

Rock & Roll Dreams

by DiagonAlleyGirls

A rock star meets a witch and their connection sets the entire wizarding world on its ear...and puts them and their friends in potential danger.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 2

A rock star meets a witch and their connection sets the entire wizarding world on its ear...and puts them and their friends in potential danger.

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Author's Notes:

This is a somewhat AU fic in that the fic takes place before GOF. Spoilers should be assumed for the first three novels, but we go in a totally different direction.

Feedback is greatly appreciated and can be sent to diagonalleygirls@gmail.com or you can join our chat list, and see chapters before anyone else at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/diagonalleygirls>

Chapter One

Another day, another gig. Roarke was getting too damn old for this. He'd enjoyed his twenty-plus years as a singer/songwriter and later a producer, but the weariness of the constant travel and the exhaustion of the music industry had worn him down over the years. He'd tried retiring to his place on the banks of the Hudson in New York, but wanderlust and boredom had forced him back into the studio and one thing had led to another. Now he was taking only a short break from yet another world tour and was playing a charity gig in London.

London! He hated to come back to England, the land of what he had possessed and what he had lost. He had come to terms with his new life many years ago, after trying everything in his power to get back where he belonged. Now, with all the years that had passed, his loss was just an ache deep inside, a friend he only dared visit with when his emotions were dulled by exhaustion or alcohol. Thinking too hard was painful. Remembering what he had lost was an impossible burden to bear.

It helped that he was channeling his emotions into the music, his loss into chords and bridges, his pain into rhyming words that would never mean as much to anyone else as they did him. Sharing his heart had felt like an intrusion at first. But then a cathartic feeling stole over him. He wasn't disillusioned enough to hope that someone from his past life...his past life, he reminded himself, it wasn't just a dream...would hear and understand.

Once, a long time ago, he had been a man of action, a man with loyal friends, respected peers and the chance to make a difference. Now he sang songs and the only thing he influenced were record sales. He loved his music and outlet, but it just seemed so empty compared to the past.

Roarke nodded when someone waved for his attention. It was time to go onstage and sing for a charity now, to help the kids. At least this gig wouldn't be self-serving. The

audience deserved his maximum effort, even if he was emotionally drained from the travel and the memories London held for him. He had wanted to go to the train station, but had lost his nerve just outside the doors. He'd done this drill before. He'd tried to crash through the non-existent barrier. Hell, he'd searched for months along the Scottish border and Highlands looking for anything...a Dark Mark, a train, directions to Hogsmeade, anyone dressed in familiar robes. But it had all disappeared, as if wiped off the face of the earth. His life, as he had known it, was gone forever.

With a deep sigh, he walked on stage to wild applause and cheers. The audience was filled both with adults and a few pale children, presumably the ones who would be most affected by the monies raised here. Roarke strummed his guitar and stared out into the audience, trying like hell to concentrate. His mind was racing and he couldn't focus on the songs he was supposed to be singing. He gritted his teeth, trying like hell to concentrate. The audience had paid good money for this gig...extra good since this was a benefit for a children's charity.

He gave a woman standing in the front row a smile. She somehow looked as if she didn't belong here, but gave him a familiar feeling as well. There was something about her that made him think about his former life, but he tamped that down for now. This was about the music, the performance, the children. Not the ghosts of his past, his broken memories.

At least there wouldn't be groupies around. He hated how everyone wanted to use him.... Didn't these people ever think of anyone but themselves? It was the very nature of the music industry. Give, give, give, and then give some more.

He shook his head again, knowing that he wasn't giving his full effort. The intriguing woman was watching him so carefully. He raised an eyebrow, almost guilty that she was the only thing commanding his attention. Why couldn't he concentrate anyway? He couldn't resist and blew her a kiss, an arrogant smile ghosting his mouth. He waited to see her response, interested in the challenge.

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Hermione Granger couldn't believe that her parents had managed to get her a ticket to go see Roarke James. He had been her favorite singer when she was younger, and was her first real unattainable crush. The walls of her bedroom had been filled with posters and magazine covers featuring this man, and here she was, not twenty feet from him. Harry and Ron may have thought she was studious when they had met at the age of eleven, but she had been quite the fan girl in her day, with the same crushes that her peers had. With a smile, she realized that wasn't quite true. Her classmates had crushes on Quidditch players and wizards from magical boy bands. Only the Muggle-born witches understood her fascination with the man who was in front of her.

Like all girls do, she had outgrown her teenage infatuation with time. She'd dated both Viktor Krum and Ron for a time before leaving Hogwarts to continue her education, but neither had managed to make her heart race like Roarke James did. There was something about him, something so familiar that when he had walked out on the stage, she had been forced to sit down before she fell down and give herself a second to catch her breath. She was able to stand back up after a moment, but couldn't help notice how Roarke's piercing gaze kept coming back over to where she was sitting. At first she thought she was imagining it, but even Ms. Logical couldn't ignore the fact that the man of her childhood dreams seemed to be checking her out.

With a slight shimmy that would have made Lavender Brown proud, Hermione tried to inconspicuously adjust her shirt just enough to show a hint of cleavage. She wasn't outrageously dressed by most standards, but her friends would be amazed to see her in a pair of tight low-riding jeans and a low cut top that was cropped enough to show her toned midriff. Just a hint of fairy dust was brushed over the top of her breasts, enhancing the briefest view of the black lace bra she was wearing, giving off the illusion of a naughty prezzie that needed to be unwrapped. Some light makeup and a charm to tame her hair topped off the outfit and made her look a bit younger than her twenty-five years. She couldn't deny that she looked good, but good enough to have caught the eye of such a beautiful man? She doubted it. When she saw him blow a kiss in her direction, she couldn't help it... she looked behind her to see who the lucky woman was. The sight of a pudgy, slightly balding man who reminded her a bit of Harry's Uncle Vernon had her turning around quickly, unsure of what to do. Had that been meant for her, or were her imagination and hormones in overdrive?

