

Women on Top

by Maddy Riddle

After the war, the Wizarding world needs to be rebuilt and wizards need to stand together again. The future demands a new order, and the women are up to that task.
SS/HG/LM

The Enemies of My Enemy Are My Allies

Chapter 1 of 5

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A/N: Thank you to tinnidawg for the yummy carrots she gave to my plot bunny. Lots of thanks to my lovely twin, Lore, for being so fantastic and helping me so much. And finally, thanks to Shalimar for being my beta.

Chapter One: The Enemies of My Enemy Are My Allies.

In the end, the Ministry had won the war. At least that's what the *Daily Prophet* said.

The Minister decided that the war was nothing more than two factions, or rebels, fighting each other, so both sides should pay for the deaths they had caused. So now, Death Eaters and Order members were sharing cells in Azkaban while the Minister gloated in his office about how clever he was.

And that's how Hermione came to share her living space (a three by three metres cell with two mattresses, a sink and a toilet, and a barred window with a beautiful view of the ocean) with none other than Bellatrix Lestrange.

There were a lot of men among both the Death Eaters and the Order members, so they were piled two or three in a cell. That wasn't too hard to believe, and somehow understandable, although Hermione thought that what the Ministry wanted was for them to kill each other. There wasn't really any other explanation as to why they put Arthur Weasley and Lucius Malfoy in the same cell, or Remus Lupin and Severus Snape together. The logical explanation, or at least what she heard the guards saying when they shoved them in, was that purebloods had to be put together, and the same went for half-bloods. But in her case, the arrangement was simpler, Hermione was the only female of her group and so was Bella. The Dark Lord wasn't prone to hire females, and the other ones in the Order had been more slippery than Hermione had thought possible.

Ginny was saved by the Minister's lapdog, otherwise known as Percy. He claimed that his poor, sweet, little sister was too young to have been involved in anything, and that she had been brainwashed by her family... so she was cleared and set free in Percy's care.

Tonks was an Auror, and although she was as clumsy as it gets, she was more clever than anyone had expected. People had forgotten how Ravenclaws in the Black family had always been. Thanks to her Metamorphmagus ability, no one had ever seen her real face... well, the face she had used in the Ministry files as her own, anyway. So, even when the Ministry Aurors forced Veritaserum down every member's throat, no one in the Order could recognise Tonks as a fellow member. She claimed someone had used her name to get into the organisation but that it wasn't really her; otherwise someone would have been able to tell.

Minerva, Molly and Hestia were no more among the living, so that left Hermione alone. Well, in the company of Bella.

Both women glared at each other distrustfully for some days while sulking about their fate. But as the first week passed by, they realised that they would be spending a large amount of years in each other's company, and there really wasn't anything they could do about it. It was either kill the other one (but that meant getting exposed to the possibility of being the one offed) or get along.

Hermione was the first one to speak. Maybe Gryffindor courage was a good thing; or maybe she was simply bored and needed to talk, even if it was to her cell mate.

"I guess we need some rules between us if we're to survive in this place".

Bella had a calculating look of her own. She might have been a fervent follower of the Supreme Snake, but she could see that hanging onto old customs wasn't productive in her new situation... maybe the Mudblood had enough sense in her...

"What do you think if we stop this staring contest and work together to survive?" said Hermione. Sighing at Bella's silence, she continued, "I intend to live several decades more, and I guess you wouldn't do me the favour of dropping dead any time soon either, so what do you say about figuring out how to make this situation less horrid?"

Bella thought that the young woman was a bit straight forward for her taste, but she was not only human, she seemed to be in possession of a brain, too. There might not be any Dementors left in Azkaban, but that didn't mean the prison was more welcoming than the last time she had been here.

After that, they argued long about what they could do, and who of them would do it. Both wanted to be in charge. But they came to an agreement some time over the next days.

And so their acquaintance started. Partnership began the first time they planned to attack one of the guards to steal more food, and their complicity grew as they started planning bigger things. Two months after that, no one would have thought they had been enemies in the past.

Hermione was surprised at how normal Bellatrix was. There was no shrieking and malevolent laughter, and she was almost pleasing to converse with. Maybe the fact that the only time she saw the woman before was in the middle of a battle had shaded Hermione's image of her.

Bella was surprised at how intelligent Hermione was. Either they had lied to her all the time or Hermione was too smart to be a Mudblood. She thought the truth was somewhere in between, but she reserved judgement for the moment.

As they found out they were quite similar in their approach to things, they left behind their differences, or argued extensively about them until one or the other conceded the point, or at least agreed to disagree.

One day while cleaning their cell, Hermione made a comment about the impossibility of making Harry and Ron clean after themselves during their days hunting Horcruxes, and how they expected her to be the one doing all the housework. Bella told her in return how difficult it was to convince a Dark Lord to stop shedding all over the place without getting hexed for her trouble. In the end, they had to agree that it didn't matter if the man in question was a boyfriend, the saviour of the Wizarding World or an overlord; men were idiots and should be properly trained before releasing them into the world. Women who taught their children that this kind of behaviour was acceptable should be hanged. Or hexed. Or subjected to Cruciatus. Or sterilised. They couldn't quite find a punishment strong enough. Maybe a mix of all of them could do.

Over the next year their conversations became plotting. The question of how to survive became how to get out. And with those two spending half of the day with their heads together to that particular problem, it was evident that it would happen sooner or later. Sooner if they had any say in it.

They didn't have a lot at their disposal, so they had to rely on each other's knowledge. Both women were very grateful they hadn't been stuck up plotting with a witless man.

With all the people she used to gossip about in jail, Rita Skeeter hadn't had too much to write about, so she turned her eyes to the only people available these days: The Ministry of Magic.

Boredom made her articles very creative pieces of writing while still remaining truthful enough to be called non-fiction.

They weren't happy with that, and soon enough the journalist found herself kicked out of the *Daily Prophet* and unemployed. The Dear Minister of Magic thought that he could make Rita Skeeter shut up at will, but she had other plans in mind. The Quibbler suddenly wasn't so horrid a place to work, and she was commissioned an article about the inmates of Azkaban to discover the new Ministry conspiracy.

And so Hermione found out, for the second time, that a former enemy could be your ally. Because there wasn't anything Skeeter wouldn't do for revenge, and that included helping someone she hated. After all, if there was a person who could go against the Ministry and win, it was Hermione Granger. And it was always good to be on the winning side.

The interviews went well. The inmates were willing to tell their side of the story. Luna Lovegood was so happy that there was a real conspiracy for once, that she gave Skeeter the job and commissioned her with a more in depth investigation, including photos and lots of pages in *The Quibbler*.

Skeeter managed to convince the guards that she needed several prisoners in the same room for the photos, and really, it was alright, she wasn't afraid of them.

The moment Severus laid his eyes on Hermione and Bellatrix talking animatedly in a corner, he shuddered. He knew enough about both women to realise he was in the presence of the new leaders of their world. So he didn't lose a minute before grovelling to them and begging them to allow him to further their cause in any way he was able to.

Lucius saw his friend's actions and knew where his place was, just right beside him. Severus wasn't one to throw himself into anything without thinking how it would benefit him. Doing it one time in his youth was enough to learn that you don't join a cause for the shiny new ideas... Severus knew the Granger witch a lot better than him, and if Bellatrix was involved, he was sure he was up to winning. The woman was a menace, and he didn't want to be on the receiving end of her hexes. So joining them it was.

He hoped the offering of the Malfoy fortune would be enough for them. He didn't want to be stuck yet again with the handling of minions. By definition minions were stupid, and that meant he had to give the orders, wipe their noses and clean up their messes, because that was what it meant Being In Charge, apparently.

When Lucius approached them to offer his services, Hermione looked at him with distrust. "What's in it for you? I don't believe you are offering your help out of the goodness of your heart".

"I'm hurt, Miss Granger," Lucius answered her with a mock wounded air.

"Now, Lucius. Miss Granger here would appreciate it if you told her the truth," admonished Severus.

"It's not as if I trust you and we are family..." Bella thought for a moment and added, "Well, we were family until Narcissa left you."

Lucius sighed. "Very well. I'd do almost anything to get out of here."

"Almost anything?" Hermione asked, intrigued.

"Miss Granger, you don't expect a Slytherin to sign a blank check, do you? I won't commit myself to anything specific until I've read the contract, the small print, and double

check with my lawyers if there's any loophole I didn't see at third sight."

At Hermione's raised eyebrow, he added, "One time was enough learning experience. I won't make the same mistake twice. I will only claim I was young and enthusiastic. And the tattoo looked cool, too."

"And why so interested in getting out?" Hermione kept questioning him. "What are you going to do once you are outside?"

Lucius looked around. Bella and Severus were encouraging him to say the truth. It was an odd idea, but if it was going to work, he was willing to try new things. He looked around again and confessed, "I can't take this treatment any longer. They force me to use soap, did you hear? Soap to wash my hair!" He shuddered.

Hermione almost laughed out loud, but Bella quieted her with a well-placed elbow to her ribs. Lucius was very serious about his hair, and she thought he would be useful for them.

"There, there, Mr Malfoy." Hermione patted him on the arm. "We're all suffering here. And I appreciate you telling the truth. I know it was a great effort on your part."

Severus also had to be quieted, this time with a good kick to his shin. His smirk was too big.

The other people in the room couldn't believe their eyes. Three ex Death Eaters falling all over themselves for a Muggle-born witch? Hermione pleasantly talking and laughing with them? Most of the other prisoners thought they were going mad after so much time in Azkaban. But Skeeter knew better, and she was sure she was witnessing one of the most important political events of the Wizarding World.

She knew those four, and knew what they would be capable of working together, so when she saw the elder Weasley and Lupin walking towards them, she stopped them.

"There you are. Come with me, gentlemen. Our readers would love to know everything from two such esteemed members of the Order of the Phoenix." And she dragged them with her to the other side of the room. There was no way she would let those men stop what was going on. Besides, anything that the quartet would come up with would be a source of great gossip for her to write about. There must be something good for her at the end. There would be more gossip, and the chance of being there would give her a position again. Not to mention she would be able to have her revenge on the *Daily Prophet*.

After the articles were published, people started to make uncomfortable questions, and soon enough, they were demanding answers. The Minister might be stupid, but even he had to admit defeat when he found himself backed into a corner by a mob of angry citizens. So he released all the "political prisoners" and prayed for his life.

