

Adventures In Babysitting

by NixtAll

Harry and Hermione babysit Teddy while Andromeda is away. How much trouble can one little toddler get into anyway?

Who's Watching Teddy?

Chapter 1 of 9

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"Harry, where's Teddy?"

"I thought you had him."

The two best friends stared at each other. The silence was broken by the sound of shattering glass.

"SHIT!"

In a flurry of arms and legs, Harry and Hermione raced up the stairs, elbowing and shoving each other to gain the lead like a pair of children instead of the twenty-year-olds they were.

"Teddy! Where are you?" They poked their heads into Hermione's room. "He's not answering, Hermione. What are we going to do?"

"He's not even two. What's he going to say, pardon me, I'm right over here?"

"Gah!" The sound came from the drawing room, followed by a loud crash. Again, the two struggled to get to the door first, the panic taking twice the amount of time needed.

Hermione managed to be the victor after a well aimed elbow to her friend's side. Teddy sat on the floor, looking as innocent as ever...which always amazed Hermione since his father was a Marauder and his mother was, well, Tonks. He broke into a fit of giggles when he saw her. She was so relieved to see him alive and whole with no obvious injuries. She swept into the room and hoisted him up in her arms; his hair turned a dark shade of orange in his mirth.

"You scared us half to death, Teddy; what..."

"Hermione."

"What, Harry?" She snuggled the young boy in her arms and didn't even wince when he tugged on her hair.

"Hermione, look." Harry was still frozen in the doorway, staring at something behind her. She scowled at him and turned to follow his gaze. She almost dropped Teddy in shock. Sitting on the floor, looking dazed and slightly put out, was a thin, black-haired wizard with familiar, gray eyes.

Regulus.

Hermione set Teddy down, unsure if she was going to faint or not.

"How did he get that?" Some of the daze wore off, and Regulus was now panic-stricken, pointing at Teddy. Hermione quickly swiped the locket that was headed for Teddy's mouth, the locket Harry and Dumbledore retrieved from the cave. No wonder Regulus was in such a state.

"It's okay; the Horcruxes are gone. He's dead. It's over." She patted his shoulder, but he jerked away. He stood up too fast and nearly fell over.

"What are you doing in my house?"

A little irked at the newly undead Black, Hermione looked to her friend. "You might want to field this one, Harry."

-o-O-o-

Regulus sat on the couch in the drawing room, *his drawing room*, while these two strangers and the oddest looking child he'd ever seen stared at him like he just rose from the dead. They looked to be his age, a little young to have a toddler, but these things did happen. The boy looked like that git his brother used to pal around with. The girl was a fine piece. She could do with a hair taming charm, but if that kid pulled on her shirt anymore, he wasn't going to be looking at her face.

"What's the last thing you remember?" Her voice startled him and made him realize he was staring at her chest. He looked up to see her knowing smirk. He really wanted to wipe that smirk off her face. The old fashioned way.

Hermione looked over his tattered robes; one sleeve was completely shredded, and his black boots were scuffed as well. He'd definitely been through the ringer, but was it possible...

"I was in a cave; I don't know the details. I drank something, and everything's a blur after that." She looked over at Harry, who nodded at her.

"What year is it?" She noticed the confusion cross his haughty features as his dark eyebrows knitted.

"1979." Again, she and Harry exchanged glances. "I've a feeling that's not right, is it?"

"I'm afraid not; it's 1999."

"1999!" His eyes bulged. How could he miss out on twenty years? What had happened in that cave? He had told Kreacher to switch the lockets and get himself out, but... "The locket!" His tone was suddenly urgent.

"It's been destroyed; all of them have." Her voice was calm and even. "Including Voldemort." He twitched at the name.

"All of them?"

"He made several Horcruxes. We tracked them all down and killed him a year and a half ago."

"So he's really gone?"

"Really." He closed his eyes. Never had he felt such relief. A quick glance at his arm through the mangled sleeve showed the mark, still there, but faint. The nightmare was really over.

He glanced up again at the young woman in front of him. She was smiling at him with an expression akin to pride. Something stirred in him when she looked at him like that. Something he could get used to.

"What's your son's name?" She looked startled, then shy. It was adorable.

"He's not mine."

"He's my godson," the boy piped up. Regulus had forgotten he was there. "His parents died in the battle for Hogwarts." The child in question had apparently bored himself to sleep in her arms. "His name's Teddy Lupin, she's Hermione Granger, and I'm Harry Potter." Potter, Lupin, those were two names he knew. Granger was a new one, probably Muggle, pity.

"What of my brother?" The two didn't answer for a moment.

"He died four years ago; Bellatrix killed him." Hermione couldn't place the look on his face. She added, "Bellatrix died a year ago, just before her master. Narcissa and Andromeda are fine. In fact, this is her grandson." He looked at the sleeping boy with renewed interest. Hermione rose and resettled herself on the couch next to him, offering him the drowsy child.

This wasn't quite what he was expecting. He had heard Andromeda had a Metamorphmagus daughter with that Muggle-born she ran off with, but never saw her. The little boy stirred and looked up at him. He really didn't look like a Black, but there was something charming about him. And something smelly...

"Oh, sorry, Teddy's just learning."

"I'll take care of it, Hermione." Harry scooped up the ripe toddler and marched out of the room with him at arm's length. It was then Hermione comprehended how close she was sitting to Regulus. Their knees were almost touching, and he was watching her with an unfamiliar expression. A swarm of butterflies invaded her stomach. Did he have to be so bloody handsome? She did catch him trying to peek down her shirt earlier, not that it meant anything other than he was a pervy teenage boy. He really did not seem like a boy to her. Perhaps his years of service to Voldemort had robbed him of his youth, just as Azkaban had taken his brother's. Neither spoke, each silently examining the other until Harry's return startled the two.

"Have either of you figured out how this happened?"

Both realized they had not been speaking at all. Hermione felt her cheeks heat up.

"No, we didn't." There was an uncomfortable pause. Hermione focused her attention on a particularly violent rip in his robes to avoid getting flustered by looking him in the eye. "Maybe you can find some new robes in your room. Nothing's been changed in there." He nodded, gray eyes still watching her.

-o-O-o-

Hermione followed Regulus into his old room, her wand out and casting cleaning spells as fast as possible. He didn't notice. It was only days ago for him that he was in this room, and nothing was moved, just aged. His gaze fell on the crest he had painted above the headboard. That was once a source of pride for him. Then things happened... The cause he followed was never the cause he believed in. He did not know what he believed in anymore. Being a Black had always been so important to him, and now that he was the last one, that significance had wilted. He had pledged himself to a Lord who was only a madman. And he was only a young, stupid boy. The important thing was, he was alive. Maybe some of that stupid could be remedied. He barely noticed when Hermione left the room, following the boy.

After a few minutes of being lost in thought, he dug a dusty, but intact, set of robes from the dresser. Midway through changing into them, there was a light rap on the door.

"Come in."

Hermione squeaked in surprise when she stepped through the doorway to be greeted by a bare-chested Regulus. He grinned at her embarrassment while pulling a black tunic over his head. This girl was going to be fun. He stalked up to her, carefully plotting his next move with her when a loud crack made them both jump. Teddy's shrill

squeal followed immediately.

Hermione was out the door and across the hall in a flash, Regulus close on her heels. They burst into Sirius' room to find Teddy hopping up and down clutching an old shirt in a fit of giggles. The girl in front of him reached out for support, and he managed to catch her before she hit the ground. He only had a moment to appreciate the soft body in his arms before a man caught his attention.

It was his brother. And he was... old.

Puppy!

Chapter 2 of 9

Strange things are afoot at Number 12, Grimmauld Place.

Harry was cleaning up the broken glass in the drawing room. Andromeda was going to kill him if she found out Teddy had broken into a cabinet filled with dark artifacts. Luckily, he had only pulled out the harmless locket, not something more dangerous like the Resurrection Stone. The Stone had been found in the Forbidden Forest by a second year serving detention. Thankfully, the boy hadn't known what he'd found, but Neville, who had been supervising the herb scavenging they were doing, had recognized it for what it was and returned it to Harry for safe-keeping. Harry's eyes traveled the cabinet shelf. The Stone wasn't there. He frantically searched the cabinet and the area around it. No sign of it. This was not good.

He had to tell Hermione.

Taking the steps three and four at a time, Harry bounded up to the top floor landing. Sounds of a ruckus guided him to Sirius' bedroom where he saw the last thing he ever expected to see there: Sirius. He was holding a giggling Teddy and talking full speed with Regulus who was holding up an unconscious Hermione.

"Sirius?"

"Harry!" Tears sparkled at the corners of his eyes as he stepped forward to embrace his godson, taking care not to squash Teddy in the process. Harry was beside himself. Sirius was back. There was no way to explain it.

"How... how is this happening?"

"I don't know. I remember being at the Ministry. I remember the veil, but that's it. Regulus said the same thing."