Only one way to find out, she thought. Gazing up at the man who had been tormenting her since walking up on stage, she slowly licked her lips, as if she were a starving woman looking at her first meal in months. With one last quick flick of her tongue, she gave him what she hoped was a sensual smile with a come hither stare added in for good measure.

Hermione Granger knew many considered her a bookworm, but she wasn't the smartest witch to graduate from Hogwarts in nearly a century for nothing. It might take a moment, but even she caught the sexual innuendo behind the kiss, and she wasn't going to back down from the challenge.

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Ah, now this was more like it! Her shimmy had been innocent, not predatory, and her expression one of interest and not conquest. The woman must have been in her early or mid-twenties, nowhere near Roarke's own age. Still, it didn't matter. He wasn't the type of man to go for a one-night stand, never had, never would. Though the love of his life was long dead...he'd held her in her final minutes...he wasn't interested in dating and sure as hell not in love. He functioned fine as a single bachelor, away from any dating or romantic dramas. He preferred his own company, anyway. He was the only one who understood the memories in his head.

So why was this woman so damn captivating? Even his body was responding to her subtle message, areas tensing up in anticipation of... what? He wasn't going to have a one-night stand with some woman in the audience. He wasn't! Roarke tried to convince himself of this as his desire grew, his concentration totally shattered now.

He played the rest of the show on auto-pilot, promising himself that he'd give a large donation to the charity or offer to play another gig at a later date. When the set was done, he strode offstage, grabbing a towel and a roadie's arm. He pointed her out and asked the roadie to give her a message to meet him in the hotel bar in about an hour. He'd have time to wrap up the show, shower and change, and maybe they could have a fruitful conversation away from the insanity of his life. He'd chosen a plush but private place near what had been the Leaky Cauldron in his former life, but what was now a bookstore and café.

With one last sigh, he took to the stage again, getting ready to play his biggest hit 'Never Forget'. Hopefully, the roadie would alert the woman before she left.

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Hermione had thoroughly enjoyed the show, and not only because Roarke James seemed to be flirting with her. He seemed somewhat distracted, but he was definitely flirting. Seemed a shame that the night was ending and her dream man would be continuing on his merry way, to wherever his tour took him next. She herself was planning on leaving London soon, after a short visit with her parents. She was expected at Hogwarts within the week, to work with her mentor, Severus Snape, to finish up lesson plans and to plot her Potions thesis that she would have to complete before being awarded the title of Mistress. Without the title, she wouldn't be able to teach or further her research, so she was determined to finish as quickly as possible.

She was deep in thought, lulled away from reality by the pulse of applause, trying to lure Roarke back onto stage for a few more songs. Her hands were moving on their own accord, hoping that he would come back out quickly, because she wasn't ready for the evening to end. Not many considered her a sex symbol, and to have been looked over by such a handsome man made a person feel good about herself. It started to quiet as he came back on stage, but Hermione could still feel his eyes on her, as if waiting to see what she would do next. She was considering her options when there was a tap on her shoulder. It amazed her, considering very few people could get close to her without her consent, one of her leftover issues from the war. The gentleman, who was wearing a Roarke James concert tee, leaned in to tell Hermione that Roarke was requesting the pleasure of her presence at the lounge of his hotel, an hour after the concert.

She worried her lower lip, unsure of what to do. Hermione had never been a one-night stand person and had no intention of becoming one at this stage of her life. But she wasn't ready to see her evening end and was intrigued what a man like Roarke James could possibly want with her. He hadn't invited her to his room, so perhaps he just wanted to fill some time before he had to leave town for goddess knew where. She knew Roarke was still looking at her, waiting for an answer. She gave him a slight nod, to acknowledge she would meet him. It was in a part of town that she was familiar with, and she knew that if he attempted anything she wasn't interested in, she could quickly escape and get to the Leaky Cauldron without so much as breaking a sweat. It seemed as if this present from her parents was the gift that kept giving. But how much was she looking to get before the night was out?

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"So, what is tonight's festive culinary display?" Severus Snape walked into a kitchen in a state of disarray. There was some white substance, perhaps flour, dusting every available surface, a gooey substance dripped slowly onto the floor and brown streaks coated the walls. Isabel was sitting on the counter in the midst of it all, swinging her legs in a very carefree manner.

Severus pulled out an ornate chair from the formal dining room and made a point to dust it off carefully. When he was sure it was the only spotless surface in the room, he sat down and carefully crossed his legs and folded his arms across his chest.

"Care to tell me what the meaning of this is, Isabel? Is this your version of modern art or has yet another meal gone horribly awry?" He couldn't prevent the ghost of a smile from twitching the corners of his mouth.

"I would think that you would appreciate a home-cooked meal, Sev, after having to eat at Hogwarts all of the time. I mean, those house-elves make their food too perfect. There aren't any lumps in the gravy!" Isabel Snape snarled at her husband. She loved him, but there were times that she wondered why she bothered. "It's not like I have to cook for you, I have other things I could be working on. Just because you have a career and a life outside of the house doesn't mean that I don't have important issues to work on." She looked around the kitchen, wishing she had paid more attention to her mum, because domestic goddess she was not. And her husband's smirky smile was not helping soothe her mood at the moment.