The Hand That Holds the Galleons Rules the World

Chapter 2 of 5

After the war, the Wizarding world needs to be rebuilt and wizards need to stand together again. The future demands a new order, and the women are up to that task. SS/HG/LM

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Chapter Two: The Hand That Holds the Galleons Rules the World.

Back out into the world, it was time to get things sorted out. First stop: Gringotts.

Lucius thought this was the moment he would be able to impress the ladies and prove his usefulness. He was very disappointed when the goblins were more interested in attending Granger than him. Apparently, knowledge of Arithmancy and Muggle economy had made Hermione rich enough to impress even the goblins. He had to admit that he was impressed, too, but that didn't prevent him from sulking. Severus was useful because he was a Potions master, and he was now reduced to be a pretty toy. Life wasn't fair.

And he must have said that out loud because Severus was looking very smug and grinned.

Money acquired, the second step was finding a new house. Malfoy Manor was in the hands of the Ministry, and Spinner's End was too dingy, so those were not an option. And neither Hermione nor Bella had a place to their name, so a new house was bought, a very big house with lots of space for the four of them to enjoy.

The house had a great ball room for Lucius, a very big library for Hermione, a full Potions Lab in the dungeons for Severus, and bedrooms with closets with so much space for shoes not even Bella could fill out.

They also had an office each because they had very different parts to play in this little plot Hermione and Bella had developed while in Azkaban: to get back at the Ministry for all they had done to them. And the list of deeds wasn't short.

The first few months were a bit chaotic. Hermione was the one in charge of calculating the best way each of them could better their finances, and soon enough she had arranged for one goblin to dedicate himself to handle their accounts.

Everyone and their mother came knocking at their door, including Skeeter, who didn't want to be left out. She was soon convinced to work in creating a good public image for the four of them through her writing at *The Quibbler*. Luna wasn't as weird as her father, and now that she was running the publication, it was a bit less dodgy these days. There was no threat, begging, or bribe big enough to stop Skeeter to use a nickname for them. After all, she was behind the "Boy Who Lived", "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named" and "Chosen One", and very proud of it. So, soon, they were known as "the Quartet".

The first sod who dared to shout at Hermione about her choice of new friends was Ron. He appeared one day at their house, demanding an explanation from her, and saying she had gone mad in Azkaban. Hermione was outraged and one step from hexing him, but it was Severus who asked him 'politely' to go away while Lucius poked him in the ribs with his wand. Even Ron could see that he had little choice but to calm down, and Hermione told him with a nasty sneer that now that he was shagging Draco, he couldn't be one to talk about taste. Her affirmation made Lucius wince, and Ron almost faint. She also pointed out that as friendships went, Ron hadn't been exactly a good friend either because he hadn't yet been at St. Mungo's visiting Harry, who was still in a coma. None of the Quartet dared to point out that Hermione hadn't gone either in weeks. But she had a good point to justify her absence; she still blamed Harry for not listening to her. Hermione was sure that he could have avoided that

fate if only he had listened to her.

After Ron's visit, Lucius sulked for some days. "A Weasley... If my son was to discover he is a homosexual, at least he could have chosen Potter, who is rich and famous, not the stupid sidekick."

Ginny had visited, too. She explained to Hermione that she had done her best to contribute to their release by way of giving Skeeter inside information about the Minister and his associates, courtesy of the bad habit of Percy the Prat of leaving vital information scattered on his desk. After the journalist confirmed this, Hermione had to give in and welcome Ginny into her house and her plans.

Tonks was a different thing. She had done nothing to help them, but she had done nothing to help the Ministry either. At least, she had arrived using the face they knew, which Hermione had no remorse of marking with her handprint as a way of greeting. Her Slytherin partners had pointed out that the Auror had done nothing wrong. Saving her own skin was commendable, and Severus had to admit he was a bit jealous he hadn't thought of that plan of getting away from jail himself. So, after some time and nagging, Hermione had reluctantly accepted her back.

With two ex-members of the Slug Club living in the house, it wasn't a surprise that Horace Slughorn paid a visit. Hermione and Lucius had been favourites of his during their years at Hogwarts. And even if he, at one time, had tried to get away from the Death Eaters and ex-Azkaban prisoners, he could smell power from kilometres away. And these four were particularly interesting to have in his network. If they were to succeed, whatever the success was, he wanted to be there. Crystallized pineapple or not, they merited his personal attention, and he'd even be willing to help them by means of his connexions. He might not have a grudge against the Ministry, but he wasn't a fervent follower of anyone but himself either, so helping them wasn't against his nature.

The plan that Hermione and Bella had devised was easy. Since the Ministry had proven that it was useless, they wanted to replace it. They wanted to be the ones ruling the Wizarding world.

The way of making the plan succeed wasn't that easy, however. And according to Hermione's Arithmancy charts, it would take some years to be completed. But they would advance step by step, using each of their own strengths.

In this first stage of their plan, Hermione was solely dedicated to the finances. Furthering their wealth was essential if they wanted to succeed without relying on external forces.

Lucius was in charge of convincing the purebloods that they wanted to support the ladies' new ideas. Smooth talk, and enough food and drinks to warm them up, was all Lucius needed to sway the masses. And so the Season of Parties began.

Bella had recruited her former associates, at least the ones who were so used to her being in command that they didn't complain about the change of targets. She was indoctrinating them to be faithful minions. That included: a) Restraint. No need to use Unforgivables and end up in Azkaban when a lot of other less powerful and less illegal hexes achieved the same result. Not to mention that she doubted even a third of them had what was needed to cast the Cruciatus. And b) Treating women the way they deserved. Hermione had said that they should teach the new generations how to behave properly, but Bella thought that there was nothing wrong with making sure the message was also passed on to this generation. And had the lot of them picking up after themselves in no time.

The Ministry had always had a policy of not hiring ex-convicts, so when all the political prisoners left Azkaban, the Minister refused to re-hire his former employees. It didn't matter that it was because of him that they had been imprisoned; it was against the rules and that was his last word.

All of them had gone to Hermione then, hoping for a solution. Most of them wouldn't be able to eat, much less have a home if they didn't find another job soon.

So now the Quartet's house looked like an employment agency.

There were some of them who could easily find their own jobs. Kingsley Shacklebolt, for example, was accepted back in his former work-place as a secretary for the Muggle Prime Minister. Kingsley had enjoyed the job the first time and was very good at it. The Prime Minister not only trusted him but was also eager to find out exactly what was going on in the Wizarding world. According to his words, the Minister of Magic was looking twitchier every time he saw him, and something sounded very fishy indeed.

Others, like Arthur Weasley, didn't seem to find anything they could do well enough to interest someone to hire them. Those like him found a place among Bella's minions or started to form Hermione's group of researchers. Hermione had decided to find experts in several branches of magic to work on various projects she had. She hoped that with time she would be able to run her own version of the Unspeakables. Arthur Weasley was in the last group and was very pleased to be paid to dismantle appliances to figure out how they work.

Inspiration had struck Severus.

Or better said, Hermione had been inspired by Remus' visit, and she struck Severus with some hexes until he agreed with her. He was one of the few masters who could brew the Wolfsbane Potion. If it weren't for him, all British werewolves would have had to rely on St. Mungo's poorly made stuff. So brewing the potion and giving it to the werewolves for almost nothing would guarantee their loyalty. Even more, if Remus put a good word in for them it was a sure thing.

But there's no such thing as a free potion, Hermione said, and soon they had parttime employees to do the menial work for them. Apparently Hermione, who still insisted that she didn't want house-elves, didn't have the same qualms with hiring werewolves.

Wolfsbane Potion was the first step, but Severus had bigger plans. Werewolves weren't the only half-breeds who needed potions and had trouble with the Ministry. Being on good terms with vampires could also be considered as a good idea.

The new Headmaster of Hogwarts, Filius Flitwick, had yet again received a negative response from Severus. He needed a Potions professor, but nothing he'd offered had interested his former colleague, although this time the letter implied Severus was starting a business in Potions. It wasn't an open invitation to tempt him to consider him to be the new provider for the school, but if you knew how to translate from Snape to English, it meant "If you offer, I may be willing to accept". And so, after some exchange of owls to finagle the arrangement, Severus became the Potions supplier for the school, leaving the Ministry-appointed Potions master without his job. Now Severus was in the awful position of hiring assistants to help him get all the work done.

Filius was more than willing to help with that and put the files of all the students at Severus' disposal. He could get his pick among the best present and past students of Hogwarts, as he didn't need for them to send him their curriculum. And this way he knew they weren't lying about their abilities. He could even catch the best ones before they thought of applying for a job at the Ministry, leaving only the worst to go to that official institution. The rest of the Quartet had also bargained access to the students' files, and the best of the best in every field was soon recruited.

With so many potions to brew and deliver, assistants weren't the only thing needed in quantity and quality. Potions ingredients were a necessity as well. Having to rely on the Apothecary's stock was a risk Severus wasn't happy to take. They needed to deal directly with the greenhouses, even better they should own their own one or at least have them in a contract to work only with them. That would assure they would have better quality without allowing others to profit of it themselves.

Severus groaned when he found out whom they had to deal with.

Neville Longbottom had apprenticed with the most renowned herbologist. The old man didn't have family, so he left all his assets and his business to Neville, the only person he knew could maintain the prestige of it. It was not a surprise that in less than a week after the old man's demise, Hermione visited Neville with a contract proposition. Neville was more than a bit hesitant to work for the person who had destroyed his family, Bellatrix, but Hermione could be very persistent when she wanted

something, and after promising not only to give him all the money to pay all his debts but also enough to expand the greenhouses to twice their actual extent, he had no choice but to accept. The best products were acquired. The next step of Severus' expanding enterprise was looking very promising.

The next step involved Charlie Weasley's ability to provide dragon-related ingredients. They contacted him through Ginny, at the dragon colony in Romania, and he was happy to help. He would also act as their contact when dealing with other animal-related suppliers, as he was more knowledgeable in that area.

No one ever questioned the old herbologist's death, a fact that Bella was feeling very smug about until Lucius was forced to short-sheet her bed to retaliate. No one should feel so good while he was pouting.