Regulus wasn't paying attention since his charge was beginning to stir. He propped her up so she could gain her bearings. Hermione blinked a few times, and looked into Sirius' smiling face. She scowled a bit.

"Is it really you?"

He grinned even wider, set down Teddy, and transformed into Padfoot.

"Puppy!" Teddy waved a small arm at Sirius, now back in human form.

"Hermione," Harry's voice was low, "the Stone is missing."

"The Stone? Oh..." Her eyes darted from Regulus to Sirius. "You don't think..."

"Puppy!"

All eyes were on Teddy. Hermione picked him up and placed a hand on his forehead. "What did you do?" He only smiled and grabbed her shirt. Regulus was starting to like the boy.

"Do you think he might have swallowed it?"

"He may have. He was about to swallow Regulus' locket." Hermione stiffened. "The locket!" Both Black brothers watched the conversation, neither had a clue about what stone they were discussing. She started anxiously pacing the room, muttering to herself. "The locket that belonged to Regulus... Sirius' room... The locket... Oof!" She tripped over the discarded shirt. She nudged it with her foot. "He was holding the shirt. Sirius, is this yours?"

"Yes."

"So, Teddy was holding your shirt, and you magically return from the dead."

"I guess so." He shrugged.

"Regulus," and she turned to the younger man, "you were returned when Teddy was playing with your locket."

He raised a brow, not wanting to interrupt her thought process. Sirius was not so patient.

"Are you saying this boy can bring people back to life?"

"I... I don't know. There is something fishy about it. I think we should take him to St. Mungo's."

Harry was silent all the while, his eyes unfocused. He snapped to attention suddenly and ran from the room, mumbling, "I'll be right back."

The three adults stood in awkward silence. "So Regulus tells me this is our cousin." Hermione smiled and passed the boy to him.

"Yes. His name is Teddy Lupin." Sirius froze, then looked at the boy with renewed awe.

"Remus Lupin, you old dog." He grinned at Teddy who latched on to a lock of hair. "Where is Moony?" Hermione's face fell, and Sirius realized the answer to his own question. He squeezed his eyes shut. "No, no, no."

Regulus then did something that surprised Hermione. He walked over to his brother and put a comforting hand on his back. Seeing such a simple gesture between the estranged brothers brought a tear to her eye. Maybe death had knocked a little sense into both of them.

Harry burst into the room clutching his Invisibility Cloak.

"You are not going to try what I think you are."

"I just have to see, Hermione. I need to know." He laid the cloak out on the bed and reached for Teddy. Sirius narrowed his eyes and did not give up the kid.

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. I just want to see if he can do it again." Sirius hesitated a moment before setting Teddy on the bed. All eyes fell on the toddler. Hermione wanted to get him to St. Mungo's as soon as possible. She felt what Harry was doing was wrong, and unnatural, but at the same time she was too fascinated to look away.

Teddy noticed all the adults staring at him. It was making him nervous. His lower lip started to wobble. Hermione reached out for him, but Harry stopped her.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!!" Hermione pushed Harry aside and picked up Teddy who was now wailing at full volume. She bounced him up and down, whispering soothing words in his ear. After a few more deafening roars, he settled down into snuffles and hiccups.

"I'm sorry, Hermione, you're right." He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his godson's face. "I'll take him to St. Mungo's; they won't ask me as many questions. You stay here, and keep an eye on these two." Regulus rolled his eyes. He didn't need a babysitter; on the other hand, a little time alone with this girl may not be such a bad idea.

Kreacher

Chapter 3 of 9

Regulus is reunited with an old friend and Hermione explains the Deathly Hallows.

Hermione snuggled down in her comfy chair by the fire and smiled with contentment. She didn't speak, only watched the Black boys as they spoke as true brothers for the first time in, perhaps, ever. Their stories were laced with tragedy, but there was an inescapable feeling of hope now that they were alive and had, at the very least, each other.

She studied their faces; the similarities were remarkable, despite the exaggerated age difference. Sirius would never be known as mature, no matter how old he grew. His eyes held a spark of warmth Regulus could not match. What Regulus had was an air of sophistication. His subtle gestures, expressions and inflections of voice indicated his aristocratic background more than his physical features could. Hermione found herself entranced.

She rested her chin in her hand, happily going unnoticed by the two men. That is what she thought anyway. Sirius was aware of his brother's sly glances to the corner. Not that he could blame him. She was not the 16 year old girl he knew before. He would defer to Regulus this time in honor of their newfound friendship, making a mental note to remind him that he would beat the ever-loving crap out of him, if he didn't treat her like royalty.

On this thought, Sirius politely excused himself on the pretense of using the bathroom.

Hermione and Regulus were left in an awkward silence before she leapt to her feet and grabbed him by the hand.

"I'm sorry I didn't think of it before; I have something to show you!" He didn't have time to put up a fight before she dragged him out the door and down the stairs to the kitchen.

The room was dark, so she did not see him frown when she dropped his hand. She proceeded over to Kreacher's old cupboard and knelt down. His heart skipped a beat. Kreacher was still alive after all this time?

"Wake up, you have a visitor," she whispered. Regulus was shaking.

"What does the Mudblood want? Waking poor old Kreacher when he is sleeping?"

Mudblood?

"Kreacher, please. You need to get up." The elderly elf emerged from the cupboard, despite not being required to follow Hermione's orders.

"Kreacher needs his rest and you are waking poor—"

"Kreacher!" The elf was stunned.

"M-master Regulus?" He stepped back and glared angrily at Hermione. "The Mudblood is playing tricks on poor Kreacher."

"It's no trick, Kreacher; it's me, Regulus." He knelt on the floor as well. Kreacher still eyed him warily. "Your mother's name was Kreely. You got that scar on your arm when you tried to stop Sirius and me from fighting when we were kids and Sirius accidentally hit you with a lamp. You—"

Kreacher flung himself forward with renewed strength. Spindly arms wrapped around his master's middle as he sobbed unabashedly into his robes. Regulus hugged him back with equal force.

Hermione burst into tears just watching the reunion.

That was how Sirius found them when he decided to grab a bite to eat: sitting in the dark, crying like little children.

"Oh for fuck's sake!"

With a snap of Kreacher's fingers, the room was lit. Hermione busily wiped her face with her sleeve. Regulus smiled at the house-elf in front of him.

"Thank you. For all you've done for me."

Regulus and Hermione got to their feet, both looking at Sirius rather sheepishly. He only shook his head and laughed as he turned to rifle through the cabinets for food.

Kreacher quickly shoed Sirius out of the kitchen. He gave no indication of his recently failing health while he bustled around, bent on preparing his long lost master's favorite meal.

-o-O-o-

Regulus kept his eyes down, idly tracing a scratch in the table with his fingers. He was not listening to Hermione and Sirius chatter on about some hippogriff.

So she was a Mudblood after all. He would not have guessed it apart from her name. He was confused as to why this disappointed him. After all, he didn't really know her. Sirius seemed to think she walked on water, but she was of the fairer sex, which was probably enough reason for him.

She was not vacuous and simple like the Muggle-borns at school. They were overly fascinated with their own magical ability. This girl used magic with ease and experience, like it was the most natural thing in the world for her.

And she was... nice. Definitely not like the girls he knew at school. Or the rare ones he met in his chosen profession. He attracted one sort of girl. The kind that wanted the Black name on her children.

He glanced up from his musings to see his brother eyeing him. It was surreal to see him as an older man. He had not spoken to him since Sirius left Hogwarts, and even then, it had been strained.

Hermione broke the tension by sighing and rubbing her face with her hands. Sirius patted her back affectionately.

"I'm sure he'll be fine, Hermione."

"I'm just so afraid he'll rupture his stomach or something."

"These things happen; kids are tough. You know, when Harry was little he got into my cloak while James and I were playing Exploding Snap. The little brat swallowed seven Galleons before we caught him."

"That's terrible!"

"It was. I had a date that night. I needed the money."

Hermione stared at him open-mouthed.

"What?"

Regulus snorted.

"Oh, Harry was fine. James and Lily took him to St. Mungo's and got them taken out. I kept one as a souvenir. Meant to give it to him when he was older, but..."

No one spoke again until Kreacher tottered in with a large serving tray. He received a thank you from both Regulus and Hermione. He was so thrilled to have his rightful master back, he forgot to cringe when Hermione spoke to him.

"So, what is this stone he may have swallowed?"

Hermione watched Regulus cut his filet into tiny pieces before answering.

"Are you familiar with the Tale of the Three Brothers?"

"Isn't that a children's story?" Regulus looked up from his plate.

"Yes. As it turns out, the story is more than a fairy tale. Harry, Ron and I discovered it is a true tale of the Peverell brothers."

"Peverell?" Sirius leaned forward in his seat with interest. "That's an old wizarding family name. James—"

"Is a direct descendant of Ignotus Peverell, the youngest of the three brothers. His invisibility cloak is one of the Deathly Hallows. A gift from Death himself."