She looked around the kitchen one more time, finding a bowl of what was supposed to be chocolate frosting sitting next to the oven. The fact that the consistency was more along the lines of chocolate pudding didn't faze her at all. It would still serve its purpose. "So, darling, how was your day?" she asked innocently, making her way towards her impeccably dressed man. He'd dropped his glamour for the summer, and the tan man would probably scare the majority of his students. She reached out and quickly streaked the chocolate mess across his cheek. "Why don't you invite Minerva and Albus over for dinner sometime soon. I promise to ask for help with dinner, and I miss seeing people who appreciate my skills. Since my husband apparently thinks he married me for my cooking skills and for no other reason."

Severus had to chuckle at his wife's antics. She fascinated him on all levels. They were so different from each other, and yet somehow they'd managed to make their marriage work. And then there was the matter of her family. Though they weren't an issue now, he knew that she would want to resume ties at some point. None of them were getting any younger.

"I happen to like what the elves prepare, but I also like your culinary adventures as well." He cast a glance around the room. "Glamour yourself and we'll go to the Three Broomsticks for dinner." He wiped a hand over his face, holding the sticky mass out to his wife. "Dessert after our entrée, Isabel." He gave her a small wink, relieved that he was able to relax. Being stern and cruel all the time was too tiring.

"Glamour yourself..." Izzy muttered under her breath. She knew that he understood what a pain it was to live under a glamour, but some days she didn't even remember who she was anymore. "Who would you like your companion to be tonight, love? Young buxom blonde, or maybe matronly sugar mama who is looking to support your next potions project?" As she said it, her long waist length hair shortened into a grey bun, similar to Minerva's, and her body shrank down to almost half its normal size. She even remembered the wart on the tip of her nose. She was exactly who people would expect her husband to be dining with, quite honestly. Most people rarely saw beyond the bad attitude and surly personality, which was part of the reason she loved him. It was never easy living with Severus, but then again, it couldn't possibly be easy to have a wife that the world thought was dead.

"I don't know, perhaps younger might be in order tonight." With a snap of her fingers, the old crone was gone, replaced by the buxom blonde she had first mentioned. Instead of jeans, which she normally wore, she had changed her clothing to be a shorter version of the Hogwarts uniform, right down to the Slytherin tie, and a green velvet bow tying back her blonde locks. "Maybe with me on your arm, the world will understand what a sensual creature you truly are, sweetheart."

"Or perhaps not." Severus darkened his skin slightly and lightened his hair to a medium brown. His nose shrank slightly and his lips widened. He looked nondescript and not like himself, and that would suit for this evening. For much of his life, he had been living under a glamour of one sort or another, dulling his hair, lightening the pigment of his skin. Only Isabel saw what he knew was the true Severus Snape. And that suited him. Of course, Dumbledore, a father figure of sorts, knew his actual countenance, but the old man would hardly tell anyone. That was just one of many secrets he held close for Severus, and now Isabel.

"Do I meet with your approval, dear? Do I look like a nondescript wizard who had the good fortune to find an incredibly beautiful woman? What is the story today, darling witch? Am I, as they say, keeping you only for your looks? What roles will we play this evening?"

"I'm not playing the hooker ever again." She'd done it once, but that was all her man was going to get. She switched her glamour to match the wizard in front of her. Middle-aged, slightly graying around the crown of her dishwater brown hair. A few extra wrinkles around her eyes and more than a few pounds on her hips and belly. "Look at me, turn my hair back to my natural color and I could be my mother." The look she got from her husband was horrified, and even she couldn't believe she said that. "Goddess, that wasn't even funny, was it? I promise, turning into my mother is not an option, darling. My whole life has been an attempt to not turn into her. The glamour may be similar, but your little Izzy is still under here. I'm not going to forget anytime soon who I don't want to grow up to be like. I mean, could you imagine me with seven perfect red-headed children, doting on you and cooking the perfect meal every day of our lives? We'd both want to kill me in a day or two."

Severus was sensitive about her family, and she tried so hard not to bring them up. Now look what she had gone and done. "Honest, Sev, Molly Weasley I'm not and I will never be. My mother made her decisions and I've made mine. You are my choice, my perfect life. I don't need anything more than you."

"Perhaps some day..." Severus shook his head. It was pointless to get into this conversation. Her family had cut her so deeply by their betrayal and their lack of faith in her. It was a subject he tended not to bring up at all and one she avoided at all costs.

"All right then, dear... whatever shall I call you? The name Minerva comes to mind, but I suppose that would draw attention. How about... hmmm... Hortense? Bertha? Add a few hairs onto your chin and I think we'll be in excellent shape, Bertha."

He sidestepped her hands, which would no doubt be swatting him any minute now. "Shall we go? Your husband is hungry, Hortense."

"You owe me in ways you can't even imagine, Milo," Izzy tested the name out, knowing it was way better than Hortense. Maybe she'd just ignore him tonight whenever he called her that. "I get to pick the names next time. And the glammers, I think we should go younger. I want to go dancing, at a club in Diagon Alley. I'll wear that green dress you like so much."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "No time like the present, darling. It is, after all, a Friday evening, and we have no pressing engagements in the morning. How young shall I be? And please don't insist that I look like that Muggle actor again. What is his name? Florida Petals?"

He waited for her signal, growing intrigued and excited about the possibility of being out with his beautiful wife. She was so carefree, and he could relax while in her presence in a way he never had before, not even as a child or a student. There were always alliances to be made, always tactics to consider in even the simplest of tasks.