It wasn't that convincing the purebloods to side with them was difficult, he enjoyed the challenge, but he still felt that prancing around the house looking good was expected and not a real effort on his part. The others were doing a lot more, and he still couldn't stop thinking about Hermione having more money than him. It didn't matter that he had more than enough to pay the foreign debt of a small country with his pocket change. Even his status as pretty toy was in question, as he had not managed to make the ladies look at him twice. They were too busy plotting, and he was getting bored. Maybe he needed a bit of plotting of his own. If only there was a country to dominate; surely the other three hadn't covered all the angles already...

And so it was that Lucius found himself back on the Board of Governors and helping further the friction between Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the Ministry of Magic, to the delight of Filius (and the former Headmasters if he was to believe the cheer that greeted him from the portraits) and the misfortune of the Ministerial bureaucrats.

The day the Ministry closed *The Quibbler* as revenge after the stories published there, Hermione decided to open *The Hogsmeade Herald* in order to have a media vehicle to reach the masses. In the mean time, Lucius' associates financed Luna Lovegood's new campaign against the Minister. The Slytherins had pointed out that opening several options for them was not only accepted behaviour but also expected of them. Hermione bowed to their knowledge this time because it really sounded like a sensible solution, and she was nothing if not a sensible woman.

And just in case they wanted to close the newspaper, Hermione had made a deal with Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop and Scribbulus Everchanging Inks so the Ministry wouldn't get the idea of cutting their supply of paper or ink to force them to close. Which they tried anyway, unsuccessfully, of course.

There really weren't too many people who didn't have their own grudges against the Ministry, so the Quartet's quick acceptance from the public eye shouldn't have surprised anyone. Still, Ministry officials were at their wits' end and couldn't fathom what was wrong with the Wizarding population.

Children were never too young to start learning in Hermione's opinion, and she had been always wary of a society that didn't bother giving a proper education to them.

Of course she didn't have too much experience with little children and didn't plan to have it any time soon. Fortunately for her, Ginny had inherited Molly's ability to deal with kids but also was a lot more sensible than her mother. So the Quartet gave Ginny the land, the building, and the funds to start a kindergarten and primary school for wizards and witches.

Even the Ministry couldn't deny that they had less complaints from the Muggle authorities since they were able to pluck the children from the Muggle schools and send them there as soon as they presented the first sparks of magic. The Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes had even sent them their gratitude, in particular those in the Obliviator Headquarters and in the Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee in charge of dealing with the young children's misadventures in their quest to control their own recently discovered magic.

There were some tutors that purebloods used for their children, but there weren't proper teachers available. So tutors were joined by Muggle-borns' parents with degrees on education in teaching at the new school, DuSaQ Nursery and Primary School.

The Ministry was livid that the Quartet had set up a way of having Muggles prancing around Wizarding areas. Hermione refused to speak with Madam Edgecombe (she was still angry at Marietta's betrayal), but Bella was more than happy to take care of the Floo connection permit. An apartment was bought in Muggle London, and its fireplace was connected to the Floo Network. A Squib was responsible for opening the door to the Muggles and providing them with the necessary Floo powder. It was a great success, and soon a few Muggle parents with children at Hogwarts also asked permission to use this gate to their offspring's world, so they could visit on Hogsmeade weekends.

The Ministry couldn't find something illegal in all this activity as the fireplace was legally owned by a wizard and had to be content with watching helplessly yet another advance of the great benefactors of the Wizarding world.

Since children weren't legally declared Squibs until the age of 11, they were also allowed to study at DuSaQ Nursery and Primary School. And because they wouldn't be admitted to Hogwarts, the Quartet designed a program for them to learn either how to insert themselves in the Muggle world or how to have a trade in the magical community.

Not every job needed magic to be performed. For example, more than half the tending to the greenhouses was done manually. Not to mention most of the breeding and care of magical creatures. And with all the new jobs available thanks to the Quartet's flourishing enterprises, the Wizarding world had become a more welcoming place for them.

The purebloods weren't very happy with this latest turn of events. Muggles weren't something they were willing to tolerate lightly. But they weren't openly opposing them either.

In reality, speaking of purebloods as a homogeneous group was making a misinformed generalisation.

One had to remember that there are four different types of purebloods and that they behave very differently.

Hufflepuff purebloods loved to see hardworking people triumph. It didn't matter their blood, just that they were willing to work hard. Struggling for success was something they held in high esteem.

They saw in the Quartet two ex-Death Eaters trying to change their ways and views by helping society, an ex-professor trying to better his life by working hard in his business, and a Muggle-born trying to find her place in the Wizarding world. And in the Squibs and Muggles they brought, they saw people struggling to fit in. So they embraced this new era with the jolliness only Hufflepuffs and Santa Claus are able to produce.

Ravenclaw purebloods had their noses in a book or their heads in the clouds. They didn't care much for the world around themselves if it didn't disrupt their musings. Their only reaction to this new school was a mild clapping and nods of approval, and then they went back to their own lives without uttering a word.

Gryffindor purebloods were distrustful of the three ex-Death Eaters just by principle. But they were loyal to their own, so if Hermione wanted something, Hermione would get it. If it wasn't for her own merit, then for her being the best friend of The-Boy-Who-Was-Still-In-A-Coma.

Slytherins, and here you don't only count the purebloods but also the ones who aspired to be considered one, were the hardest to convince. But they weren't stupid, and they were usually good at spotting who was most likely to be the one with all the power, be it as a Dark Lord or a Minister. And once assured that the bet was a sure thing, they would flock that way, trying to be sure to not be the last one... Dark Lords and Ministers alike tended to remember the reluctant ones, and punishment was never far for them.

Convincing them that you were the one who would win was the tough part. They didn't want to be the first ones to join either. Rushing into what you thought was the best

option was more a Gryffindor trait. They wanted to weigh every option and see for themselves that you were actually on the winning side. But once they followed a particular side, it was a sure thing they'd do their best to help that side be the winning party.

Those were the unhappy bunch...

They had to admit that Hermione was in control of the money. There wasn't any doubt that if she were to retire all her funds from Gringotts, the goblins would be in great trouble, if not broke.

Lucius had preached the importance of embracing the new ideas or be left behind and alone, and they were quick to get the tiny threat in that comment. There was also Bella, who was more than willing to zap the more thick ones until she got the point across. And no one wanted to be considered stupid, and even less to be considered Bella's punching ball. Not to mention, Severus' ability to brew undetectable poisons unnerved more than half of them.

It also happened that DuSaQ Nursery and Primary School had hired the more sought out tutors. And sending your children there was trendy. So they might be an unhappy bunch of purebloods, but one who was paying to send their children to study there anyway. Public image was everything, and being in the good graces of the new overlords even more.

A new school meant the need of new textbooks that covered the curriculum. There weren't any in existence which covered the Muggle and the Wizarding education the children would receive. And so the writing of said manuals was commissioned.

Their first goal had always been to not depend on anyone else. They didn't want anyone who wanted to stop them to have the power to do it, and the only way this time was creating their own publishing house. Once the establishment was running, stopping at merely a bunch of textbooks was unthinkable. Hermione wanted to publish only serious books for scholarly pursuits. On the other hand, Lucius was adamant that they should publish books that sold, and if it meant publishing tripe, they should. Good selling tripe, mind you. On what they did agree was that not one of them would be willing to publish something written by Lockhart, no matter if the fool was able to write longhand these days.

An argument had arisen and neither part wanted to lose the battle. Bella had to stop them before they injured each other, and after applying a full Body-Bind on each, she presented them with the most logical solution. Hermione would get her dream of a very selective publishing house while Lucius could publish all the books for the entertainment of housewives he wanted using another branch (with a different name) of the publishing house.

Hermione hired Remus to be in charge of New Moon Publications since he was the only person, apart from herself, that she could trust to choose what was good.

Lucius had asked a restless Skeeter to step out of her career in journalism, before she got too bored for everyone's sake, and gave her almost free rein to select what to publish under B-Witching Editions. Skeeter would still write articles from time to time, but she was going to be too busy to get really creative in her writing. And unless the Quartet was trying to discredit someone in particular, there was no need for her skills.

Bella's minions were more than slightly reformed Death Eaters and not only because there were several ex-Order members working among them. With the help of Tonks, Bella had created a group capable of sneaking around to be the eyes and ears of the organisation. They also were good at infiltrating the ranks of the commoners to whisper suggestions in their ears that would sway their minds in their favour.

Bella was very proud of her niece. She had always been very worried of how she would turn out after being raised by a Muggle-born father... but she had to admit that wizards and witches with Muggle blood had a lot of advantages over stuffy purebloods, and if you kept in mind that not only Tonks, but also Hermione, and Severus had turned out so well, it really was a misconception. Idiots could be born into Muggle families as much as into pure-blooded ones, and she had the intention of straightening out that fact at all cost.

Hermione took to calling Bella's minions "The Irregulars of Baker Street" to the great amusement of Severus and the confusion of Lucius and Bella.

Augustus Pye was the first person Hermione found whom she didn't have to convince to work with them. Actually, the former Trainee Healer who had tried to stitch up Arthur's snake bite some years ago had knocked on their door to ask for Hermione's help.

Through some former classmates of Miss Granger, Healer Pye had found that Hermione's parents were Muggle Healers of some sort. Something related to teeth if the information was correct. He had been interested in complementary medicine for years, and he saw the opportunity for both, asking for funds for his research and getting in contact with Muggle Healers who already knew about the Wizarding world and therefore secrecy wasn't an issue.

Hermione was excited. She hadn't had yet any idea of how to get into St. Mungo's, much less a way to influence their work. Pye had formed a research group of similarly interested young Healers, so Hermione's parents became the providers of Muggle biology and medical books, and she gave monetary support to the group as long as the Quartet was informed of any progress made.

Following that first step, the other people in the Quartet's organisation decided to fund research and treatments at St. Mungo's, too. After all, they had several personal interests in some of their departments.

Remus donated to the Creature-Induced Injuries department, adding to Hermione's, for them to improve the treatment of werewolves and to join efforts with Severus' own team in the finding of a cure for lycanthropy.

Severus donated to the Potion and Plant Poisoning section. After all, between his and Longbottom's employees and testers, he sent a lot of people to be treated there.