Both men stared at her in disbelief. Sirius knew James had Peverell blood, but never connected that name with the old story. What shocked him more was that the ever skeptical Hermione believed it.

Regulus immediately saw the connection between the tale and his current predicament.

"So the stone you and Harry were talking about, the one the boy may have swallowed, is the Resurrection Stone?"

Hermione nodded, meeting his hard glare. She could tell he was trying to determine if she spoke the truth.

"Why didn't you or Harry use it before, if it really has the power to bring back the dead?" Sirius asked her now, also looking at her intently.

"That's just it. The Stone doesn't bring people fully back. It doesn't work like the second brother expected. It only brings back a shadow of the person, insubstantial, like a ghost. Harry used it in the forest, when he went to face Voldemort. Sirius, you appeared to him." He looked dumbfounded.

"I have no memory of that." Hermione only nodded and continued.

"James, Lily and Remus as well. They spoke to Harry, but disappeared the moment he dropped the Stone. That is why it doesn't make any sense that it worked now. If it is even the reason behind your, uh, presence."

"I suppose we may never know." Regulus stirred his mashed potatoes thoughtfully. "Whatever the reason, I'm glad it happened. I've made a right mess of things in my life," and his eyes flicked to his left arm, "maybe this is my chance to make up for that."

"Hear, hear." Sirius raised his water glass, then scowled. "I think this calls for something a little stronger."

The Black Brothers

Chapter 4 of 9

Hermione and Harry give the boys a short history lesson, and Regulus once again forgets Harry is in the room.

"It's still here!" Sirius cried out triumphantly.

"We didn't remove anything." Hermione coughed at a cloud of dust Sirius stirred up. "We haven't been up here at all." She coughed again. "Obviously." She soon had her wand out and started blasting away the dust.

Sirius held up a wine bottle victoriously. "I knew this stash would come in handy one day." He picked up a few more bottles and tucked them under his arm. "Come on, let's go."

"Regulus?" Hermione inquired to the man in a dark corner of the attic. He was sifting through boxes, like he was on a mission.

"Lumos." She held her wand out for him to see what he was looking for.

"Thank you."

In the wandlight, she noticed a half-open box at her feet that appeared to be filled with large leather bound books. Using her free hand, she opened the one on top to discover it was no mere book. Moving pictures of witches and wizards in fancy dress robes turned up their noses at her.

"Wow."

"What? Come on, there is a warm fire and fine elf-made wine to be drunk." And he gestured to the door as best as possible with an armload of wine bottles. "Downstairs."

"Sirius, it's old photo albums of your family." He was lucky she was too busy flipping through the pages and did not see him roll his eyes.

"Just grab them and let's go. Regulus! What are you doing?"

"Just a minute... Ha!"

Hermione watched him pull a thin wooden box out of an old trunk. He was grinning from ear to ear, which looked almost manic in the sharp light of her wand. He emptied the box and tossed it aside, revealing a wand of some dark wood, presumably walnut. Still smiling, he pointed it at Hermione.

With a swish and a flick, the photo albums rose in front of her. She let out a breath she did not know she had been holding. What about him made her so nervous?

Sirius was absolutely dumbfounded.

"Father's wand."

"Is Mother's in there too?"

"Yes, but do you really think it would work for you?"

"Fair point."

-o-O-o-

Harry Flooed into the house, exhausted and exasperated after several hours at St. Mungo's. Teddy was so asleep the Floo did not wake him. It was not difficult to find where the occupants of Grimmauld Place were. Muffled voices and shrieks of laughter led him straight to the drawing room.

Hermione was sandwiched between the Black brothers on the sofa. All three were leaning over a book on the coffee table, pointing at the pages and laughing hysterically. A couple of empty wine bottles lay discarded on the floor around them, and Sirius was drinking directly from a third.

"So Uncle Cygnus realizes his hidden stash of firewhiskey is gone and grounds Bellatrix for a week!" More laughter erupted from the trio. Sirius managed to stop laughing long enough to continue, "She never found out it was us!"

"What is going on here?"

"Harry!" Hermione stood up so quickly she almost fell over. "How is Teddy? Is he okay?" Her eyes were shining and her cheeks pink from the combination of laughter and drink, but she was quite sober. And alert enough to recognize the irritated expression on Harry's face.

"Well." He shifted the sleeping boy higher in his grip. "It is the Stone. The bad news is, it's already left his stomach, so taking it out was too dangerous."

"You mean..."

"We have to wait it out. The Healer thinks because he is a Metamorphmagus he should be able to pass it with no problems." Sirius made a face. "Because it's rather large, she estimated it would take approximately eight hours."

"Did the Healer think there would be any problems on account of the, er, special properties of the Stone?"

"I couldn't tell her what it was exactly; she did test it for Dark magic, and it came up negative. Luckily, it appears as if Dumbledore cleaned it very thoroughly after destroying the Horcrux part of it, so there was no residual Basilisk venom. I had her check. I thought she was going to send me to the psychiatric ward."

"Horcrux?"

"Basilisk venom?"

Harry sighed. "Did you tell them everything?"

"I guess I left out some parts." She frowned, feeling guilty for having fun while she should have been worrying about Teddy. "Maybe you should explain it."

-o-O-o-

Hermione was just starting to come to terms with her attraction to the mysterious Regulus Black. It was highly illogical to feel this way, but hormones and logic never went hand in hand very well. She had other things to worry about more...mainly Teddy...than the number of times their fingers brushed while flipping through the album (six) or the way he had blushed when they had found the photo of him and Sirius playing in the garden, absolutely starkers.

Still, she managed to keep her composure. Her face was flushed, a reaction she could blame on the alcohol, even though she only had two glasses. He was quite handsome, a little thin, a little pale, but strong, with finely cut features. Certainly alluring, but the way he was sitting now, listening to Harry's story with his cousin sleeping peacefully in his lap, had her twisting in her seat. He held the boy close to him, absentmindedly stroking his arm.

"Voldemort came into possession of the Stone in his sixth year. He tracked down his family, murdered his Muggle father and grandparents and modified his uncle Morfin's memory, so that he would confess to the crime."

Muggle father?

Hermione saw Regulus' face twitch. *He didn't know.*

It was Sirius who spoke. "Voldemort's father was a Muggle?" His distinct laugh filled the room. "That is priceless." He took a final swig from his wine bottle and tossed it on the floor. Hermione glared at him. He did not see or care how uncomfortable this was making his brother.

"He took the ring the Stone was set in from his uncle, thinking it only a family heirloom bearing the Peverell coat of arms. He turned it into a Horcrux either then or later on; eventually he buried it on the site of the Gaunts' home."

"He was a Gaunt too? That explains his claims to be Slytherin's heir."

Sirius scowled at his brother. "Where do you learn all this tripe?" Regulus rolled his eyes. He'd made a lot of progress with Sirius in the last few hours, but his brother still managed to get under his skin.

"They're called books, Sirius."

Hermione could not hold back her snort of laughter. The amount of times she said the same thing to Harry and Ron...

"Do you all want to hear the story or not?" Harry asked, exasperated.

-o-O-o-

So old Snively was a decent sort after all. Sirius was not surprised over Snape's lifelong obsession with Lily; they were rather close for a few years, something he had teased her about often.

Dumbledore's death horrified him. Would he have been capable of murdering an old friend, Pettigrew aside, if it was their last request? It was just too much to process. He had to go somewhere to think. Without a word, he strode out of the room.

Regulus was shocked as well. He was not close to Severus, but knew he was trusted by the Dark Lord, more so perhaps than his cousin Bellatrix. Not that she would ever have conceded that. He spent the rest of his life defying the Dark Lord for the mere memory of a witch. *A Muggle-born witch.* Regulus felt ashamed. He had taken the easy way out, sacrificing himself before his comrades caught him. Could he have had the courage to risk unimaginable torture to see the fight through to the end?

His mind wandered to another Muggle-born witch, one that was sitting two feet away from him. He was not thinking about her heritage either; he had enough of that discussion for one day. He was wondering what those rosy lips would feel like when he kissed her. It was only a kiss after all, not a proposal. Distracted by his brother's dramatic exit, he did not see her rise and stand before him until she was leaning over, her arms brushing against his, as she reached around Teddy.

It was now or never.

He did not relinquish his grip, only pulling the little boy closer, trapping her arms against him. The odd angle of her standing and him sitting brought their faces close together. She did not shy away; in fact, through half closed lashes he saw a little smile. He leaned forward to make the connection they had been dancing around for hours.

"Hey! What are you doing?"

Fuck. He had forgotten about Harry.

"I thought I would take Teddy for a bit, that's all." Regulus smiled inwardly. It was a terrible lie, but it meant she was feeling guilty too.

Teddy spared them all an awkward silence by starting to stir, the sleeping potion finally wearing off. He looked a little dazed, but in good spirits.