That had been how they'd found each other, in Slytherin. He had been a fourth year and she was a scared first year. Her family, who had raised her to be a Gryffindor, had been most upset when she'd been sorted into Slytherin, if the Howler from her mother had been any indication. Her despondence called out to him, and he had protected her from the sometimes cruel world of the green and silver. Friendship had grown, and when the situation with her family happened, he had hidden and protected her. Now they'd had each other for so long that he could barely remember what life had been like alone in his quarters at Hogwarts. She had breathed life into every part of him, and as time went on, his sour mien had melted, then disappeared totally. Now it was only a cloak he wore in public when not glamourous.

He wished he could give her back her family, but she had maintained that time had deepened the rift and that it was better that they thought she had died all those years ago. The single-mindedness and determination that she and younger brother Percy possessed had caused them both to strive for greatness. But Percy had willingly sacrificed his life for ambition, while Isabel had been driven and determined, but had never strayed from the side of light. She had been the one who convinced him to turn to Dumbledore and defect from the Death Eaters.

"Orlando Bloom, not Florida Petals, love." Although he had made quite the striking figure in his tight leather pants and flowing pirate shirt the night she took him out looking like the Brit actor, it had caused too many people to do a double take, and the last thing she wanted was to draw attention to them. "How about a younger, tanner version of

my husband? The man I fell in love with, before the war. I might be able to remember what the young girl that caught your fancy looked like. If we go into Muggle London, no one would recognize us. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be young and in love again? As opposed to middle-aged and still in love?"

She did an artistic twirl on her toes, and changed herself back into the image of her eighteen-year-old self. Her hair was shorter than it was now, and she was less padded all around, almost gangly. The freckles, which she usually charmed away, were back across her nose and down her cheeks. "Do you remember, Sev, how everything was still so innocent then?" She twirled around again, this time laughing as her hair created a halo around her head and the skirt she was wearing spun out of control. "Where is the handsome dark knight who won the fair maiden? Is he going to come out to play, or will I have to give chase and win his hand again?"

Severus couldn't stop the change even if he wanted to. He became just a little leaner, darkened his skin to its normal tanned hue, and swept his glossy dark hair back. "Does this meet with Mrs. Snape's approval, my dear?" When she studied him without speaking, he changed his clothes as well, now wearing a thin gray jumper and dark pants.

He extended his hand to hers. "May the dark knight take the fair maiden out to the big city of London?" If his friends or even his enemies saw them, they'd never imagine that Severus Snape could be flirtatious, could be happy. But he could be, indeed. This special woman had brought so much out in him and he owed her so much.

Izzy let loose a wolf whistle. "Does it ever meet my approval? I am married to the most beautiful man in the world, even if I'm the only one who gets to see it. You're better than Florida Petals any night of the week."

Severus pulled his wife close and kissed her gently. "You decide where we go, then, darling. I promise not to turn my nose up at anything, no matter how Muggle."

"Really? Then I know exactly the place. You'll love it." She knew her husband would hate every second of it, but she wasn't going to pass up the chance of a complaint-free Severus. "I have been craving a Big Mac, and there is a McDonalds on the way to the club I'm thinking of." A look of disdain crossed her husband's face. She knew he was expecting her to choose some swanky restaurant in a very Muggle part of London. "You know you love their French fries, so stop making faces! If you're good, I might even buy you one of those strawberry milkshakes you like so well."

Severus shook his head in resignation. "Why can't we ever go to a place that would suit me, love? A nice... what do they call it? Five star dining experience? Instead of that saturated fats castle called McDonalds?" He leaned in close. "You know, I was reading a serious Muggle newspaper called The Sun, and they said they use horse meat instead of beef in their culinary offerings."

When she looked outraged, he couldn't stop smiling. "Wouldn't you rather have a nice tender steak instead of some reconstituted horse meat, love? I would dearly like to have some chocolate that was not pre-processed or whatever it is they call it. And no plastic cheese, please."

"Okay, since you're the expert in five star dining, tell me where The Sun says we should eat that won't serve us horse meat. Not that I believe that garbage." She would just have to sneak off to McDonalds some day when Severus was at Hogwarts all day. She really had been having some major grease cravings, but that could wait. "Steak or pasta would be wonderful, and I expect dessert as well, and I mean the chocolate kind, not the kind you're thinking of."

"I haven't any idea. Perhaps we should wander until we can find a newsagent who might have The Sun on hand. Or perhaps we should just go to the tourist areas and ask. It could be exciting to query Muggles in their own environment. Think of it as a scientific experiment. What could we learn from the wild Muggles in their home setting? It could be just fascinating." He drew the word out slowly, punctuating his evil tone with a wink.

"Perhaps we could even ask them why they like that McDonalds place. It is a mystery to me why you like it." He suddenly frowned as something occurred to him. "Isabel, you're not... expecting, are you?" Someday Severus wanted a child with this woman, but the current political climate made having children dangerous, even though they themselves were relatively safe.

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Roarke nodded almost imperceptibly. She had gotten the gist of what he was asking, even though he wasn't quite sure exactly what he wanted. This woman stirred something in him that went beyond the physical or sensual. It was almost as if she gave him peace with that part of his soul that had been smoldering since that fateful time.

As soon as the show was over, he took a quick shower, washing off the musician, the star. He was just James... Roarke James, that was. Why had his old name crept in after all this time? Very annoyed with himself, he dressed in a midnight-blue shirt almost the same shade as his eyes and a pair of black jeans. He slicked back his hair, happy that it had tamed with time. He still needed what the wardrobe people at the record company called "product" when he was on stage, but mostly his hair stayed un mussed.