Neville for his part joined Bella in supporting the Spell Damage Healers, in special the ones working in the Janus Thickey Ward. No one could say that Bella didn't feel bad about the two Aurors still there because of her. Neither could it be said that Luna hadn't donated enough for the Spell Damage department herself on behalf of her mother.

Arthur, Fred and George Weasley for their part had done more than enough for the Artifact Accidents section.

Lucius had pouted prettily while complaining that they all chose the most interesting departments of St. Mungo's to sponsor, and the only one left for him was the Magical Bugs one. At that point, Severus reminded him that his own father, Abraxas, had died of dragon pox, so it was only appropriate to have the donations made in his name. If Luna could manage to have a ward named after her mother, he surely could have a Contagious Maladies Abraxas Malfoy Ward.

A Brit Without Footie Is Only Half A Brit

After the war, the Wizarding world needs to be rebuilt and wizards need to stand together again. The future demands a new order, and the women are up to that task. SS/HG/LM

Disclaimer: JKR is the owner. I'm just playing with her characters.

A/N: Thanks to tinnidawg, the bunny feeder. ;)

Lots of thanks to my lovely twin, Lore. And last but not least, thanks to my betas Shalimar and Southern_Witch_69.

Chapter Three: A Brit Without Footie Is Only Half A Brit.

Several months into the first year of DuSaQ Nursery and Primary School, Headmistress Ginny was so worried about her students that she went to talk to Hermione almost in tears. She had tried to interest them in sports, she had tried to teach them about Quidditch. She really, really, really had tried, but more than half the children simply weren't interested. Ginny couldn't think why any wizard or witch wouldn't be interested in Quidditch. It wasn't normal. It sounded like heresy, even. Hermione had promised her to investigate the matter. She went to the school to talk with the teachers, with the children and even with their parents. She took her time to research thoroughly, but the result was clear. And Ginny didn't want to believe her.

Once a month, the Quartet held a big meeting with the people in charge of their businesses and other supporters. That way they were updated about their progress, and they could think of plans to improve each enterprise for everyone's benefit.

And so it was that in the presence of Bella, Lucius, Severus, Neville, Luna, Remus, Skeeter, Tonks, Kingsley, Charlie, and Flitwick, Ginny exposed her problem, and Hermione explained yet again.

"It's simple, Ginny. The kids are Muggle-borns and half-bloods, and they live in Muggle surroundings." Hermione looked around, hoping for someone to catch what she was trying to say without much success. "They aren't allowed to use brooms. Of course, as any normal person would, the kids are interested in football."

At this, the shock was generalised. Hermione could point out which of the persons in the room was a pureblood, and who wasn't, just by looking at their faces. It was a slow reaction, but the non-purebloods were starting to nod.

It was Tonks that finished the explanation. "Quidditch is something that will present itself to them at Hogwarts, but until then, their hearts are in what they know."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Hermione, relieved that someone was at least figuring out the issue at hand quickly. "And that means football."

The purebloods in the room sided with Ginny and protested that it couldn't be right. The others, including Severus, laughed at them and called them narrow-minded. The debate was a long one and consisted of several points.

To begin with, it was the issue of convincing the purebloods that it was a great idea to have football and not Quidditch as the school's sport. It wouldn't have been an issue if Ginny had embraced the idea, but she insisted that it was somehow perverse and refused to even find out what football was.

As it was quite impossible to take all the people in the conference room to a match to see it for themselves, they took several steps.

First, they used a Pensieve. That Hermione was the first one putting memories of watched football matches in it wasn't surprising. But when Severus stepped up and told them that he'd show them what playing felt like, even the reluctant ones scrambled from their seats to see that.

They were entertained and a bit interested. Severus had to glare most of the time so no one laughed at his younger self. Some sniggering from Lucius at young Severus' Victory Dance was met with mild hexing from both Severus and Hermione.

The second step was to use the Muggle flat Lucius owned as a gate to the Wizarding world to gather them all in front of a television (after explaining to the more recalcitrant purebloods what that was) to watch some matches.

And then hell broke loose. They may not have been a big party, but they were loud, and they were very fervent over their clubs. The purebloods were astonished at the way their otherwise calm and normal friends hexed each other because some foul words about the other person's favourite player were said.

Tonks had changed her hair to her team's colours. Remus had brought a ridiculous hat while Severus and Hermione squabbled to decorate the house with the appropriate flag.

After that performance by their friends and acquaintances, it was clear that football was as important to them as Quidditch. Not to mention that after two or three matches, most of the purebloods were more than hooked themselves.

In the next monthly meeting, it was unanimously decided that the children were going to practice football in the school. It wasn't difficult to find a parent who would be willing to teach them and even to give lessons to some of the adults.

The construction of the field was done quickly, and some of the most important business people in the Wizarding world had not felt any embarrassment at playing in the big opening game. Slytherin versus Gryffindor was forgotten in sight of the more important Arsenal versus Manchester United. With much sulking from the one Chelsea fan that refused to play.

Bella thought the new wave created by the introduction of a sport that could easily compete with Quidditch for a place of honour in everybody's heart had to be exploited somehow.

There wasn't an easy way to either go to Muggle matches or to have wizard matches of their own. The first one, because it was clear that witches and wizards weren't good at mingling with Muggles, and the second one, because training football players would take some time. Watching children play wasn't what she had in mind, and unfortunately Hermione's team of researchers hadn't found a way yet of making electrical appliances work well around magical towns. So the telly was out of the question.

And there was the answer. They had their own mass media, although calling the wizard's wireless a mass media was a bit of a stretch. Bella knew the Muggles had something similar called radio, so she guessed the research people could find a way of adapting a Wizarding Wireless Network to piggyback Muggle football transmissions.

There were only a few short steps from there to owning both a Muggle radio station and a wizard's wireless radio.

The Muggle radio station was the front for them to get access to Muggle news, including the rights to transmit football matches. Faking identifications was not an option when you were working in the outskirts of Ministerial regulations. Wizarding Ministry regulations, mind you. The Muggle Prime Minister was very happy with all of this and gave them his blessing.

Again, they hired Muggles with relations to the Wizarding community (be it because they were the parents of Muggle-borns or because they were married to a wizard or witch) to work there, as they were able to be among Muggles without attracting their attention by committing a faux pas. Maintaining the Statute of Secrecy was essential if they didn't want to end up in Azkaban again.

There was going to be a ball, organised by Lucius, to inaugurate Bella's new Wizarding Wireless Network the Wireless Omni Network (or WON, for shorts).

Everyone who was someone was invited... and a couple of nobodies, too.

But this time the ball wasn't to be held at their house, as usual. They were using the new WON building instead. That left Lucius to believe they weren't going to play the hosts role, but that they should behave like guests. And that meant the women should be escorted. So he informed Hermione of his decision.

"Hermione, I'm pleased to inform you that you're going to be my partner for the ball." Lucius wasn't sure why she was looking at him oddly, but it wasn't reassuring for his ego. No woman had been less than thrilled of getting his attention.

"Why should I?"

"Well, this is a formal event, one that is not going to be held at our house. You shouldn't go alone when I can escort you." Lucius thought all of this was pretty obvious, but he wanted Hermione to accept, so he tried to be charming and patient about it. He might be old fashioned in his manners, but what was wrong with that?

"Shouldn't you go with Bella, then? She shouldn't go alone either."

Lucius looked at her with a dumbfounded expression. "Hermione, Bella is still a married woman..."

"Yes, even if we don't know where the hell Roddy is hiding," interrupted Severus, raising his head from the book he was pretending to read, "it is good to know that someone remembers him."

"Wherever he is, he doesn't read the British news. He'd be here begging Bella to forgive him otherwise."

Hermione rolled her eyes.

Lucius sighed. "Anyway, as I was saying, not only is she married, but I was married to her sister. People would think I'm shagging my sister-in-law, and that's unacceptable."

Severus rolled his eyes at the dramatics of Lucius' speech.

"So you'd rather let people think you're shagging me?" an infuriated Hermione asked.

"I'd rather it was true," whispered Lucius to himself, but from the smirk on Severus' lips, he had said it loud enough. He was grateful Hermione seemed oblivious of it, or he was sure he'd end up hexed. Out loud he answered, "Of course not, Hermione, I would rather people wouldn't gossip at all. But..."

He never got to finish. Hermione was final in her decision. "You'll escort both of us, then. Unless you think they will be saying we're having a threesome." And she left before Lucius got enough time to open his mouth.

Severus had to laugh at that. He was sure if Skeeter weren't on their side that would probably be exactly the gossip. But they all knew no one would say anything about them. If by living in the same house they hadn't suffered any ill-spirited comments, surely attending a party wasn't going to change that. Lucius was too prone to dramatics. But even all his Slytherin skills weren't helping in getting Hermione to see him in any other light than that of a partner-in-annoying-the-Ministry.

Lucius wasn't happy. So he snapped at him. "And who are you taking to the ball?"

"I'm not going."

Raising an eyebrow, Lucius smirked. "And offend Bella by doing that? I don't think so, friend."

"Fine. Then I'm sure Augusta Longbottom would be glad for my company. At least I'll be able to get blackmail material about my business associate."

"Tsk, ts, that way you'll never find a woman of your own."

"And you will? With Bella and Hermione as your dates? No woman would dare to get close to you, just in case."

And with those words Severus left grinning.

The balls and parties continued. At some point during a party at the Quartet's home, Percy Weasley, showing all the signs of having been hit by a Bat-Bogey Hex and an assortment of Ginny's other specialties, approached Hermione.

"Hermione, I was wondering if you could do me the great favour of having a chat with my sister. She doesn't pay attention to me."

There was more than a bit of whinging in his voice, Hermione noted. "And what do you want me to tell Ginny?"

"You have to help me convince her to leave that silly job of hers and start looking for a husband. It's understandable that she wanted some years to do whatever she pleased and experiment how it feels to have another kind of life, but now she has reached an age in which she has to settle down soon if she has any intention of having a normal life."

Hermione was speechless. She couldn't believe the prat was actually serious, but his stance was the same pompous one he always had, so it had to be true. She doubted he even knew what humour was.

Percy took the silence as a permission to keep explaining the point. "At her age, she should be looking for a husband, not working."

"What do you mean by that? What's wrong with working?"