"You're awake." He smiled and reached for her hair. "Best get you to the bathroom, young man." Hermione was never so pleased to have potty training duty as at that moment.

-o-O-o-

When she returned, Sirius was back, and Harry had acquired a bowl of mashed potatoes for Teddy.

"The healer recommended feeding him lots of soft foods for the next few days," he explained, as she watched Teddy play in his food, smearing most of it on his godfather. Hermione was going through all the possible ways the little boy could be the reason behind the current situation.

Anything to get her mind off of Regulus and their near kiss.

"Do you all think it is more than a coincidence that you were... brought back while Teddy had something of yours?"

"I think he had everything to do with it," Regulus answered right away, "whether it was accidental magic on his part or some unknown power the Stone possesses." He held out a hand, so the toddler could balance himself while he hopped up and down like a bunny. Another thought crossed his mind. "Are there any objects here that may have belonged to the Dark Lord?"

Harry paled. There were a few relics he stashed here at Grimmauld Place to keep away from the remaining Death Eaters. His hesitation was enough. Regulus abruptly scooped up the toddler, who gave a squeak of protest.

"I don't think we need to risk him bringing back any dark lords. Or worse..." The Black brothers looked at each other solemnly.

"...Mother."

A Change of Scenery

Chapter 5 of 9

Hermione decides it is time for action, and Teddy has another surprise for everyone.

It was surreal to be standing in Tonks' childhood room. Just as she had imagined, the walls were covered with posters of The Weird Sisters, famous Aurors, and unicorns. Well, she never had imagined there would be unicorns. A brightly colored bedspread with mismatched pillows just screamed 'Tonks.' Her black and yellow tie was knotted around one of the bedposts as a testament to her old school house. Large stacks of overflowing boxes in the corner made Hermione's heart drop. All of Tonks' and Remus' worldly possessions were erected in a sad monument to their former owners. She felt suddenly uncomfortable, as if she had trespassed in a tomb. It was, unfortunately, the last available bed in the house.

Harry was ensconced in the guest bedroom, and Sirius took Andromeda's room, leaving Regulus with the sitting room couch, although he had done an impressive job transfiguring it. Not surprisingly, her thoughts turned to him again. Harry hardly let the two of them out of his sight after the incident back at Grimmauld Place, so they had only managed to exchange a few words since then.

She picked up a book entitled *Metamorphmagi Magic* and attempted to read it with little success. Her mind would not wander from the man in the sitting room, a former Death Eater, no less. In her heart, she knew he had done more to fight Voldemort than most members of the Order. He was driving her mad. And she did not know why. After a short time spent twisting her fingers and pacing the floor, she resolved to go talk to him. Just talk. And if he happened to try to kiss her again, then...

Her daydream was interrupted by a small bit of movement out of the corner of her eye. The edge of a photograph stuck out from the nearest box, its occupants catching her attention. Hermione pulled it out to see a flushed and happy Tonks and Remus holding their newborn son. Their smiles were so wide and happy, so filled with hope, it broke her heart. Wiping away a fresh stream of tears, Hermione redoubled her resolve to talk to Regulus. Life was too short to fret about the little things.

-o-O-o-

Harry and his overly watchful eyes went to bed, figuring that someone should be alert to watch Teddy in the morning. Regulus found him more than a bit irritating. He may have had the power to vanquish the Dark Lord, but that was no excuse to vanquish others' love lives as well. Love life? Maybe that was a stretch. He just wanted to kiss the girl. Okay, he wanted to do more than that, but one had to start somewhere. He knew he should go talk to her, but he was afraid she had retired to bed already. Sirius was occupied with Teddy at the moment; they had agreed to take turns watching him through the night. Perhaps Sirius would not notice if he slipped out to check on her.

Needless to say, Regulus was happily surprised when Hermione entered. His eyebrows met when he noticed her looking flustered and teary eyed. Shite. He did not know what to do with crying girls.

It turned out he did not need to know what to do. She strode up to him, threw her arms around him and kissed him hard on the mouth. He got over his shock immediately and raised his hands to her face. A rush of adrenaline quickened his pulse. She pulled back suddenly, quite out of breath and eyes wide with shock. He grinned at her and pulled her in for another kiss before she could change her mind. Her lips were soft. He brushed against them lightly, wanting to savor her this time. Ever so gently, his fingers wound into her hair, trapping her against him.

"Don't mind me," Sirius exclaimed, giving a small huff when they did not, in fact, mind him at all. Teddy found it greatly amusing. He reverted to his favorite game of laughing and hopping up and down. "Come on, Teddy, we can tell when we're not wanted." He swung the giggling boy under his arm and sulked out of the room after one last glance at the couple.

"Regulus, I..." She pulled back to look him in the eyes. He did not know what to say either. This was not how he had imagined it. It was better. He wanted to say something to her, something to express the warm feeling that was spreading through him. He settled for tightening his grip on her hair and kissing her again.

Regulus took a chance and nipped her lower lip lightly. When she gasped, he slid his tongue against hers. She responded immediately. Soon, her hands began a timid exploration of his lean body. The experience was more intense than either expected. When they finally broke for air, he hugged her close. She pressed her forehead against his chest, and they stood, silently enjoying the close contact.

"Where did Sirius go?"

"Who cares?"

-o-O-o-

"Enough you two. I need sleep; it's your turn to watch Teddy." Sirius reentered the room past midnight, eyeing their disheveled hair and swollen lips curiously.

"I'll watch over his crib tonight. Hermione, you get your rest."

"Actually, I was thinking of taking him to bed with me, I don't feel like being alone in that room." She examined a bit of lint on the floor, not wanting to admit how much it bothered her.

"I could keep you company, you know." A slow smile spread across her face, and she looked up to see Regulus' naughty smirk.

"Nice try," she said as she wagged a finger at him. He shrugged and smiled sweetly back at her.

Sirius was awed. This was not the brother he had known when they were in school, but then, they had not spoken since he was sixteen. The young man before him reminded him of himself, not the uptight, self-righteous prick he remembered. He felt guilty for not trying harder with him when they were younger. How would things have been different if he had met the good man inside of Regulus sooner?

-o-O-o-

Regulus did leave her and Teddy to sleep alone in the darkened bedroom after he insisted on tucking them in, making sure to kiss them both chastely on the forehead. Hermione pulled him in for a not so chaste kiss on the lips as well. He smiled at her serenely as she fell asleep. Teddy stirred uncomfortably, his hair turning a deeper shade of blue in the night air. Regulus found an old cloak to wrap him in to give him extra protection from the cold before bidding them a whispered goodnight.

He leaned against the doorframe for one last look. She was beautiful. Wild hair fanned out across the pillow, framing her pink-tinged face. He marveled at the girl. His girl. What had started as a mutual attraction between two strangers now had him plotting things that did not bode well for the purity of the noble and most ancient house of

Black.

-o-O-o-

Hermione was having the most fantastic dream. She was sure it could not be real. She lay in bed next to Regulus, his warm arm draped over her. It was comfortable. It had to be a dream. Regulus would not be so bold as to crawl into her bed. If so, he would have done it earlier. Her stomach twisted with nerves. How much did she want to admit to wanting that?

She drifted into full consciousness. She was not dreaming. There was someone in bed with her besides Teddy, and this definitely was not him.

Regulus heard a shriek come from Hermione's room. He was up in an instant. Wand out and eyes wide, he burst through the doorway to her room. She was sitting upright clutching a confused Teddy to her. There was a strange man at the other end of her bed, reaching toward her.

"*Stupefy!*" Hermione gasped in shock when the man slumped forward on the bed.

"Regulus, that's Teddy's..."

"What is going on in here?" Sirius arrived on the scene looking distinctly disheveled from sleep. "Hermione, are you okay?" His eyes traveled from a horrified Hermione to Regulus standing in front of her, wand drawn. He gave his brother the dirtiest of looks. When he did, he noticed what was over his shoulder. He shoved Regulus aside for a better look.

"Remus?"

Regulus walked around the bed to put a hand on Hermione's shoulder. "It's okay, Regulus," she said, her eyes never leaving the form on the bed. "You can wake him up."

He hesitated.

"It's Teddy's father."

"Let me guess, he was..."

"Dead. Yes." Regulus shrugged at the confirmation of his guess. Nothing shocked him anymore.

"*Ennervate.*"

Remus came to, startled and confused. "What's going on?"

"Relax, Moony, everything is fine."

"Sirius?" Remus was deathly pale. He rubbed his eyes and looked from Sirius to Regulus, then Hermione and finally Teddy.

"Teddy? You're so big, what..." He was still disoriented. "What is going on here?"

The Resurrection Stone

Chapter 6 of 9

Regulus and Hermione bond over school marks, and all his Death Eater training comes in handy. Plus, Teddy has one more trick up his... sleeve.