Roarke spent a few minutes with his manager, who hadn't even noticed his fractured concentration. He shook hands and posed for pictures with some of the children who clearly had no idea who he was, but were appreciative anyway. After a couple of short interviews, he donned a black leather blazer, reminded his manager to get his guitar to him at the hotel, grabbed his leather duffel, and left. He had a few meetings the following day, but nothing too early, and it was just after nine in the evening, very early for an insomniac like him.

He had half hoped the woman would be backstage; he'd created a background for her already. Her eyes had brimmed over with compassion, so perhaps she worked with the children or was associated with the charity. He could imagine her in a staid office, her curls tamed and gathered at the back of her neck, a dull business suit in some neutral color covering those curves. She'd have an utterly English name... Claire or Emma or Jane, maybe... and she'd be a woman who played by the rules most of the time. She'd have really let loose at the show, becoming as uninhibited as those around her. She most assuredly wasn't interested in one-night stands, so both of them were safe.

Yet as Roarke walked back to the hotel, he stopped in a chemist shop to buy some protection. He reddened, realizing how futile the thought itself was. Thankfully, the pimply-faced clerk seemed to have no idea who he was.

He walked along the street opposite his hotel, looking in vain for the Leaky Cauldron. As he passed the bookshop/cafe, which apparently served the extra-caffeinated young professionals late into the night, he touched the window, reassuring himself that it was real and true. It was no surprise to him that the cool glass met his hand. He turned away, stalking down the street, so angry with himself that he barely noticed where he was going. A man in a cloak brushed his arm, and Roarke turned around to see a red shock of hair, a middle-aged man huddled into his coat.

"Art..." It couldn't be! It just couldn't be Arthur Weasley. What the hell was happening to him? He hadn't even allowed himself to think about these people in many years. Why this? Why now? Was it being in London itself?

Roarke jogged across the street and walked into the hotel, glancing into the bar and finding it empty. It didn't appear to be a busy place, since most of the businessmen tended to visit the trendier and less quiet bars down the road. Good. He could drop his overnight bag in his room and try to calm down. The silence, the memories were all getting to him. He needed a change of pace, and this woman would make for an interesting evening. He knew that much! As long as she didn't find him mentally disturbed or certifiably insane.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 2

A rock star meets a witch and their connection sets the entire wizarding world on its ear...and puts them and their friends in potential danger.

Chapter Two

"Dad? Did that man just call to you?" Ginny was meeting Draco at the Leaky Cauldron and had accompanied her father there. A very handsome Muggle had brushed past him, and Ginny could have sworn he said her father's name. "Are you spending time in Muggle pubs again, Dad? You know how Mum hates that."

Arthur shook his head, puzzled. He watched the man walk into a modern and very Muggle hotel. A few scantily clad women stood outside. "I haven't any idea what that was about, Ginny, but I obviously don't keep the company of many Muggles. The only ones I see often are the Grangers, but since Ron went off to Wales to train dragons, Hermione and her family haven't been around." He held the door open for his youngest child, his only living daughter. "Are you seeing Malfoy again?"

Ginny sighed and rubbed the bridge of her nose. "His father isn't around, his mother is destitute somewhere and he works a real job now, he's a brilliant artist. He's a good Slytherin, okay, Daddy?"

"There is no such thing," her father grumbled and stepped up to the bar.

Ginny caught sight of Draco. She would not bicker in front of him, not again. It seemed that every time Draco was around her family, he was the source of their arguments. "Fine, then. Have a good evening, Dad." There was something very wrong with her father, Ginny realized, as she crossed the room to where Draco lounged in front of a roaring fire, a butterbeer in his hand. She wondered if Draco would be willing to help her find out what was the problem.

Arthur watched his daughter approach Malfoy and had to turn away. He would not lose another child to the dark side, no matter what it took. No matter who got hurt. He would not let it happen again.

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Remus Lupin walked into a small non-descript house just over the Scottish border in England. The Order had been keeping this house for as long as he remembered, and he had exclusive use of it for times like these. He opened the door slowly and quietly. She still got scared easily. As expected, she was in the lounge area, staring at a Muggle television. It was one of her only interests while her mind healed, and Remus didn't mind it at all.

He held out a paper bag. "I got some fish and chips. I hope you'll eat." The scent of the fish and chips, liberally doused with vinegar, had his stomach rumbling. "I'm sorry I was late. I had to spend some time with Bill. You remember Bill, don't you? Bill Weasley? Arthur and Molly's eldest son?"

She didn't answer, but then again, he hadn't expected her to. She had her good days and bad days, and often, when he was called away on business, she had a terrible time of it. He'd been gone since dawn today, first meeting with Dumbledore and McGonagall and then with Bill. Bill was damn close to some answers that could change his world and rid him of his curse. But she was most important to him. She had nobody to care for her, and her existence was a closely held secret.

"Here you go." Remus placed the food on a plate and brought it to her, along with a mug of warmed milk. Maybe today would be different. Maybe today she'd communicate with him. It was high time for a miracle.

The smell of hot food caught her attention, and she watched her constant companion over the last year. He took such good care of her, but to this point, she hadn't been able to come up with enough energy to thank him. Nothing mattered to her anymore; her son and husband were gone. Remus had told her that Harry was alive and a grown man now. This made sense, since the Remus she remembered was much younger and not as tired looking. The only reason she knew who he was when she first woke up was because of how he smelled. He had always smelled like the forest on a spring day, and he still did. She knew that Remus would take care of her, no matter what. Lily reached out to pick up one of the chips off of the plate that he set in front of her. It tasted wonderful, just the way she liked it. Not many people would remember how a dead woman preferred her food, but her caregiver wasn't most people.