"Oh, nothing at all. I understand that women too old to marry want to do something with their lives, feel productive somehow, and it is normal that they want to do something that gets them close to children, even if they are not their own, hence teaching. But Ginny still has a chance to find someone, even at her age."

"So, are you saying that it was alright for McGonagall to be Deputy Headmistress because she was a spinster, but it's wrong for Ginny to be Headmistress because she should get a husband and be... what? A housewitch?"

No one else could have been able to mistake Hermione's tone but Percy.

"Exactly! I'm pleased to see you agree with me. You have always been a sensible person," said Percy, nodding. "Could you explain that to Ginny? For some unfathomable reason she doesn't understand it." He was whinging again.

Hermione blinked, confused. When did she agree with him? Was this a Twilight Zone episode? It felt like it, for sure. "I guess I'm in the same category as her, then. Or do you deem me too old already? Shouldn't you be convincing me to marry? Or am I already a spinster in your book?" She was frothing at the mouth, although the prat seemed completely oblivious of her state.

Severus saw Hermione's face turning puce and her hand strangling the glass she was holding and went to investigate, hoping to arrive before it was too late and she hexed

the guy. It was obvious she wanted to, and her restraint wasn't going to last much longer.

Percy blushed. Or at least that was what Hermione supposed it was. He had turned into a freckled tomato, and he was fidgeting. "Well, you're not that old, Hermione, and you still possess the cleverness you had as a student. I-I'd be willing to marry you before it's too late... Of course, you'll have to change y..."

Severus didn't wait to hear what she was supposed to change in order to get a marriage proposal from the ginger idiot. He grabbed Hermione by one arm and took her away with a mumbled "You're needed elsewhere" thrown in for good measure.

Lucius had watched (and heard) the exchange and followed the pair out of the ballroom and into Severus' office.

Hermione was spluttering and pacing, a mad glint in her eyes. She was so agitated that the Slytherins didn't know what to do. They had never seen her like this. They tried to calm her, but she was having none of it. Neither Lucius nor Severus wanted to be hexed by the angry witch for saying or doing the wrong thing; after all, they both knew what she was capable of. But nonetheless they had to do something.

"I can hex him if you want," offered Lucius warily.

"And you know that you have all my pretty poisons at your disposal if you need them," volunteered Severus, keeping a safe distance.

"Severus, mate, you know it is considered bad manners to poison one's guest."

"I never said you have to poison him in our house, Lucius. Finding a scapegoat and having an alibi were implied."

Hermione smiled a little at that. "You would do that for me? Really?"

She looked so lovely that Severus almost forgot for a moment that this was the woman who could destroy someone's life if she woke up a little cranky and someone spoke to her before she had her breakfast.

Lucius was ready to admit that he'd do anything for her, even if it was a bit too Gryffindor to admit to that publicly. But Severus interrupted. "Of course we'd do it. No one crosses you and gets out unpunished. But I'm sure you'd want to teach him the lesson yourself. And I'm positive you are already thinking of something more creative than that."

Hermione kissed them both on the cheek, and smiling brightly at them, she said, "Thank you."

The glint in her eyes a minute later was unmistakable: she was well into the plotting stage of her rage, and both men shuddered. Ron Weasley had been right all those years ago, she was scary. Fortunately, her target was one Percival Ignatius, so they weren't in danger for the moment. They really didn't want to be in the room when Hermione told Bella and Ginny what had happened.

They were correct. The room where that conversation took place looked like a battlefield afterwards. The ladies looked around sheepishly and confessed they had let their anger loose for a bit while trying to put everything back to normal.

An extraordinary meeting was called, and everyone was informed about the prat's behaviour.

"Men," spat the women with contempt. At which point the wizards in the room remembered they had other pressing matters to attend elsewhere.

Remus excused himself by saying that after last night's full moon, he needed to rest.

Severus sorted mumbling something about a potion left on the burner.

Neville remembered it was time for his carnivorous plants to have dinner.

Filius claimed work at Hogwarts while Charlie told Ginny she had all his support, but if he wasn't back at the dragon colony right at that moment, he'd lose his job.

One by one they vacated the room, leaving the coven to concoct revenge on their own.

Each one of them had an idea of how to make him pay for being such an idiot.

"Can we ask the twins for Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes products? They have several things I'm sure Percy will be delighted to try." Ginny actually looked too much like her brothers at that moment, making the women wonder how strongly they had influenced her life when they were children.

Since Percy had deemed Hermione unsuccessful in the grounds of not having a husband and children, they thought that maybe showing him a woman who was that and who was also a working woman could prove him wrong. Or at least prove him that there wasn't anything bad with women having a job.

"I'm barefoot and pregnant," said Luna while trying to put her feet on top of the table to show the statement was true. She giggled.

"But I don't think the Wizarding world would be that happy if we put Luna as the poster girl. They are not that acceptant of unwedded witches having children," said Bella, hurrying to add, "yet", before Hermione had the chance to glare at her.

Luna and Remus saw each other again when they started working with Hermione, and he was fascinated by her brilliant and quite unusual mind. They got involved and moved together after a few months of dating, surprising family and friends. Now Luna was pregnant with Remus baby.

"It's not as if I don't want to marry," pointed out Luna. "If they are the ones forbidding me to do it, they can't expect me to be married before having children, can they?"

The Werewolf Code of Conduct forbid werewolves to get married with a witch or wizard. Their relationship was considered a scandal amongst many, but they were quite respected by the majority for the campaign they were doing to get the right to get married and form a family.

"I'm sure the prohibition of marriage was because they didn't want you to have his children," Ginny tried to reason with her.

"That's just silly. Do they really think that you can't get pregnant if you are single?" Luna was giggling again. "Odd."

Hermione sighed and stopped Skeeter before she answered. "Leave it. Luna is still Luna. Just focus on the point at hand, and she'll join us in conversation soon enough."

And it was true. The women were still trying to figure out what punishment was best for Percy ("Are you sure we couldn't simply hex him? I do know very creative hexes.") when the suggestion of "We should hex his balls off" was interrupted by Luna's, "By the way, what are we doing against the Werewolf Code of Conduct? Not that I mind the child being a Lovegood, but I'd love to be able to tell people who is his or her Daddy."

The non sequitur left the ladies thinking for a minute until they remembered that Luna was living with Remus, and the question was about the aforementioned rule against marrying a werewolf. But they never had time to respond, as Luna decided it was time to rejoin the previous conversation. "Didn't you mention some Potions research about gender change the other day? We could slip him a potion to turn him into a woman. Let's see if he's willing to spend his life as a housewitch."

Luna may still be Loony Lovegood, but she was also a Ravenclaw on a mission. If the prat was to pay, she thought it her business to concoct the most clever and sneaky way.

"Can't we give him a love potion so he'll fall in love with a goblin?" asked Tonks.

"Ew," was the general response. And Tonks answered herself, "Nah, that would be too cruel for the poor little goblin."

In the end, Skeeter won the argument. Maybe because her idea didn't impede others to also do their own, maybe because it was the most devious one that didn't involve Unforgivables. Hermione didn't only want to punish him, she wanted the message to reach the masses. Troglodyte behaviour wasn't accepted anymore. Women would see to that.

And so Rita went to her trunk and dug up her famous acid-green Quick-Quotes Quill. She had an appointment with the Fates. Or, more specifically, she was going to interview Percy Weasley in her old and very famous style.

A lot of people trembled at the sight of Skeeter and her quill, but Hermione reminded everyone, herself included, that this was for a very good cause.

Hermione thought it was crass to post something bad about Percy in her own newspaper. But neither Pansy Parkinson nor Lavender Brown had the same qualms, and both volunteered to post the interview in their respective columns in *Witch Weekly*. And seeing as that had mostly women readers, it was a great solution. It was disconcerting for Hermione to see the Queen of Slytherin and Lav-Lav being close friends, but she supposed that bonding between them was possible since both of their exes (Draco and Ron respectively) were now an item.

The People Who Plot Together Stay Together

Chapter 4 of 5

After the war, the Wizarding world needs to be rebuilt and wizards need to stand together again. The future demands a new order, and the women are up to that task. SS/HG/LM

Disclaimer: JKR is the owner. I'm just playing with her characters.

Author's Notes: Lots of thanks to my lovely twin Lore for all her help and to Southern_Witch_69 for being my beta.

Chapter Four: The People Who Plot Together Stay Together.

Skeeter sucked on the tip of her famous quill and started the interview by saying, "Here we are with Mister Percival Ignatius Weasley, the Minister's right hand."

The quill dutifully wrote that down. In its opinion the wording was alright, and as long as it was to its liking, the quill refused to do much work. It was still annoyed that its best mate, its companion of so many years, dear old Rita, had put it in a dark and damp trunk for so long.

"Can I call you Percy? Lovely. You are the youngest wizard to have such high position at the Ministry. How would you say that has affected you?"

Percy provided a short and not too interesting answer about how he had known he was meant for this since he was at Hogwarts. The quill copied down what he said without too much flourish, but it took the licence to add some comments. The quill feared if it did too bad a job, Rita wouldn't forgive it. It didn't want to spend the next few years yet again in that awful trunk.

"How did your prominent career start?" 'Well,' thought Skeeter, 'you have to start the questions somewhere. Let's just hope Hermione exaggerated and he is, in fact, a bit more interesting than a flobberworm.'

Percy started a long-winded and very detailed story about his work, starting from the summer of 1994 with something boring about cauldrons, and then he carried on with all he had done since then.

'Boring, boring, and more boring. If he keeps this up, I'll be asleep before I get the interview finished,' thought Skeeter while trying to stifle a yawn at the nth time Percy mentioned the importance of the thickness of cauldron bottoms and how he had been the first one to notice; he considered it a fact that it was what helped him to get the position he had now.

The quill wasn't less bored than Rita, and since it considered all that rambling utterly irrelevant, it was writing snoring sounds on the parchment instead of what Percy was saying.

Rita decided that it was enough about this prat's boring chatter, so she interrupted him. "And how is it that such an intelligent and good looking gentleman as yourself is still single?" The quill perked up when it noticed the change in the subject.