Hermione woke slowly. She had no idea of the time or where she was. Only that she was seated slightly upright, leaning against a warm, comfortable body. A body? Again? She sat bolt upright as the evening's memories came flooding back to her. A touch of vertigo hit her. She needed to stop waking up this way. The embers in the grate shed little light in the room, but a quick inspection by feel of her mystery companion's face revealed that it was indeed Regulus this time.

He chuckled. "Feeling all right?"

Strangely, despite what was probably the oddest twelve hours of her life, she did feel all right. Largely due to the man she was currently snuggled against. Had she really kissed him? That wasn't a dream, was it? She was amazed at her own forwardness. The normal Hermione would not recklessly snog a total stranger. The norm...Oh. He was kissing her now. This was no dream. The normal Hermione needed to rethink her priorities. This was good.

They were interrupted by a loud laugh from the direction of the kitchen. She remembered now. They had all been re-telling the events of the last year to Remus when exhaustion finally caught her. Sirius had laughed at her when he shook her awake and insisted she go lie down.

"Shall we check on the others?" she managed to get out before yawning.

"I suppose."

She gingerly rose from the couch, trying not to shiver at the light contact of his hand down her back. In fact, she was so distracted by his hand in hers that even after he raised the lights in the room she still knocked over Andromeda's potted plant. A quick *Reparo* and *Scourgify* rectified the mess, but she was a bit embarrassed. She covered herself by launching into bookworm mode.

"Whew, I guess they call the aspidistra the cast-iron plant for a reason! They're quite useful in potions, and they can practically grow in the dark. In their native..." She blushed, realizing she must sound like a complete swot. He merely watched her benignly and waited for her to finish her dissertation on the aspidistra. "In their native China, they are considered lucky to have around since they are so hardy."

"They also make a nice addition to the Pepper-up Potion. Just a pinch of shredded root and it doesn't burn so much going down."

Her eyebrows almost reached her hairline.

"What? You are not the only one to have earned an *outstanding* OWL in Potions." He smiled at her haughtily before breaking into an honest grin. "I admit I didn't know about it being considered good luck. I only managed *exceeds expectations* in Herbology," and it was her turn to fake a haughty smile. "I spent a little too much time on the Quidditch pitch I suppose." She was outright laughing now. "Enough, you." He shooed her along, chastising her with a quick pinch.

-o-O-o-

The kitchen was alive with chatter and laughter. Remus was sitting up straight in his chair, bouncing his son on his knee and talking animatedly with Sirius. He flushed when he caught Hermione's eye.

"I can't apologize enough, Hermione."

"It's fine, Remus; I'm just so happy to see you again." She walked around the table to give him a hug or at least the best hug possible considering he was sitting with a toddler on his lap and she was standing.

"Remus, I would like you to meet my brother." Sirius spoke with a hint of pride in his voice. Regulus edged over to him, still wary after finding him in Hermione's bed. Remus was cautious as well from what Harry and Sirius had told him about Regulus' relationship with his former student.

Regulus held out a hand to shake and relaxed a bit when he saw the honest look in the older man's eyes. He vaguely remembered him as a prefect from school, though he generally made a point to avoid Gryffindors, especially those close to his brother.

Unaware of any tension, Hermione began her assessment of the situation. "What I don't understand is how Teddy brought you back. From what we have been able to guess so far, he needs to have an old possession of the deceased in hand. If anything, the bed was Tonks'. There must have been something of yours there, like a blanket or..."

"Or a tattered old cloak?"

All eyes turned to Regulus.

"He was cold. I found a cloak in that stack of boxes and wrapped him in it."

"Well, I guess that theory is right then. At least it's the best we've got so far."

"Let's give him something of Dora's then." Remus' voice was low and serious.

"It didn't work when I gave him my father's invisibility cloak." Harry's melancholy was back. He was thrilled to see his friends again, but being so close to meeting his parents and only to be denied left him more than hurt.

"That wasn't a fair trial, Harry; he was scared. All the other times he was relaxed or happy. Everyone was staring at him and making him nervous." Harry did not look encouraged by her explanation. He opened his mouth to comment to that effect when Teddy let out a piercing scream.

Everyone nearly jumped out of their skin in surprise. Remus held him close, but he continued to sob madly.

"The Stone!" Sirius jumped to his feet. "He must be trying to pass it!" Then he cringed at the thought of what that would entail.

Hermione felt completely helpless as the little boy cried out in anguish. She saw Regulus reach for his wand beside her, and before she could register what he was doing, he spoke calmly.

"*Imperio.*"

Instantly, Teddy's screaming stopped. His face became calm and slightly drowsy.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" Remus was furious. Had he been in possession of a wand, he would have cursed him.

"Regulus!" Sirius moved to physically stop his brother, but it dawned on Hermione what was happening, and she threw herself between them. Unable to defend himself, he sidestepped to dodge Sirius, but kept his eyes trained on Teddy.

"Haven't you ever been under the Imperius curse?" she asked. Everyone save Regulus looked at her dumbfounded, and then Harry got it.

"It's the best feeling in the world."

Sirius turned and looked at his godson like he had sprouted another head. He then looked to Remus, who nodded.

"But if anything goes wrong with this, Regulus..." Remus spoke through gritted teeth.

Regulus was not listening to any of this. He was concentrating fully on the curse, urging Teddy to relax and think happy thoughts. All eyes were on the boy except Hermione's. She watched Regulus in awe as he focused on his task, a small muscle in his cheek occasionally twitching.

They all got the shock of their lives when a loud crack, like that of Apparition, sounded a few feet from the boy. Nymphadora Tonks Lupin appeared out of thin air. And promptly fell on her arse.

The surprise was enough for Regulus to drop the curse. Teddy started to tear up again, but was not in a full out panic as before. Remus almost dropped him as he leapt up to see to his wife. Hermione rescued Teddy and held him close, getting a bit teary eyed herself at the reunion.

While the others gathered around the newly resurrected Tonks, Regulus began to examine Teddy. Hermione watched him with interest. He really cared about the boy. The very idea tugged at her heart a little. More than a little. She had moved on from casual fancy to full blown infatuation. At every turn, Regulus showed what kind of man he was. And she liked that man.

A tug on her shirt brought her attention back to her charge. Teddy was in a much better mood and grabbing at her again. This time he hooked her bra strap and let it go with a snap. Regulus smiled and tucked a bushy tendril that had fallen in her eyes behind her ear while the little imp made another grab at her chest. He was definitely going to have to get one of those one day.

"Ahem." Tonks interrupted the little moment. Hermione immediately handed her son over to her. Tonks burst into a fresh round of tears, causing Hermione to do the same. Regulus was again at a loss, now with two crying girls.

Harry saved him by edging toward Teddy and pulling the seat of his diaper back. An action he soon regretted.

"Oh, that's ghastly."

"Do you think it's out?" Hermione sniffled.

"If it is, I don't want to touch it. Remus, Tonks, you're his parents. You get the Stone."

"The Stone?"

Remus nodded to the others, who got the hint and retreated back to the sitting room to let the family bond over dirty diapers, alone. He put his arm around his wife, leading her to the kitchen sink.

"Have you ever heard of the Deathly Hallows?"

Old Wounds

Chapter 7 of 9

The Black brothers still have some unresolved issues, and someone needs to tell Tonks what is going on.

"So I guess that eliminates one theory." Hermione slouched on the couch next to Regulus, vexed at being wrong.

"Uh, not entirely. It may not have to do with object." She sat up a little, waiting to hear his explanation. Harry and Sirius looked curious too. "Well, while I had him under the Imperius, I had trouble communicating to him that I wanted him to think happy thoughts, so I told him to think about his mother, figuring that would be a nice memory."

"For some people." Sirius grumbled.

"So you think the Stone works for him as the second brother intended it to?" Harry asked.

"Oh!" Hermione was fully upright now, "I read about this in a book in Tonks' room. Metamorphmagi are more prone to accidental magic than others. Maybe that is how he is doing it. Until he was under Regulus' control, he wasn't, to our knowledge, consciously thinking of anybody." She hopped up and hurried out of the room.

"I guess we won't know until they get that Stone cleaned off." Sirius rose from his chair to pace the room. "Has anyone thought of how we are going to explain this?"

"What can we explain? We don't know anything." Harry ran his hands through his hair in frustration making it more unruly than usual. Hermione returned clutching an old book.

"People, especially at the Ministry, are going to raise a lot of questions when it gets out that four supposedly dead people... aren't." Sirius scowled, unhappy at the clumsiness of his statement.

"I can call in my favors with Kingsley." Harry glanced at Sirius, realizing a bit of information he had not shared yet. "He's Minister now." Sirius raised his eyebrows appreciatively. Harry had told him he was no longer considered a murderer. Having someone in a position of power on his side was definitely a relief. He would help get them back into society. Officially dead or not, nothing was going to leave him a prisoner in his own house ever again. Harry continued, "The one I am most concerned with is Regulus. He's been gone so long, and it is more obvious his age hasn't changed. We could probably get away with a cover story of the others not dying in the first place, but there is not an easy way to lie about him."