"Thank you," Lily said quietly, after a long minute. She couldn't believe how bad she sounded; that couldn't possibly be her voice, could it? "Remy, thank you." She said, a bit more forcefully. That sounded a little better, at least in her mind. Lack of use had obviously done a number on her vocal cords. She would have to try and talk more, to try and get her life back together again. No more pity for Lily Evans-Potter. She had wallowed long enough and now she needed to try and get better.

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Hermione Granger approached the hotel that she had been told to meet Roarke at cautiously, watching for both friends and foes alike. She honestly didn't want to run into anyone she knew. She didn't want to wake up in the morning and have to explain what she was doing sneaking around to a well-meaning friend who saw her walking near the Leaky Cauldron. If she were honest with herself, she wasn't completely sure that this wasn't some elaborate prank that the boys had come up with. It was all very convenient that a famous man whom she had a crush on as a young woman had invited her out for a drink after his concert, in the same area of London that backed up to Diagon Alley. Not that she honestly believed Roarke James was a wizard, but the coincidence was amazing, and she wouldn't be surprised at all if Ron or Harry popped their heads into the bar, laughing uproariously at her attempt at seduction.

Now where had that thought come from? Hermione had no intention of trying to seduce anyone, as if Roarke James, rock star and legend, could possibly be interested in her. He probably picked out one girl to flirt with at all of his shows and took them back to his hotel for a little fun. A little fun wasn't what she was looking for, but the challenge had been too irresistible, and what sane woman would pass up a chance meeting with one of the hottest men in the world?

Hermione smiled at the doorman when he opened the door to the opulent hotel. She had been here before, for tea with an aunt, but it was still enough to take her breath away. The dark wood and sharply dressed attendants were subtle reminders that she was more than a little out of her element. She glanced towards the bar, but didn't see anyone in there. She stopped for a moment, to give herself one last chance to leave before things went any further. But she knew she wanted to see this to the end, and she did a quick finger check, to make sure that her hair and clothes were where they were supposed to be, before heading into the bar and ordering a hard cider. She normally wasn't much of a drinker, but something to take the edge off might not be such a bad idea. She jumped as she felt a hand run over her bare back, when, for the second time that night, she was caught unaware of her surroundings.

She turned around in her seat and found herself staring into the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. There was a hint of sadness in them, and something else she couldn't place if she had wanted to at that moment. But she felt an overwhelming need to comfort this man, to help ease some of the pain he seemed to carry with him. "Good evening, Mr. James, I thought that perhaps I had been stood up," she heard herself say, in a voice that was almost too husky to have belonged to her.

"Now why would I do that?" Unable to stop touching that tender skin, Roarke slid onto a barstool beside her. "Wouldn't you be more comfortable at a booth?" He gestured to the round booths situated in recessed corners, dimly lit and intimate.

As soon as the bartender returned, he held up his room key, knowing that the man would recognize the private, key-only floor. "I'll have whatever the lady is having."

Roarke knew that both of them probably looked a bit out of place in the midst of such elegance, but he wasn't about to conform to his surroundings. His money was just as legitimate as white-collar businessmen, even more so, in many ways. The luxury of many years of recording had allowed him to build up quite a portfolio. Even if he never worked another day in his life, he could live very well off the royalties he'd amassed and the publishing catalogue he'd built up. He belonged here just as much as anyone

else did, and the woman was his guest.

As the woman stood, he leaned close, brushing her earlobe with his lip as he said, "I'll have your name. What is it?"

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"No change." Neville winced, sure that the words would some day not sting so deeply. His parents had been unresponsive for so many years now. Did he really think they'd open their eyes, smile and everything would be normal again? No, that bitch Bellatrix and her psychotic husband had ruined his life. But he'd killed them both in the final battle, not that it had brought his parents back. They were gone. Forever was when you talked to empty shells, the occupants long gone.

Today, he'd only spent twenty minutes or so with them. He couldn't take it. Some days he and Tonks would spend a weekend afternoon playing cards, chatting and taking tea in his parents' room. But today there was something so dark and bleak about the whole thing, he wasn't emotionally up for it.

Neville turned to his fiancée and grasped her hand. "I think we should go now. They look tired..."

They did, but he was the only one actually suffering. What was wrong with saying that he couldn't handle it today? Tonks had taught him more than anyone that he wasn't weak and that his signs of emotion didn't make him less of a man. Neville supposed old habits died hard. Even though he was far removed from the shy and clumsy boy he'd been at Hogwarts, the rejections he'd suffered as a child still grated a bit.

He squared his shoulders, then pulled up the blanket, tucking his mother in securely. "Tonks and I have to go for now. Get some sleep, Mum and Dad. We love you." With one last emotion-filled look, Neville turned away, wondering as he had many times before if this would be the last time he saw his parents.

As soon as they were outside the nicely appointed room, he sagged against the wall. "It is so hard to see them like this. I keep thinking it will be easier, but..."

"I don't honestly believe it will ever get easier." Nymphadora Tonks hated how these trips continued to hurt Neville, but she hadn't been able to come up with any way to make this better. She had made some quiet inquiries about new magical treatments, but nothing seemed to be suited to Frank and Alice's situation. But she would keep looking in hopes of giving Neville his family back.

"They wouldn't want you to be miserable, Nev. They knew what they were doing when they protected you, and they wouldn't want you feeling like this every time you visited them." Her mother and father adored her fiancé, but she knew that it wasn't the same as having your own parents.