"My work has been always my priority, and a man can't even consider the idea of marriage before he has made a name for himself and has enough money to sustain a family of his own." The pompous attitude was starting to show to the great relief of the journalist. "The fact that you're interviewing me shows that I'm succeeding at the first. I'm still working in achieving the second, but I think I'm doing my best in that way. I have now a very interesting and demanding job. It is true that it takes away most of my time, but I'm willing to do the sacrifices necessary to get me where I want."

Rita Skeeter wondered if that meant he wanted to become the next Minister of Magic and almost laughed at the poor sod. Just in case, she didn't look at what the quill was writing.

"Lovely. But surely your work isn't everything, dear. I'm sure if you find the right woman, you'll be very happy to settle down."

"Very possible, Madam. The right woman would have to understand the need for me to dedicate most of my time to my work, and I'm sure she'd be grateful for it and for her good luck."

"Haven't you found someone special?"

The quill wrote, "*The young man's face turned even redder than usual, in what in any other person could be described as blushing, and cast his eyes down, and we wondered if he wasn't hiding something from us.*" But at a shake of Rita's head, it struck the last part and left only a comment about him blushing.

"No," said Percy, blushing. "I know several ladies that interest me, but when I get to know them better, they are just lacking. Well, except..." But Percy stopped mid-sentence, reconsidering his answer, and he added quickly, "I guess that I just haven't found the right one... yet."

"Really? Do tell, Mr. Weasley. Which young witches have caught your attention? Or perhaps there's a certain special lady."

Percy refused to answer, leaving Skeeter to wonder if she should add something about rumours of him fancying Hermione, but thought it would be better left unsaid. Maybe she could force him into saying something interesting himself.

The quill summed it up as, "*Mr Weasley denied it. And even if he admits finding several witches attractive, he wonders if any of them would be up to his high standards.*"

"Percy, darling, here's your opportunity. Our young readers are waiting to see how your perfect woman is. And who knows, maybe the woman of your dreams is out there..." Skeeter hoped this was a step onto the right path. If the prat kept talking about Ministerial bureaucracy for too long, no one would read the article until its end, and she'll have to rely on creative writing.

"Well, I'm looking for a young and proper lady. One that was raised by a normal and traditional family."

"Could you explain a bit more, dear?" Skeeter was trying to smile and finding it very difficult. "When you say young, do you mean your own age?"

"Madam, any witch my age that is not already married must have some trouble finding a husband. If she's not married, one would wonder what's wrong with her or if she has her head set in the right place. Any proper witch should be married and with children of her own by the time she is my age."

"For what I know, Mr. Weasley, your sister is not married."

"I know. And I consider it a disgrace, even a scandal. But she still has the chance to have a normal life, and I'm working on convincing her of it. I hope she finally gets some good sense and decides to settle down and get a husband before it's too late." Percy sounded quite pleased with himself about it, as if he were the one solving Ginny's life and saving her from a terrible fate.

At Skeeter's prompting, he continued, "I have never understood this stupid idea of women working when they still have the chance of a normal life. I mean, what do they want to prove? What do they want to achieve? I know some of them didn't have any other chance, but really, my sister is not old enough to resign to be a spinster just yet. There's no need for her to work. Even if she can't find a husband, I could take care of her. I'm making enough money to do that."

"Don't you approve of women working?"

"I understand that some of them don't have families to take care of them and didn't have the luck of finding a man to get married. In that case, I can't fault them for doing so as they had no other choice and they need to survive somehow. And of course, they need to feel themselves useful, so working is a good therapy for them after failing in forming a family. Women are better at taking care of children, too. It's a natural thing, you know. So the women that didn't have children of their own usually seek to fulfil that need in them by becoming teachers or sometimes mediwitches. I just don't understand these witches that call themselves 'modern'. They are setting a terrible example, and if this pattern keeps on repeating itself, our society is doomed." Percy was carving his own tomb if Skeeter's look was any indication. Apparently the prat didn't realise he was talking to a working woman, one that chose to be single and to not have children. Rita was more likely to eat children than raise them. But she had to bite her tongue and continue with the interview.

"Tell me, Percy, what do you mean with the term 'modern witch', and why you think they are dooming our society?"

"Isn't it obvious? These women are a threat. They defy the traditions and customs that have kept the Wizarding society safe and united. Can you imagine what would happen if witches start refusing to form families? They deny their own nature when they refuse to play the mother and wife role that corresponds them. And some of them even live a life full of inappropriate excesses, drinking alcohol, partying until dawn without a man escorting them, having..." Percy stopped mid-sentence, his face getting even redder while he found the words to carry on. "Well, you know which other excesses women do, attempting to rebel against their purity and chastity. I tell you, no decent man will want a woman that has indulged in depraved activities. A decent woman, one to become a wife and mother, must be a pure being, humble, obedient, sensible... That's the woman I'm looking for."

"So, you're telling me you want a house witch, barefoot and pregnant, as they say..."

"Why would my wife be barefoot? I have enough money to buy her shoes, you know." The quill was amused; the wizard was so stuck up that he didn't have a sense of humour. This was going to be fun after all.

Skeeter looked at the parchment and was a bit surprised. 'The poor quill didn't have to change that much to make him sound like the idiot he is,' she thought while shaking her head. 'That's for the best anyway. Hermione wouldn't be happy otherwise.'

The quill added at the end, "*Note to the journalist: Next time find someone more interesting. We haven't interviewed someone this boring since Harry Potter during the Triwizard Tournament.*"

Skeeter laughed at that. "I promise," she said while patting the quill and putting it and the parchment back in her purse.

After the interview was published, some strange things started to happen around Percy.

Important documents got lost when he needed them, but reappeared on his desk as soon as it was too late to do the job he was asked for. Memos didn't arrive or got sent to the wrong office, and the meeting requests about scheduled meetings always came a minute or two after said meeting was over. If he needed a file, it was never where it should be. If he asked for something, someone else asked first so he had to wait... Although his turn didn't seem to arrive, ever.

If Percy had been more paranoid, he would have thought there was a conspiracy against him... and he would have been right. Women were out to get him and make him pay. He just couldn't imagine that the sweet, fairer sex could do anything harmful to a prominent figure as he thought he was.

It wasn't the case of all women plotting together either. It was the simple fact that half the employees at the Ministry were women, and each one of them had felt Percy needed something nasty to happen to him because of what he'd said in the interview. Each one of them had devised something to go wrong for him without knowledge of the others doing the same. Each one had done her best to make Percy's life miserable.

And so he went, wondering if he had a case of Loser's Lurgy. In that case a visit to St. Mungo's was in order... Not that his visit to St. Mungo's cleared the matter. Percy couldn't understand why everyone else was attended first, even the ones arriving after him. And when he finally got to see a Healer, he was prodded at wand point, pricked with needles of all calibres, and stuffed with disgusting potions before declared "as healthy as you could be with that face" and shoved out.

It was Lucius' birthday. He had never been thrilled with the prospect of becoming older, and the only reason he still didn't hate his birthday was because there wasn't any chance he would be a grandfather. It was a blessing that his only son was gay. Draco may have the terrible taste of shagging Ron Weasley, but at least no one would be calling him Grandpa Lucy anytime soon... nor any time later either.

It was for this same reason that Draco and Ron were invited to the little gathering. Only the closest friends and them were invited. Draco was after all family. And Ron was... well, he was the "plus one" on Draco's invitation.

After dinner, they were all enjoying conversation, drinks and a bit of music.

Draco and Ron were quietly (as requested) sitting in a corner, watching with a bit of fascination the odd mixture of people in the room.

"Ugh! Doesn't the dirty old man have some dignity?" The disgust in Ron's voice was unmistakable. "Ogling Hermione like that..."

"I haven't realised father was that obvious, but I was about to comment on that," said Draco with a nod.

"Your dad? I was talking about Snape." And with that, Ron pointed one finger in Severus' direction.

Draco slapped Ron's finger and glared. "Don't point. It's rude."

They stared some time, looking at both men's actions, until they couldn't take it anymore.

"Do you think Granger knows?"

"What?"

Draco sighed. Some days he didn't know what he saw in Ron... "I was asking you if you thought that Granger knows about those two drooling all over her. She doesn't seem to mind, but with women, you never know... They are so clueless."

Ron shrugged and walked away to chase the waiter with the drinks or the waiter with the food; both options were fine for him.

Draco stopped him. "Could you talk with her about it?"

"Why should I talk about Snape with Hermione?"

"Ron!" said Draco annoyed. "I don't care about him. It's about my father I was asking."

"It's your father. You go talk to her."

"Me? She's your ex-girlfriend. You go talk to her."

"Yeah, exactly. EX-girlfriend. With emphasis in the EX. She dumped me because she said I was an insensitive prat. What makes you think she'll talk to me about her love life?"

"Oh, perhaps because she'll be more willing to talk with me about it. Right."

"Couldn't we ask someone else to do it?" Ron whinged.

"You could ask Auntie Bella, if you want, but I'm not going to interrupt her while she's snogging that blond in the corner. Not unless it's a life or death situation. And even then, I think I'd choose death before bothering her. Anyway, I think she's too busy to notice it."

"..."

"Where is your famous Gryffindor courage?"

"Eh..."

Draco grabbed Ron by the hand and dragged him towards Hermione. "Well, we'll both talk to her then."

Hermione had been acting like the proper hostess and had talked a bit with each group of people. When she took a break to drink some punch, she was faced with her two you-can-call-them-friends-if-you-don't-want-to-try-to-figure-out-what-they-really-are.

With her best smile she asked, "Are you enjoying the party?" and then, addressing Draco, she added, "Lucius is very happy you were able to come."

Both men looked rather uncomfortable and were babbling. They were also fidgeting and nudging each other. Hermione had the impression they had the look of two small children caught by their mother doing something they shouldn't and were forced to confess.

Looking straight to Ron, but glancing at Draco to include him, Hermione asked, "What did you do now?"

Ron looked hurt. "Why do people always ask me that?"

Draco shook his head. Ron was definitely a lost case. Getting closer to Hermione, he said, "We were wondering about my father. Isn't he acting a bit odd? I mean, was he flirting with you, or was I hallucinating?"

"Yeah," added Ron, "and Snape too."

"Oh, that." Hermione giggled. "It's nothing. Severus and Lucius are always playing silly games. It gets annoying sometimes, but I never have the heart to tell them to stop. They aren't hurting anyone..."

"Are you sure they aren't serious? I may not know Severus that much to tell, but my father looks quite smitten with you."

