

Battles Within

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Prologue

Chapter 1 of 1

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Everyone in the Weasleys' home was laughing, eating, and enjoying each other's company. Some of the Order members had even come over to eat lunch, and in fact, there was only one person who was not having fun—Hermione.

Ron and Hermione had had a gigantic fight the other day and were avoiding each other. They were clearly acting, being kind, smiling. Deep inside, they were aching, angry, and confused.

Hermione was trying not to brood on the fight. It was difficult. She was barely holding in the tears that were building up behind her eyes, and it seemed monumentally unfair that everyone else was so cheerful.

She had had enough of the giggling of Ginny and Harry's flirtatious ways. She had had enough of the laughter and bliss caused because their favorite Quidditch team had won after a continuous two-week game.

She had had it.

She didn't want everyone to be happy while she was not.

"I'm---going upstairs," Hermione called to everyone in the kitchen.

"All right, dear!" came Molly's response, followed by a gale of laughter.

Hermione sighed. She knew she was being a spoilsport, but she just wasn't up to being happy with everyone.

Before Hermione had stepped on a stair, there was a loud Crack! fairly close to her. She jumped, recognizing the sound.

"Oi! That you, 'Mione?" asked a slurred voice. Hermione turned around and would have screamed had the sorrow that had been eating at her soul all afternoon not made shrieking seem a futile effort.

"S-Sirius?" Hermione stammered, shocked.

"Yep. You got it right." He slapped a hand on her shoulder. Hermione managed a small smile.

"What are you doing here?"

"Mione, 'Mione..." He shook his head, rolling his eyes sarcastically as he did. And since when had he taken up calling me "Mione"? Hermione wondered.

"They lifted all charges on me from Azkaban. I'm a free man." He slicked his hand through his black hair, and Hermione noticed that it was shorter.

"Did you trim your hair?" Hermione asked, awed. His haircut made him look younger; his face was fuller, no longer gaunt like it had been. There were the handsome features that he had had when he was younger, a Marauder. His short black hair was only long enough to curl around under his ears. His gray eyes seemed very content, no longer angry like they had been, but there was a sadness lingering; he was tired... from Azkaban.

It had been so very long since Hermione had seen him.

"What? Is it that bad?" Sirius asked after Hermione had passed the moment, mute, staring at him. "Because I can make it long again—" His hand went for the wand in his lengthy, black cloak's pocket.

"Oh! No, it looks—wonderful, er—" Sirius raised an eyebrow for being promptly interrupted. Hermione glanced down at the floor.

"Um, everyone is in the kitchen," she said quickly, pushing away some embarrassment.

"All right, a surprise visit is in order!" Sirius declared, and he changed into the form of a dog before Hermione's eyes.

The big, black, shaggy-haired dog padded over towards the Weasleys' kitchen door. Hermione opened it for him, and he barked at everyone, tail wagging, tongue hanging out of his mouth, panting.

"Where did that---?" Molly shrieked.

"Sirius!" Harry and Lupin gleefully chimed.

With that, the room broke into a chorus of happy cheers, all grateful to see Sirius again.