"But I'll always be here with you, Nev, we'll get through this together. You're not alone. You have me and my family and your friends, who will support you in any way we can." The man in front of her was nothing like the boy that she had first met, but the insecurities were still the same. "You are an amazing man, Neville Longbottom, and I'm sure that your parents are proud of you."

Neville smiled briefly and reached for her hand. "My parents most likely don't even know who I am, Nymph. They've been lost for too long." He shook his head. "Let's get out of here. Since your aunt isn't here anymore, we can either go right home or somewhere for a pint and a bite to eat. Or we can see if Harry and Luna want to relax. We could get a curry on the way home and invite them in. Harry has been rather distant lately, hasn't he?"

Neville didn't work at the ministry like Harry and Tonks did, but they shared a past, a history, and they were the best of friends. He'd briefly dated Luna and knew that Harry and Tonks had shared a flirtation when he first joined the Aurors and became her partner. It was all ancient history and had never impacted their friendship. He and Harry had lost so much at the hands of the Dark Lord, and that, as well as their shared birthday and the famous prophecy, would bind them always.

"There is no way of telling what your parents know or don't know. So let me have my pleasant thoughts." She took Nev's hand and let him lead her away from St. Mungo's. "I think curry with the landlord would be the perfect way to end the evening, and I have to admit that I've been craving it for a while now." Carryout would be good even if their friends didn't join them, and she wasn't in much of a mood to go home and cook. It wasn't ever her favorite thing to do, especially after an emotional day like today.

"I've been after Harry to get a checkup. He's been run down of late and has been getting killer headaches. It hasn't started to affect his job yet, but something isn't right with him. I haven't said anything to Luna yet, but if things don't change soon, I'm going to have to. I won't let him do something stupid because he's too pigheaded to see a doctor. Plus his disregard for his own health and well-being puts all of us at risk. And I love him like a brother, but that doesn't mean I want a half awake Harry Potter watching my back. He's no good to any of us the way he is."

Neville frowned. "Nymph, I have to tell you something." He pushed his hair back and showed her a fine pinkish line. "Doesn't it mirror Harry's scar? Last night I must have stumbled when going to the kitchen for a drink of water. I cut myself by accident, in this precise shape. And then it healed over right away." A sense of urgency ran through him and he started walking quickly.

"Something feels very wrong, honey. You go right home. I'll call in a curry and meet you there. Check on Harry and Luna, and please be careful. I have a bad feeling about all of this. Something is making me panic this badly and it isn't organic in nature." He pulled her close and hugged her fiercely. "Tell me I'm imagining things, please."

"Nev, it's probably exactly what you said, an accident, nothing more." But she didn't believe that any more than he did. Harry and Neville were connected because of that damn prophecy, and now Nev had a scar similar to Harry's. "If something is wrong, I'm not leaving you, Neville. I appreciate you wanting to take care of me, but I'm trained to protect the population, and I'm not letting you take off on your own. We either do this together or we both go home and call for delivery. Now isn't the time to be a hero, Nev. If I lost you, I don't know what I'd do."

"Fine." Neville knew she was right, but it still needed at him. He hated the idea that she and Harry were much more able to protect any of them if an emergency happened. For too long he'd been at a disadvantage, due to the clumsiness and memory charms his grandmother and Uncle Algie had placed on him. His time at Hogwarts had been fraught with misery because of it, but he understood that they had been trying to protect him. All his life, everyone had tried to protect him, and sometimes it just got to be too much.

"We'll go for a curry and then stop at Harry and Luna's place for some tea. We can talk to them then. Will that suit you?"

"Neville, don't be mad at me." Tonks had heard the tension in his voice, and knew she had stepped on some very male toes. "I know you can take care of yourself, but that doesn't mean that safety in numbers doesn't still apply to you." She mussed his hair in a loving gesture. "And the fact that I worry about you has less to do with your ability and more to do with my not wanting to face life without you. We're going to be married, and I'd like there to be a groom for me to marry. You were one of Voldemort's targets, like it or not. Any of his minions that we haven't given the Kiss to could be out there trying to do some sort of blood magic, and if they are, I want to be around in case you need help."

"I know," Neville allowed before returning her hug. "You know I don't like the fact that everyone still seems stronger than I am in defending myself. Never mind, it isn't your problem. It is just something I have to deal with." For far too long, he had secretly wondered if Tonks might leave him for someone more masculine, more capable, more like the Aurors she worked beside. He tried not to be too worried about it, but it did weigh on his mind in times like this.

"Neville Longbottom, your problems are my problems. I put my life in your hands whenever we go out, I know that if we're attacked, you are more than capable of protecting the both of us." She trusted Neville as much as she trusted Harry, more at times. He may not always be as skilled as Harry was, but when he was fighting for someone he loved or a cause he believed in, there was no stopping him. "That doesn't mean you're infallible. None of us are, which is why, until we know what is going on, we need to make sure no one is alone. There's too much at risk, and I might need your assistance as much as you'll need mine."

Neville nodded, still a bit concerned about his lack of skill when compared with the others, but unwilling to mention it. "Okay then, a quick curry, then a visit with Harry and Luna. We'll stick together, Tonks. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you." He truly hadn't intended to worry her and now he felt a little ashamed of it. "I really am sorry. You know I'm never thinking clearly after I see my parents. This place does something to me."

"I know, Nev, and it's okay. I probably shouldn't have been so tactless about it." She always seemed to say the wrong thing or, at least, she said things the wrong way.