At Hermione's disbelieving look, Draco insisted. "Trust me."

She looked dubious, but then Ron added, "That's the look of a man in love, Hermione."

It was ridiculous, impossible. They were just her comrades, her friends even. It couldn't be, right? She decided that a better look at the men in question was needed. If even Ron had that idea, maybe investigating wasn't amiss. Could it be possible that there was more to their actions than she'd thought? Could they really fancy her?

Her head started swirling, and she wasn't sure if it was the alcohol or the talk with Draco and Ron that had caused it. But sure enough, Severus was immediately at her side asking her if she was feeling alright. The confused look she gave him worried him, and a minute later, she was escorted to her office and seated on a comfortable armchair while Lucius and Severus fussed over her, asking her by turns if she was feeling alright and if she needed something.

"I'll be alright. Lucius, you should go and talk with the guests. No one will miss me, but it's your birthday party. They came to see you, so you shouldn't leave them alone."

Lucius left, looking hurt. Severus gave her a little smug smile.

"You should go, too, Severus. Someone has to stop Lucius from hexing the guests if they start asking how old he is again. And stuff Ron with food so he doesn't say anything idiotic. I'll be alright, really."

Severus nodded and left, sulking.

'It is true then', thought Hermione. She didn't know what to make of it. "WOW" was the most profound thought she had at the moment.

She watched them closely the next few days. And the result was clear. Both men were really interested in her.

Severus *and* Lucius fancied her? She still couldn't grasp the idea completely.

And then, she remembered why she had convinced herself so forcefully that they were just being playful. The knowledge came to her as if an Obliviate was lifted. She fancied both men. Both as in "she couldn't choose one over the other". And it was in the reasonable idea (or so she thought at the moment) that it was impossible for both of them to return her feelings, that she blocked any thought on the matter.

And now she was confronted by the truth. By Draco. And Ron.

There was the smallest matter of knowing if they would be willing to share, as she was unable to choose. Sod it. She wanted both and she refused to choose. They didn't seem hostile to each other, so maybe there was hope...

"It's obvious the woman isn't interested."

Lucius glared at Severus.

"Now, Lucius, don't look at me like that. She isn't interested in me either."

"Are you saying you're giving up all hope?"

"What else can we do? Grovelling will make her lose any respect she may have for us, and I refuse to give her a love potion. She'll skin me alive once the haze is gone if I do that."

The sound of someone clearing her throat shocked them out of their sulking.

Hermione was standing by the door. "Bella said you were here in need of some help. What's the problem you can't solve?"

Lucius was too depressed to even see the glint in Hermione's eyes. Severus only hoped she wasn't there to laugh at them.

Hermione was amused by Severus' glare that obviously meant "*How much have you heard?*" and only smiled at them.

"Don't tell me you have problems getting a woman. Can't you impress her with your money?" asked Hermione looking at Lucius. "Or your looks?"

"She's rich enough not to care about money," answered Lucius.

"And she's not shallow enough to want a pretty ornament," added Severus gesturing towards Lucius' general area.

Hermione, instead of giving advice to Lucius as they expected she would, turned to Severus, asking, "And you, isn't your lady moved by your tortured past and your Byronic character?"

The snort was the only answer from Severus.

"A fellow war survivor would say that we all have a tortured past..." said Lucius. "She'll tell him to snap out of it and do something productive."

Hermione shrugged. "Oh, well... in that case..."

She got closer to Lucius. "Maybe you could catch her distracted and simply kiss her. I have been told you are quite good."

She then leaned towards Severus. "And you could try seducing her with your voice. No woman can resist that sultry tone of yours."

With a smile, she walked to the door, and added, without looking at either of them, "Or you can use the Gryffindor approach and simply turn up in my bed one evening." And she quickly left before they could realise what she had just said.

They were left speechless.

After all, Hermione was interested; she'd just hidden it well. Maybe she wanted them to work harder to get her. Maybe they were more out of practice than they'd thought in this courting business. They should have considered the fact that they were trying to romance a Gryffindor. Maybe they had been too subtle?

As Severus was sure Lucius had done everything but posting an ad in the *Hogsmeade Herald*, he was convinced subtlety wasn't the problem.

Anyway, they had a bigger problem now. Who had she been talking to when she'd made the invitation to her bed?

Lucius thought it was him for sure. He was, after all, the best looking one, and if he was to be truthful, in a competition with Severus, it was obvious that he was the winner. Not that he would say that out loud.

On the other hand, Severus was almost sure she had been talking to him. But there was always the possibility that he might be wrong. And he didn't want to know what Hermione would do to him if he happened to get into her bed and she wasn't expecting him. The witch was powerful, no need to anger her. Research was needed.

And so it was that Severus and Lucius found each other in Hermione's room. Severus was searching in her desk for a diary, journal or anything where she could have written about this matter when Lucius entered.

Lucius was disconcerted. "What are you doing here?"

"What does it look like?" was the annoyed answer from Severus.

"Trespassing," Lucius said, trying not to smirk.

Severus glared. "I was looking for something that would indicate who was she inviting here, though it looks like you have decided it was you."

Lucius sneered. "I did see her first," he pointed.

"I doubt it. I saw her the first time she put a foot in the Potions classroom, first year. And believe me, there was no way to ignore her in the classroom, not that I didn't try during six years. When did you find out she existed? During the Department of Mystery's disaster?"

Lucius was sulking. "No. It was before that, but I can't remember when... Lockhart was involved somehow, I think."

Severus shuddered at the memory of the wizard. "1992 or 1993, then. A year after myself." And at Lucius' inquiring look, he added, "I remember the date every Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher started working at Hogwarts since I applied for the job and the reason they stopped teaching, too."

Lucius only shook his head. "Anyway, I was the first to fall in love with her. I have priority."

Severus was still searching and trying not to laugh. "I can't dispute that, friend. I don't know when you realised that particular feeling, although I hope you won't claim it was love at first sight. Hermione might think it is a bit creepy otherwise."

Lucius was getting irritated. "Anyway, do you need any help?" And without waiting for an answer, he started shuffling around her drawers.

Severus, with some papers still in his hand, stopped searching and looked at Lucius. "Do you think she's stupid? If she has a diary hidden, it won't be there."

"Oh, because the smart choice would be leaving it on top of her desk," mocked Lucius.

With another glare, Severus went back to peruse the papers... and choked.

"Now what?"

"..." Severus couldn't quite explain, so he opened and closed his mouth several times.

"Could we finish this before Hermione finds us here?"

Severus was still unable to speak.

Lucius closed the drawer in exasperation and joined Severus, looking at the parchment he was holding. It was a drawing. At first sight, a very silly and badly made, moving picture.

The title was in Bella's handwriting: 'What Hermione wants for Christmas'.

The picture had a female stick figure sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of what looked like a Christmas tree. In between them, there was a gift box. The stick figure unwrapped the gift, and two male stick figures with very big bows on their heads jumped out of it, and they proceeded to sandwich the one female figure labelled 'Hermione' while she squeaked.

Both men were watching the picture in fascination. So much, that they never heard Hermione entering her room.

"What are you two doing here? Not that I didn't mention you dropping by... but what are you doing with that?" asked Hermione while trying to snatch the picture from Severus' hands. "And what the hell is Lucius doing with my silk knickers in his pocket?"

Both men were red faced, shuffling their feet and looking at the floor as if there weren't anything more fascinating in the world than a wooden floor.

Hermione was annoyed. "First, Lucius, I want those knickers back." She extended her hand, and he reluctantly complied while considering how good his chances were of stuffing another pair into his pocket again. None was his conclusion.

"If you are so much a fan of Bella's artistic pictures, you can ask her for one yourself. There's no need to steal mine," Hermione said, finally snatching the drawing from Severus' hands. "Besides, it's not as if she's that accurate either," she said while regarding the drawing in her hands. Both men felt their hopes flee when they thought she meant that wasn't really what Hermione wanted. "The bows would've been more appreciated in another part of their anatomy." The two stick figures were now groping the stick Hermione.

Severus and Lucius decided that the floor was no longer more interesting than the witch in front of them, no matter how annoyed she sounded.

She sighed and went to her drawers to put her knickers back in their place. When she turned around after closing the drawer, Severus knew it was now or never, and he glided behind her, pushing his body against hers and snaking his arms around her waist. He whispered in her ear, "My apologies for the intrusion, Hermione. Maybe there's a way to repay you for such an atrocious behaviour on our part..."

Hermione felt her breath catch in her throat when she felt his body against hers, and she closed her eyes when she heard his silken voice speaking in her ear, and when those lips caressed her neck slowly, she started moaning. Severus was enjoying very much having a handful of squirming Hermione in his arms, and he moved his hands from her waist to her breasts. Lucius, on the other hand, was sulking. He didn't like being left aside, and Severus didn't look like he was going to remember he was in the room any time soon. Lucius made up his mind, and he moved towards the couple standing there, and taking hold of Hermione's waist, he manoeuvred her to face him and lowered his head to kiss her.

Hermione thought breathing was overrated when Lucius started snogging her senseless. She could feel Severus' hands still caressing her breasts while he unbuttoned her blouse, his lips moving down her neck to the now exposed skin of her shoulders. On the other hand, Lucius was still kissing her while his hands gripped her arse to lift her and push her closer to his body. Overwhelmed with the high emotions these two men were making her feel, she decided that thinking was overrated as well, and she let herself enjoy everything without analysing it.

Some time later, she found herself naked on the bed, despite the fact that she wasn't sure where all her clothes had gone, and being the filling of a Slytherin sandwich. She was still trying to fathom how she'd got there, but she knew there was no other place she'd rather be.

Some hours later, an exhausted Lucius was asleep with his body pressed to her back, his hand wrapped around her waist.

Severus was still awake by her other side and feeling awkward, Hermione could tell.

When their gazes met, he saw her questioning look. "So, what's next, Hermione? Will you throw us out of your bed before morning?" He tried to sound detached, but his voice had a note of uncertainty. Severus was not sure if discussing the subject with Hermione was a good or a bad thing to do at that moment. He was still trying to find out what Hermione's intentions towards them were, and despite that it hadn't been that bad to be used for her pleasure, now that they'd fulfilled her fantasy, he didn't know if she'd want to go back to what they'd had before.