Hmm, Regulus indeed. As much as Sirius was worried about the problem at hand, something was unsettling him about his brother. He was fine with him pursuing Hermione when there was little risk of him actually being successful. They shared little glances and pinched one another when they thought no one was looking. It was disgusting really. Back at Hogwarts Lily and James had been the same way, after she stopped loathing him that was. Those silly feelings did not last forever and he was not going to watch Regulus take advantage of a girl responsible for saving his life.

"I think we need to worry more about anyone finding out about the Stone. Who knows about it besides the people in this house?" Hermione spoke without raising her eyes from her book.

"Neville, I suppose, but he doesn't know it works. Ron, of course. I owed him that we were here so he's bound to find out when he gets back from his match. I didn't tell him what was going on in case anyone else saw the letter. Andromeda will be back tonight. I wanted to send her a message, but was afraid she would panic."

Sirius was only half listening to Harry. Now, when he watched them sit so casually together poring over some book, the more agitated he became. Would Regulus tell her what he used to call her kind? Would he dump her as soon as he found a more appropriate partner? He would be a free man soon with plenty of pureblood girls to choose from...

"We need to keep it under wraps, I mean, if someone thinks they could use it..."

"Like any of your old chums, Regulus." Sirius' tone instantly filled the room with tension. Hermione scowled at him, placing a hand on Regulus' leg in solidarity. He brushed her away and turned on Sirius.

"I think I made my resignation from that particular organization rather clear."

Sirius only snorted.

Harry and Hermione said nothing. They looked back and forth between the two Blacks, each of whom were staring hard at the other as if continuing their argument telepathically.

"Did you tell Hermione how you feel about Muggle-borns, or does she not merit an explanation? Are you just going to toss her aside when you find a more suitable toy to play with?" Hermione was embarrassed at Sirius' accusation, but she looked to Regulus with curiosity.

"Really, Sirius, have you told her how you used to get off at school? Sneaking hexes at me and my housemates to show off how smart you were. Did that really help you win friends, or was it only about how many fans you could gather and how many knickers you could get into?" Sirius was abashed at his brother's reaction, the memories not being as fresh for him as they were for Regulus. Regulus was not finished though. "Don't think that I didn't see what you and your friends," and his eyes darted to the kitchen door and over to Harry as if it were James sitting there, "did to Severus Snape on several occasions."

Harry lowered his head in shame. Hermione was spared further embarrassment when the kitchen door swung open, revealing a scowling Remus. "What are you all shouting about?" The Black brothers ignored him, each unwilling to drop eye contact.

Hermione, despite being extremely put out with both of them, decided to keep the peace. "Nothing but a family disagreement, Remus. We're all a little tired and stressed. It has been a long night."

-o-O-o-

Tonks held her son to her with one arm while she examined the freshly washed Resurrection Stone with her free hand. It was the most fascinating stone she had ever seen. It had a large crack down the center, the edges of which were worn as if eaten away by acid, leaving a patch of the center exposed. She could not help but be mesmerized by the iridescent nature of it. She pressed her thumb against the center, and it felt warm. Teddy giggled, finally drawing her attention away.

"You are such a naughty boy, Teddy," she said, and she smiled as she chided him. "Mum and Dad would say I'm getting just what I deserved with you." Mother and son looked at each other seriously. "It's too bad you couldn't meet him. You are more like him than he'd ever admit. You're both..."

CRACK

She spun around slowly, utterly shocked at the sight before her. Teddy, however, waved his little arms excitedly.

"Gah!"

-o-O-o-

Sirius offered Regulus his hand, ashamed of his own hotheadedness. Regulus took it, feeling his own share of the guilt. Their handshake soon became a hug. Hermione could not help but roll her eyes and mutter, "Boys."

"Remus!" Tonks burst into the room. "Can someone please tell me what the deal is with this thing because I swear I just saw my father!" She held out her hand with the Stone in it just as Ted Tonks walked through the doorway behind her.

"Dora, what is going on here?" He was taken aback at his sitting room being full of people. Then his gaze landed on Sirius. "Sirius?"

"Puppy!"

Ted looked at the little boy whose hair was rapidly turning orange, then to his daughter and gasped.

"It's alright, Mr. Tonks." Harry stepped forward. "We can explain everything. Why don't you sit down." He edged over to the couch that Regulus and Hermione recently vacated.

"Sirius, they said you were dead."

"I was, Ted. And so were you." Ted's eyes grew large and he looked around the room. All the faces he saw confirmed Sirius' story. Tonks seated herself next to him and let Teddy crawl over to his lap.

"I'd like you to meet your grandson."

"My...my grandson?"

"Yes," she said, and she grinned, "Teddy Remus Lupin."

-o-O-o-

"Hermione, I need to talk to you." Regulus had been waiting in the hall for her to return from the bathroom so he could catch her on her own.

She paused. Ever since Sirius and Regulus had their argument, she had been more confused than ever. Realistically, she knew he had changed. He sacrificed everything for what was right even though it went against everything he had been told his whole life. Yet, she still had doubts.

"I want you to know what Sirius said..." He was flustered. He was never flustered. This girl was trouble. He raised his gaze from the floor to her face and felt his confidence return. Definitely trouble. And worth every minute of it. "It isn't true. I may have felt that way once, but that was a lifetime ago." He realized the irony of his statement.

"Literally. I know now that pride isn't about who your ancestors are. It's about who you are. I don't have much to be proud of, but if it's possible, could you forgive me for being..." and he took a breath, "...for being a bigoted pureblood prat?"

"Only if you could forgive me for being a Muggle-born."

He grinned. Not the answer he was expecting. She was grinning too. He leaned down to kiss her. It was a bit awkward because neither of them could stop smiling. It was an honest kiss, one that held promise for both of them.

"Oh! Excuse me." Ted shuffled across the hallway to escape the private moment he had walked in on.

Still smiling, Regulus took her hands in his. "There are too many people in this house."

A Surprise for Andromeda

Chapter 8 of 9

Andromeda gets a bit of a shock, Ron and Hermione get one last lesson from their Professor, Kingsley never saw this in his job description, and Mrs. Black gets what's coming to her.

Ron opened the door quietly. He would have knocked, but it was not quite seven a.m., and he did not want the verbal lashing from Hermione that was sure to come if he woke Teddy up. Setting his broom and a bag of Quaffles down in the hall, he followed the sound of voices to the sitting room.

"Hey, Harry, why are...oh, blimey." Ron stared at them all, mouth agape.

"Ron! You're back; wonderful!"

"Harry, how?" Harry grinned at him.

"How was the match?"

"Don't be mean, Harry." Sirius stepped forward. "Good to see you again, Ron. In case you were wondering, Teddy found a way to work the Resurrection Stone; he's brought us back." Ron was incredulous, but there was Sirius before him, looking just as he did the last time he had seen him. Tonks and Remus too. He leaned forward and gripped Sirius' outstretched hand, still shaking his head, but smiling nonetheless.

After a round of greetings, Ron punched his best friend in the arm. "Some funny joke, mate."

"Ron!" Hermione entered the room followed by a strangely familiar, dark haired man.

"Oof!" She threw herself at him, hugging him tightly. When she finally let him go, she stepped back and gestured to the man.

"Ron, this is Regulus, Sirius' brother." He shook hands with the man. So this was the infamous R.A.B. What was his hand doing on Hermione's shoulder?

-o-O-o-

"So, Tonks, do you still have the Stone?"

"Yes, in my pocket." She drew it out. "Here."

"Wow!" Hermione peered into her outstretched hand. "It didn't look like that before."

Harry's fingers ran over the newly exposed surface. "It's warm."

"Yes, I thought it was because of the water, but it's really only warm on the inside. I was just holding it and telling Teddy about his grandfather when..."

"Hang on. You had the Stone when Ted came back?"

"Well, yes."

"So anyone can use it?"

Sirius snatched the Stone from her and held it tightly in his hand.

"James Potter."

Nothing.

"Maybe only a Metamorphmagus can do it," Hermione said as she patted Harry on the back. Sirius handed the Stone back to Tonks. She took a deep breath and pressed her thumb on the open surface. It was not quite as warm as before.

"James Potter."

Nothing.

"I don't know; I'm sorry, Harry." She frowned and handed it to Harry, who took it dejectedly. He held it tightly in his fist and closed his eyes.

When the crack sounded, Hermione screamed.

-o-O-o-

Ted, Regulus, Hermione, Ron, Tonks and Teddy all sat around the kitchen table. James had been quite jumpy when he returned, his last memory having been confronting Voldemort, so they decided it was best to have only Lily's friends present when Harry brought her back.

Ron was still trying to cope with what was going on, as was Ted. Hermione and Regulus were not fazed anymore. No one really spoke until shrieking broke out in the next room.

"Sounds like Lily's back."