"Maybe we can do something about your parents, move them to a private facility closer to our home. I know that it won't cure everything, but maybe with the bad associations you have of St. Mungo's gone, visiting will be easier. We could find someplace that's more of a home setting, less of a hopeless hospital. It's at least something to think about for the future. I hate seeing you like this when we visit."

Neville nodded. That didn't sound like a bad idea at all. "Okay, serious discussion over. Curry awaits!"

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Remus gasped when she spoke, brushing a hand over her face and tucking her hair behind an ear. Had it been his imagination? Then a painful sensation took hold of him and he grabbed his leg. The old wolf bite injury was throbbing all of a sudden and there was red seeping out from between his fingers. He was bleeding from a wound he had received as a child. How could this be? What had happened? He sank down to the ground, looking up at Lily, torn between this frightening new development and the small miracle that had just happened.

"Are you really all right, Lily? You've been so quiet for so long." A year actually, which was why he had kept this secret. He had always hoped that she would come back, but until that time, there was no way he could give Harry the one thing he wanted the most, but in an untouchable way. That would break Harry's heart twice over. "Please... keep talking."

"What's wrong, Remus?" Her speech was slow, but her voice was getting stronger with use. "I think I'm fine. I still don't feel real great. It's like a fog is lifting away and I can see everything again." Lily looked worriedly at her friend, she wasn't sure she was strong enough to help him if he was sick or hurt in some way. She could see the blood on his hands, but nothing had happened to cause the bleeding that she had seen.

"Please be okay. Who will help me if you get sick or go away?"

"I don't know. This is where I was bitten all those years ago. There is no reason why it should start bleeding now. I can't understand it." He winced and tried not to moan. It seemed that the blood flow was slowing. "See? It's getting better, Lil. And please don't worry. I'll be fine, and Merlin forbid, if anything were to happen, you'd be cared for."

Remus had contingency plans upon contingency plans set up. She'd always be cared for. It was the least he could do for the woman he'd loved since childhood.

"You worry about me. I think that returning the favor is the least I can do." Lily tried to stand, wanting to check her friend's wound. She had been cleaning cuts and scratches for Remus and all the boys since she was in her early teens, and it was second nature. "I've always worried about you, Remy, don't ask me to stop now. Especially now." She wobbled to her feet and took a step, but could feel herself falling back down into the chair behind her.

"We need to start working on getting my strength back. Right now, you can take care of me and I will take care of you. But you're going to have to bring me a first aid kit. It seems I'm not fit enough to move very far yet." But she was already starting to plot an exercise plan that would get her back into shape. If she was going to take her life back, she was going to do it completely. She had a son to reclaim and a werewolf to care for. It was apparent from his appearance that he hadn't had someone to mother him in far too long.

Remus arched an eyebrow, but went to do her bidding. He was worried that she might overdo, but the rest of this was quite nice. Having her talk, seeing the awareness in those emerald eyes. He'd missed her... as a friend. Cleaning her, washing her intimately, had brought him closer than he'd ever imagined he could be with Lily Potter. Unfortunately, time hadn't dampened the strength of his desire for her. Once upon a time, she had seemed to fancy him, but his intellect could never compare to James' dashing good looks and self-confidence.

Remus walked back to Lily, lifting his now-ruined trousers. "I don't know what this means, but I don't like it at all."

"We'll get you fixed up, Remy. I can't have my favorite hurting like this. And we can figure out what happened. It could be a fluke thing, it could be nothing." Lily realized that the words probably sounded as hollow to Remus as they did to her. And not knowing much of anything that had happened in the last twenty-five years didn't help her case. "I won't let anything happen to you I just got you and my life back. I'm not going to give up either of you if I can help it."

"Your favorite? Your favorite what? Marauder? By process of elimination, I'm the only Marauder left." At the pain in her eyes, he winced and pulled her close. "I'm sorry. That wasn't right of me. They may have been my friends, but James was your soul mate. That just can't compare." He knew it. This was something he lived with every day. He'd never be as charismatic as Sirius, never be as all around brilliant as James... and he could never be as ruthless as Peter had been. They had all stood out for some reason. But not him. Never him. He was the sidekick, the second best.

"My favorite Remus." She didn't know where the hurt in his voice had come from. When they were younger, they had always been friends; even without James in the picture, they would have been friends. "You're my favorite friend and, except for possibly my son, who I have yet to get to know, my favorite man."

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Hermione shivered when his lips brushed over her ear lobe. She couldn't help it, the reaction was something she couldn't stop. Her whole body was wound tight, and she could physically feel the attraction between them. It was a tingle that was running up and down her whole body, which seemed nearly impossible. Of course, she had once thought that magic was nothing but a fairy tale, but that theory had been proven wrong with her Hogwarts letter. "I was hoping that you wouldn't, stand me up that is." She shamelessly curled into his embrace, allowing him to lead her to a private booth at the back of the bar. She slid in and patted the area next to her, indicating that he should come in as close as possible. A chill immediately set in when he wasn't touching her, and it wasn't a feeling she wanted to prolong.

She waited for him to sit down, wondering who this forward woman was and where Hermione Granger had gone for the evening. Never in her life had she acted like this with another human being. She might boss Harry and Ron around, but she had never felt the need to use her sexuality the way she was tonight. She was pulling out all the stops to entice her companion. When she felt his thigh move against her, she moved toward him just a smidge, stopping herself short of sitting on the man's lap. "My name is Hermione, although most people call me 'Mione." She offered up the shorter name out of habit, since most of her friends called her that, but she preferred her whole name when someone bothered to ask. "What about you. Is Roarke James your true name, or is it a stage name you made up so you could keep an air of mystery about you?"