"Why would I do that?" asked Hermione with a smile. "If you are going to be this good every time, I may not let you out of bed until next month." She stretched, yawned, and added, "Now, be quiet." And with that, she snuggled up to him and got comfortable for sleep.

"Yes, Severus, do shut up. People are trying to sleep in here," mumbled Lucius tightening his grip around her waist.

Hermione was enjoying herself so much that she even forgot to check how the women's revenge on Percy the Prat was going.

By the time she did, she had to admit that the result was even better than what she had envisioned. She had wanted simply to make him miserable, but the outcome was certainly what he deserved.

After two months of excuses for his incompetence, the Minister had fired him. The Ministry may be slow, but it was clear even for them that something wrong was going on with Mr. Weasley, and they didn't want to get stuck paying for psychological treatment or whatever the guy obviously needed.

Finding a new job was more difficult than Percy had even thought possible. Women refused to speak to him if he approached them. Men didn't dare to enrage family members or friends, so they didn't dare to hire him. And if someone even thought of the possibility, then Tonks or Bella's minions were sent to make them reconsider. Not even his own brothers were willing to have him working in their shop.

Without a job, he soon had to move out of his ostentatious house.

He didn't have enough friends to start with, and after the infamous interview, he had none. And so it was that several months later, a very humbled Percy arrived to his sister's home begging to be let in. Ginny was enjoying it too much, and this time she was going to make Percy pay for everything he had done to her since she'd been born.

Epilogue or We're Not In Kansas Anymore, Harry

Chapter 5 of 5

After the war, the Wizarding world needs to be rebuilt and wizards need to stand together again. The future demands a new order, and the women are up to that task. SS/HG/LM

Disclaimer: JKR is the owner. I'm just playing with her characters.

Author's notes: Lots of thanks to my lovely twin, Lore, for all her help and to Southern_Witch_69 for being my beta.

Chapter Five: Epilogue or We're Not In Kansas Anymore, Harry.

It was late. The nurse in charge of the Estrella Lovegood Ward was bored. So bored that he even attempted doing the crossword in the newspaper some hour or two ago. He was considering counting the tiles on the wall. But he already knew they were 238. He had counted them twice that week.

There was a noise, and he went to investigate.

Harry was waking up from what felt like a very profound sleep. The first thing he heard was the scraping of a chair and the steps of someone walking towards him. As he didn't know where he was or who was there with him, he tried to be cautious. Without moving, he opened his eyes just enough to see shadows. When he saw there wasn't any imminent danger, he tried moving. The pain he felt made him groan. Someone with a St. Mungo's uniform approached him in surprise.

"Welcome back to the land of the living, Mr. Potter," was the greeting, accompanied by a smile.

"Uh?" was the only thing Harry could say. His brain felt foggy.

"I have to make some scans and call your Healer. Please try to stay quiet," the professional voice told him.

Harry heard the steps going away. He was obviously at St. Mungo's. He remembered, vaguely, being on a battlefield... and green light surrounding him... He focused on that, and soon the memories came to him. He had been on the battlefield, facing Voldemort. He remembered killing him, but something had happened. Harry thought someone had hexed him because he remembered falling on the ground. And that was all there was in his head. He must have been knocked out and brought here. How long had he been unconscious?

When the Healer came, Harry tried to ask him, but he was told to be quiet while he was prodded with a wand and lights of all colours danced around him.

"Amazing as it sounds, Mr. Potter, you're as good as new. Unless there's something I can't find at this moment, you'll be able to leave us in a couple of days." And addressing the nurse, the Healer added, "The potions and food he needs are in this chart. Follow the instructions until morning when we'll be able to move him into a normal room."

The nurse simply nodded and took the charts.

"Before leaving your post in the morning, try to find out if there's someone to inform about him." And leaving the room, the Healer's last words were, "Good Night, Mr. Potter."

Harry was very confused and tried to pry answers from the nurse.

"What happened with the others? Where's Hermione? And Ron? How many survived? Is everyone alright?"

"Slow down, Mr Potter." The nurse tried to calm him. "I'll try to answer some of your questions, but if you don't breathe and take this potion first, I'll have to petrify you before you hurt yourself."

Harry complied begrudgingly.

"That's better. Now, let's see. I don't know who you were asking about. What do you mean by surviving?"

"The others, the Order, my friends..." Harry was worried the nurse had some mental problems. How could he not know what he was talking about? "The people who were with me on the battle facing Voldemort?"

The nurse frowned, looked at the charts, looked at Harry again, and back to the charts. "Oh." He hesitated but said, "You have been in a coma for a long time, Mr. Potter. No one else has been on this ward this long, not even me. The people you're asking about may be living their lives or dead. I couldn't tell..." the nurse said with regret, but added in a more cheerful manner, "but if you want me to contact someone you knew, they may be able to tell you."

"Alright. Has anyone been visiting me here?"

"Eh... Only three persons have visited you since I've been assigned here five years ago. Let me see if I can find their names..."

"What? Five years! I've been in here for five years?" Harry's infamous temper was rising.

"Please, calm down, sir."

That someone called him sir shocked him into silence.

"I shouldn't be telling you this. I'm supposed to talk to you and be sure you're adjusting well, not shock you with information that might hurt you." The nurse seemed to be reciting some lesson he'd received. "Let's make a deal, sir. You don't ask me too many questions, and I'll try to answer as much as I'm allowed."

Harry nodded.

In the remainder of the night, he found out that the nurse was a lot younger than him and only remembered Voldemort or the Order as some boring topic he'd heard about in History of Magic. The nurse had never heard of the Boy Who Lived. He was also informed that Miss Granger was a very important figure of their world and that Ronald Weasley resided for some reason at Malfoy Manor. He didn't know anything about Remus, but werewolves these days had a lot more opportunities, so he guessed he was doing well.

In the morning he was moved to a room where he was supposed to share his recovery with another five patients.

After checking that he was alright, he was left there on his own.

Harry asked another of the patients if he could borrow the newspaper. He thought it weird that it wasn't the *Daily Prophet*, but he didn't mind. He wasn't a fan of it anyway.

The Hogsmeade Herald, special edition.

The Ministry's New Head.

From our special correspondent, Rita Skeeter.

London.

After the unfortunate and unexpected demise of our Minister of Magic yesterday morning, the Wizengamot called an extraordinary session and unanimously appointed Miss Hermione Granger as Minister of Magic until such a time when elections could be convened.

When asked about this turn of events, Madam Griselda Marchbanks commented, "Miss Granger has done more for our community than all the Ministers together have done since I was born."

Wizengamot member Tiberius Odgen added, "The only reason either Miss Granger or Madam LeStrange have never been elected is because they have never decided to run for the position. It was past time that we did something about that."

This morning, in a great ceremony in the Atrium of the Ministry's building, Miss Hermione Granger, escorted as always by Misters Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape, took office as the new Minister of Magic and declared, "It will be my duty to keep the Wizarding world moving in the right direction."

Among the guests at the ceremony, in a place of honour, was the Muggle Prime Minister. It isn't the first time he has been seen in the Wizarding world, as we all remember his assistance to the last Wizarding Football World Cup's final match.

Also at the ceremony, Madam Bellatrix LeStrange, née Black, who was in the company of a young blond we weren't able to recognise, was seen in deep conversation with the Chief of the Auror Department, Gawain Robards. Rumour has it that she'll be asked to fill that position during our dear new Minister's administration.

Along with the politicians, several friends and prominent figures of our world assisted to the event.

Madam Luna Lupin, née Lovegood, editor in chief of *The Quibbler*, proudly announced her new status as Remus Lupin's wife. As we previously reported, she won her judicial case against the Ministry last month and was finally allowed to marry her long time partner and now officially recognised father of her three children. (See page 4 for more details about the happy family).

Mister Draco Malfoy, owner of the Wiltshire Football Club, attended with Mister Ronald Weasley, co-owner of the Quidditch team of the same name. This has proven wrong the ill-intentioned rumours regarding the two couples' relationships. Mister Draco Malfoy is not on bad terms with his father for his relationship with Miss Granger and Mister Snape, and Mister Lucius Malfoy feels the same way towards his son's long-lasting relationship with the younger Mister Weasley.

I invite you all, dear readers, to join me in congratulating our new and very dear Minister. We hope the best for her and her cabinet in all the years to come.

The newspaper continued with some articles about the clothes everyone wore, the drink and food served during the event, the complete transcript of several speeches, and many interviews. There was even a detailed list of guests at the ceremony. Every columnist of the journal had written positive editorials about Hermione's future administration and the repercussions that it would have in their area of expertise (and this meant from politics to fashion).

On the last page of the *Hogsmeade Herald*, there was a reminder that the sports channel of the Wizarding Omni Network was going to transmit the Muggle Football World Cup, accompanied with a timetable, and a list of pubs in Muggle England that were owned by Squibs, for those who wished to watch the matches on the telly.

Harry closed the newspaper and handed it back to its owner. He was certainly shocked about how things had turned out, but he could see despite his initial impression that everything seemed to feel right.

It seemed a lot had changed since the day he'd defeated Voldemort. This wasn't the world he used to live in and that had demanded so much from him during all his life. This was a new world, the world others had created after he'd been put in St. Mungo's. It was obvious the Wizarding world didn't need him anymore, and that it could survive and rebuild itself without him. He was finally free of the burden of being The Weapon of the Prophecy. He was free to live his life at last and be just Harry.

During the following day, Harry wrote letters to Hermione, Ron and Remus to tell them he had finally woken up and that the Healer had released him from the hospital. He told them he saw the world they had created and wished them happy lives now that they had found their paths. He also said it was his time to find his own path as well and informed them it was his decision to live as a Muggle, away from the Wizarding world. He promised he would write them as soon as he had settled down so they could keep in touch.

Later, when the nurse came to inform him he could leave when he wanted, Harry again took the discarded newspaper the man in the next bed had thrown to the trash bin. He decided to keep the pictures of those who had been his best friends for so many years and that had been by his side when he'd needed it most. It didn't matter to him that Ron was cuddling with bloody Draco Malfoy or that the two former Death Eaters by Hermione's side weren't able to take their hands off her. They were still his best friends. It was now their time to write history, and as far as he could see, they had found happiness, and that was all that mattered to him.