"Why can Harry do it if we can't?" Tonks nodded to the boy in her father's lap.

Hermione opened her mouth to speculate, but Regulus interrupted her.

"Blood relatives."

"I think he's right; it's the only connection I've been able to come up with too."

Ron scowled a bit when Regulus patted Hermione's leg under the table. They were awfully chummy. Not that he cared, they were over ages ago, but still, who was this git anyway?

"Obviously, it doesn't have to be a close relative; I mean Regulus and I are only second cousins."

"But the Blacks are inbred." Everyone looked at Ron, who realized that may not have come out how he meant it to. "No offence, mate, but it is true."

Regulus only shrugged. Mum referred to it as *linebreeding*, but he wasn't going to split hairs.

Remus peeked in the kitchen. "It's safe to come in now."

-o-O-o-

Hermione was quite taken aback. Harry did look like his father and really did have his mother's eyes. No wonder people never let up on him about it. They seemed rather nice, still stunned, but nice. Harry was beyond ecstatic, and she did feel happy for him, but the mystery of the Stone was gnawing at her. She felt helpless with no known reference about it either.

"Harry, may I see it?"

"Huh?"

"May I see the Stone please?"

"Oh, right, here, Hermione." She held it as best as possible; the center seemed to burn hot.

"How did it work before?" She had to ask him twice since he was focused on his parents again.

"Turn it over three times and think about the people you want to see." Ron recognized the look on her face.

"Here," and he pulled her by the elbow into the hall, "if you are going to try something, maybe it's best out here."

"Or here." She led him to Tonks' old room, which was not so ominous anymore. "I'm not sure if this will work."

"Are you going to bring back Dumbledore?"

"Even if this works for me, I'm not sure that would be ethical. He was dying, Ron; I would hate to bring him back only for him to die again." Ron nodded. Leave it to Hermione to think of that. His own mind did not have to wander far to think of whom he wanted to bring back.

She held the Stone as Harry had, making sure to touch the center. Her eyes closed, and her hand clenched, but nothing happened. Cautiously, she opened one eye, then the other. She looked into Ron's face. He only shook his head. Taking a deep breath, she turned the Stone slowly in her hand.

The translucent form of Severus Snape appeared before her.

"Bloody hell."

"What do you want, Miss Granger?" Even in the afterlife, her former professor held no enthusiasm for seeing her. "And*where* are you?" He looked around the room, obviously disgusted at being subjected to the violent pinks and purples.

"Is this really you or just an imprint of you?" Ron snorted, having a flashback to his sixth year Defense Against the Dark Arts class. The semi-opaque Severus eyed her warily.

"Only you would ask that question, Miss Granger." He shrugged. "Very well then, the real soul of Severus Snape is dead and not subject to the trivial curiosities of Gryffindors. I, however, am a mere shadow of him, much like the portraits that I am quite sure you are familiar with."

Hermione swallowed nervously before asking, "Do you have any living relatives?" Again, he eyed her warily. Was it possible for a shade of a person to use Legilimency?

"Whatever your plans are, Miss Granger, do remember, some things are better off left alone. Death is not such an incomprehensible horror as some believe it to be. You will experience it yourself one day." She and Ron were rather dumbfounded. A small knock at the door made them both jump.

"Thank you, Professor, for everything." With that, she loosened her grip on the Stone, and the apparition before them faded away.

"Come in." Her voice faltered. Regulus opened the door cautiously. He noticed Ron was in the room as well and tried to quell the jealousy rising in him.

"I was just worried; you disappeared rather suddenly." Again, he was looking at Ron, who rather secretly enjoyed making Regulus squirm.

"Sorry, there was just someone I needed to talk to." She held the Stone out to Ron. "I believe you'll be needing this."

"Thanks, Hermione." He hugged her tightly and not solely to annoy Regulus.

"Come on, Regulus, let's go see the others." She led him out of the room, leaving Ron to make his decision.

-o-O-o-

It had been a long day, and quite frankly Hermione was pleased to have some time to herself to sort her thoughts. Upon returning to the sitting room after a slight detour with Regulus to the coat closet, she found Harry composing a letter to Kingsley. She volunteered to go speak to him in person. And she had quite a story to tell him too.

Regulus had wanted to come with her, and truthfully, she would have liked that. However, unlikely as it was that he would be recognized, it was too risky. So instead she Apparated to the Ministry alone and made her way to the Minister's office. Her involvement in the war gave her the freedom to gain audience with him with little trouble. Especially when she came bearing a missive from Harry Potter.

"Hermione, my dear, what is so important that you came to see me personally?"

"Well, Minister Shacklebolt," and he gave her a friendly scowl for addressing him so formally, "Harry, Ron and I have a bit of a situation on our hands. It seems we had a little mishap with a very powerful magical object, and we, well, we sort of brought several Order members back from the dead." She spoke the last part so quickly, Kingsley wasn't sure he heard right.

"You what?"

"Um, we brought some people back from the dead." Had she been anyone but Hermione Granger, she would have undoubtedly been chucked out of the Ministry building forthwith. "I brought a letter from Harry in case you don't believe me. I wouldn't blame you; I wouldn't believe me either." She nibbled nervously on her bottom lip while he read the letter over. When he finished, he set the parchment down and stared at her blankly. "Perhaps you would like to come with me?" she asked.

-o-O-o-

Andromeda was a bit jarred from the Portkey, but otherwise in good spirits when she walked down the street to her house. She was anxious to see her grandson again; however, she would not deny how much she had enjoyed the week of peaceful relaxation on the Continent.

Voices from the direction of the sitting room startled her when she opened the door. Harry had Teddy with him at Grimmauld Place, so the house should be empty. She drew her wand and crept up to the half opened sitting room door. She recognized Harry's voice and that of...Kingsley Shacklebolt? What was going on? Deciding it was safe, she lowered her wand and entered the room. That is when she saw him. Her pulse raced, and her face and hands started to numb.

"Dromeda!" She was ghostly white.

"Mum!"

Ted rushed forward just in time to catch his wife before she hit the ground. "Well, that went better than expected."

-o-O-o-

Tonks fanned her mother's face as she slowly came to. "Mum, are you all right?" She didn't answer, only reaching up to touch her daughter's face as if to confirm it was truly her. Soon, the two were embracing and sobbing madly. Ted sat next to them and held them both.

When she finally gathered herself, wiping her eyes with a kerchief provided by Remus, she spoke. "Oh, I thought I'd lost you two forever. And you, Remus." When she looked up to acknowledge her son-in-law, she noticed the others in the room. Kingsley stood beside Harry and Sirius, who was smiling with a hint of a tear in his eye. Beside him were James and Lily Potter, Regulus, who she had not seen since he was a child, and Hermione. On the other side of the room were the Prewett brothers, Gideon and Fabian, joined by Ron and what appeared or rather she hoped was Fred Weasley.

Andromeda's mouth hung open in shock. Tonks began to fan her again in case she fainted. "But, how, how is all this possible?"

-o-O-o-

After a careful explanation of the origin of the Stone and what they could figure about it so far, Andromeda sat thoughtfully in her chair. She lifted her teacup to her mouth, lowering it without drinking. She raised it again, but once more didn't drink.

"So you believe that the true Stone lay beneath the surface all the time?"

"Yes," Harry answered, "I doubt Death believed that Cadmus Peverell would know to crack the Stone open or even have the ability, but technically, he did give him something that would resurrect the dead."

"Sounds like Death's style," snorted Fred.

"Yeah," Ron counted off on his fingers, "let's see, give him what he asked, but only after it's been etched on, harbored a bit of human soul, been hacked into with a basilisk venom flavored sword and eaten away by the stomach acid of an eighteen-month-old boy. He'll never think of that."

Hermione shook her head and tried to hide her amusement. "I doubt it was that specific."

Finally managing a sip, Andromeda set her cup down on one of the delicate tables by her chair. "The point is what do we do now?"

That earned a round of silence from the rest of the group.

Kingsley finally spoke. "I will go back to the Ministry and put the Unspeakables to work on it. This reaches into their territory." He looked to Harry. "I would like to turn the Stone over to them, for study, maybe they can..."

"Harry." Hermione spoke in a small voice to her friend. She had told him of her experience in Tonks' room and her opinion on the matter.

"I'm sorry, Kingsley. As much as I wish for everyone to be able to use it, it is just too dangerous, especially if it were to fall into the wrong hands. Even in the right hands, it is enough to drive anyone mad. I think it ought to be destroyed, or hidden."

Kingsley nodded; he knew that was the answer he was going to get in the first place, but it did not hurt to ask. "I trust you to do that, Harry."

He nodded, fingers brushing the now cold Stone in his pocket. He knew just the place. The same place he had hidden the Elder Wand.

-o-O-o-

Andromeda was in no mood to be alone after the recently returned were shuffled off to the Ministry to meet with the Unspeakables. They then had to spend the night at St. Mungo's, enduring all manner of tests.

She and Hermione shared stories well into the night after Harry left to hide the Stone and Ron returned to the Burrow to prepare his family, namely his mother, for the return of her son and brothers. After putting Teddy down for the night, she told her all her favorite stories of Sirius and Regulus as children, then of her elopement with Ted and subsequent exodus from the Black family. Hermione told her all about their search for the Horcruxes and Hallows, especially the part where she had impersonated her sister using Polyjuice potion. Eventually, Hermione returned bleary eyed to Grimmauld Place to find Harry already back from Hogwarts and in bed himself.

The sound of the door opening midmorning distracted her from her packing. After the last 48 hours, her quiet flat would be a blessed relief.

She came downstairs to find Harry trying to usher his parents and the Black brothers in quietly so as to not disturb Mrs. Black's portrait. Sirius was grinning from ear to ear.

"They came up with a story for us," Lily explained. "Sirius managed to escape the veil and brought us all back with him."

"They figured since my name was going to draw a lot of attention anyway, might as well have it be for bringing people back to life instead of killing them. It will also keep the public eye away from Teddy. You know what a burden that can be, Harry."

"Plus," James added, "he's connected to everyone brought back, through blood or friendship."

"Or both," Sirius added, giving his brother a nudge.

"Well, come on then, Kreacher has been cooking all morning for you. I guess Number Twelve is yours again." Sirius made a face.

"Are you kidding? I am going house hunting with Lily and James as soon as I empty a few plates in the kitchen!" His enthusiasm made everyone laugh. "It's all yours, Regulus!" With that, he bounded down the stairs, followed closely by the Potters.

Hermione realized she and Regulus were finally alone. "Well, welcome home then." She fidgeted a bit. "I suppose we should get down to the kitchen while there is still food left."

"Yes, I suppose."

They were in each other's arms in an instant. He pressed her hard against the wall. They were kissing so intently, he did not notice the flutter of curtains behind him or pay any heed to his mother's screeching voice.

"FILTH! MUDBLOODS! SHAME OF...Regulus? Is that you, my boy? What are you doing with... AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

Epilogue

Chapter 9 of 9

Life goes on for the ten people brought back by the Resurrection Stone and their families.

"This is fucking ace, my friends!" Fabian slammed his pint glass down.

"Easy there, brother." Gideon punched him on the shoulder. "You're out of practice; don't want to get too pissed and let the young'uns steal your birds."

"Out of practice? It was only last week I drank you and Black under the table, though it looks like it's been a bit longer than five days for you, Sirius."

Sirius raised his glass and nodded. "My constitution has only improved since then."

"Very well then, Fabian." Gideon shook his head at them both. "Another round, Tom!"

"Did we hear someone call for another round?"

"I don't know, Fred, my hearing's not so good you know."

"Is there room for me and my *older* brother?"

"Always, boys, always! Look we've got two sets of twins to worry about now!"

Harry and James exchanged glances. They were now closer in age to each other than Fred and George were.

"Do you know what those wankers had the gall to do yesterday?" Sirius gestured to Harry and James. "I was chatting up this lovely young lass outside of Quality Quidditch Supplies yesterday." He emphasized what part of her he thought was lovely with his hands. "When Prongs and son here run up yelling 'Dad, Dad, we found the brooms we want, please buy them for us, please!'" Laughter echoed through the whole pub. Even Sirius could hardly catch his breath.

"What did Lily do to them after that?"

"Lily? She probably told them to do it!"

Harry and James snickered and elbowed one another.

"Ah, Lily," said George.

"Our new hero," answered Fred.

"We redheads have to stick together." The woman in question had entered the pub at just the right time.

"Lily!" She smiled and stood behind the twins with a hand on each of their heads.

"Oh, Mr. Black, can James come over to play?"

"Stop it, you."

"Remus and Dora send their love, but are ditching us for quality time with Teddy, but they said see you at the match Saturday." James winked at his wife and gave Harry a shove so there was room on the bench for her between them. She rolled her eyes, but took the seat. "Also, Remus told me to warn you to not drink too much and get any ideas about scampering through the wilderness. Something about antlers and low hanging branches, and I didn't really want to know the rest." James and Sirius exchanged a knowing glance.

"It's best you don't, dear."

"So, where're Hermione and Regulus? I thought they were supposed to be here already," Harry asked.

Sirius only shrugged, but Lily became suddenly interested in her napkin. James noticed her.

"What?"

"Nothing." He stared her down. "Fine! I stopped by on my way here, but they didn't answer and sounded," and she took a deep breath, "busy."

"Busy?" Harry scowled.

James snickered. "Uh, Harry, ask your father." Sirius smacked him on the back of the head.

"Oh..." Harry shuddered. "Eww. She's practically my sister; I didn't want to know that."

The twins spared him from having to think about it further. "Looks like Uncle Fabian has found himself a date."

"I think you better go rescue her." Sirius tried not to laugh too hard as Gideon was unsuccessfully trying to pry his brother off of a very irritated Minerva McGonagall. "That man could never hold his liquor."

With some assistance from Fred and George, Minerva was freed. She shook herself off and walked over to say a quick hello to her old friends. She got to formally greet them the day after they returned when Harry called for a special Order meeting.

"That lad hasn't changed a bit. Ever since he was a student..."

"Are you coming to the match on Saturday, Professor?" Harry could not bring himself to address her any other way yet. "Cannons and the Harpies, Ron vs. Ginny, should be a bloodbath. I can get extra tickets for you."

"I'll be there, Harry; I've got a little bet going with Professor Slughorn, so tell Ron to keep his focus, will you?"

"Sure thing, Professor."

"Ah, well, it looks like I must be going." She was out of the pub faster than Harry thought possible of the old woman, just in time too, as Fabian wrestled free from his captors.

"Minerva, my darling! Don't leave me!"

-o-o-o-

Hermione peeled off her coat when she entered the warm luxury box at the stadium. Being close friends of members of both teams as well as being in Harry Potter's entourage came in handy when it came to Quidditch matches. Large as it was, the box was packed with people, mostly Weasleys, ready to watch a little sibling rivalry.

"Teddy!" She grabbed him away from his parents and swung him into a hug. He giggled and pulled her hair.

"Nice to see you too, Hermione," Remus deadpanned.

"Yeah, we've been well, thanks for asking," Tonks added. Hermione ignored them both. Regulus also ignored them to come visit his favorite cousin; he did save his life, after all.

Sirius walked up to Remus and Tonks and gave them both a one armed hug, his free hand holding a full glass of mead. "Maybe they'd take you more seriously if you weren't holding a bright yellow diaper bag with—what is that on it anyway?"

"Nikki the Kneazle."

Sirius raised his eyebrows as if to say 'my point exactly'. "Here, you look like you need this more than I do," he said, passing his drink to Tonks.

"Thanks."

"There's nothing wrong with Nikki the Kneazle, and look, I'm even manlier: mine's purple!" Bill laughed holding up the bag in his hand. His infant daughter lay asleep in his other arm. Fleur trailed in behind him, looking as light and airy as ever, despite having given birth a month before. Tonks sighed and took a large swig of her drink.

Regulus grudgingly handed Teddy back to his father when it was time for the match to start. He led Hermione to their seats and gave her a quick kiss before they sat down.

"Please! There are children present!" James held his hand in front of Harry's eyes, which only earned him a swat from Lily.

Hermione snuggled against Regulus, her cheek against his shoulder. It was so good to be close to him and at the same time, guilt nagged at her. There were so many more families torn apart in the war: the Diggorys, the Boneses, the Creeveys, the Abbotts, countless Muggles... Shouldn't they have a chance to have their loved ones back? What about those who did not have relatives: Emmeline Vance, Marlene McKinnon, Severus Snape? She had researched all of them to no avail. Then there was Neville, whose parents would not be able to appreciate his upcoming marriage to Hannah. Days did not make it feel better; it was unlikely months or years would either.

She watched Harry as he sat with baby Victoire in his arms. He had the same guilty dreams too, compounded by the fact that he now had the family he was denied all those years. Victoire was awake now, with her little hand wrapped around one of Harry's fingers.

"Oi, watch it there, tyke!" Sirius twisted in his seat as Teddy dove across his lap to get a better look at Victoire. Sirius held him back, but Teddy behaved, sitting quietly and waiving at the little girl.

Bill leaned over from the row behind and scooped up Teddy, holding him up and saying in his best stern father voice, "Stay away from my daughter."

Everyone broke into laughter, even Bill.

"You better start practicing that now, judging by her mother," Fabian chided.

"I've already asked my father-in-law what the best hexes are." He laughed and sat down, bouncing Teddy on his knee.

"He iz so busy now dat Gabrielle iz of age."

"Gabrielle? You've got a sister? Ouch!" Fabian got elbowed in the ribs by both Gideon and Molly. "Hey, a man can hope."

Hermione smiled. There was always hope. She gave Regulus' left arm a squeeze. Even in the darkest times.