

# Shattered

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## Accio Aurors

Chapter 1 of 1

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A young, smiling witch wove her way through the small crowd of people gathered in the reception hall. Some men and women chatted animatedly to her right and left, while others sat deep in serious, intelligent conversation at the little round tables. House-elves scurried around, balancing trays of little pastries and various drinks, but for once, Hermione didn't care. She saw many familiar faces mixed in with the other pupils she had met and befriended over the course of the past two years.

The energized atmosphere in the room was almost tangible. Everyone in attendance was wearing dress robes hers were a lovely periwinkle blue and finally, after much effort, she had managed to slather on enough Sleekeazy's to keep her bushy, brown mane of hair under control. With just a smattering of cosmetics, she was positively glowing, a result of the makeup and her own shining demeanor. She fought to keep her broadening grin within a sane diameter, but she truly couldn't have been happier.

"Hermione!" someone called.

Hermione Granger looked quickly in the direction of the sound and rushed over to join Harry and some of her other friends from her days at Hogwarts. Merlin, that was almost four years ago! A wave of pleasant nostalgia washed over her as she slipped into conversation with three of her best friends. While the Golden Trio had disbanded, what with Ron moving to the States, Harry still remained her dearest friend, and Dean Thomas and Justin Finch-Fletchley had become almost like brothers to her.

"Hi, Harry!" she responded. "Hey, Dean, Justin." She nodded and grinned at her other two friends. They both returned her greeting with smiles of their own, albeit with fewer molars showing. The three exchanged pleasantries and work gossip while chamber music from the enchanted orchestra in the corner wafted overhead.

Just when the conversation started to become really interesting, thanks to Dean bringing up the hot, new office romance scandal, Hermione noticed a cluster of her instructors milling around the front of the room off to the left of a stage and podium. She nodded and pointed them out to her friends.

"You guys want to get a table before they begin?" she asked. They nodded, still debating whether pimply-faced Christian Honedale, the newest Department of Magical Transportation employee, deserved to be dating Heather Baldrige, the blonde bombshell from the Improper Use of Magic Office. The group continued talking as they grabbed four butterbeers from the table with drinks and sat. When they finally decided that having breasts and big hair (Hermione snorted) didn't equate to dating the *right* guys, Harry, Dean, and Justin quickly became absorbed in a discussion about Quidditch, of all things, so Hermione smiled to herself and left the men to it, contented to sit with her chin in her hands and people-watch. She could hear snippets of conversation float over her head.

"...completely *mental*. That mad old bat almost failed me in Stealth and Tracking..."

"...of course, the written exam wasn't too terribly bad. I think I missed more than I first thought, though..."

"...you look nice tonight, Jeanne. Did you do something different with your hair?"

This continued for about ten or fifteen minutes or so long enough for Hermione's luminous brown eyes to glaze over slightly... She had not even wanted to be an Auror, really, when she had graduated from Hogwarts over two years ago. It soon became apparent, however, that the war was not going to end in a matter of weeks... months... years, even. And after Dumbledore died, her life was left in a shambles as much as Harry's had been. She felt like a part of her had died with him, for Dumbledore was not only her Headmaster, he was her mentor and advisor throughout her years at Hogwarts. He had given her advice, talked to her as an equal about current events and new discoveries. The "cleverest witch of the age" had absolutely no idea what she was supposed to do after she left school. She dug furiously into every career choice offered to wizard kind, but nothing was appealing.

Finally, about nine months following her seventh year, Hermione decided to throw it all to hell and do something... rash. She enrolled in Auror training with Harry, Dean, and Justin and threw herself completely into her studies and training. It felt nice to have a ritual again, almost as if it were just another school year, though she was sure life would be hectic again as soon as she began her *real* job. The war was still going on, and while the Aurors-in-training did several field assignments, it was clear that the Death Eaters would not remain quiet much longer.

Hermione found it rather amusing, actually, that a career she had turned away without a second thought in her fifth year quickly became the outlet into which she could forcefully vent the stresses of the war. It became the driving force fueling her work with the Order, and in time she had come to realize that being an Auror was the wisest path she could have chosen to benefit the Order most. Her instructors were very pleased with her work and oftentimes would gloat to other members of the Ministry that they had finally roped the great Hermione Granger into their department. She had been a bit disappointed when she discovered Healing was not one of her passions after working two or three months as an apprentice Healer, expecting to be challenged and stimulated, but the only remarkable event had been the third patient with a Snitch stuck up his... Anyway, so far, the elite training the Aurors provided was the only thing keeping her focused, or even tied to any sense of normalcy.

And then it had happened. A rage suddenly burned deep within Hermione, unwanted and unwelcome and suffocating. Bile rose up hot and acidic in her throat *Not tonight*, she thought desperately, squeezing her eyes closed. *Any night but tonight*. She began clenching and unclenching her fists. It clawed at her insides, demanding of her that which she could not do. Yet.

Flashbacks flooded her memory in staggering waves. Bodies. *Flash*. Fire. *Flash*. Cloaks. *Flash*. Blood. *Flash*. Blood. *Flash*. Blood.

"You okay, 'Mione?" Hermione felt Harry's hand clap bracingly on her shoulder, bringing her sharply back to reality. The images faded to mist as she once again became aware of her surroundings. She started, then shakily half-smiled at him (even though, as she came back to earth, she would have preferred to strangle him she *hated* that damn nickname) and quickly assured him she was fine.

The fury that had come so close to boiling over had already receded as rapidly as it had come, taking a piece of Hermione's heart with it once more. Harry continued to look slightly concerned, but was unable to say anything further, as a handful of instructors had just risen to stand at the podium, waiting to speak.

The conversations amongst the former pupils died out almost instantly as their first teacher began a congratulatory speech with a reserved smile on his pockmarked face. The young men and women applauded when he finished, and the next instructor stepped in and took his place, as did the following men and women. Presently, all of the instructors on the stage had spoken.

The only witch remaining near the podium stepped up. Her long, dark locks gleamed in the candle light, and she smiled broadly at everyone assembled. She cleared her throat and began, "And now, for the moment I'm sure everyone has been waiting for since you completed the final test this morning..." Looking around the room, she brandished her wand with a flourish and called out, "*Accio diplomas!*" Twenty or thirty tightly-furled pieces of parchment zoomed into the outstretched hands of their eager recipients. The air was abuzz with excited remarks, and more than one delighted whoop rang out above their heads.

Hermione was at once distracted; she feverishly tapped her diploma with her wand and watched it unfurl. Official, dark-green letters slowly uncurled and faded onto the page.

Hermione Jane Granger,

We are pleased to present you with this honorary diploma

in recognition of your achievements in Advanced Auror Training.

Below you will find the scores you have received on your final examinations.

Congratulations.

Her eyes flew over the parchment so fast they would have seemed blurred to an observer. She let out a loud sigh of relief when she reached the bottom of the page. Her marks were good: she had passed with flying colors in almost every examination. She felt a pang of regret as she noticed her Disguises grade. An eighty-four percent was a disappointment, though it hardly kept her from graduating that class.

She sighed and glanced surreptitiously at Harry's parchment. *Of course*. She snorted when she saw that all his grades were above ninety-five percent. *Little prat*, she thought fondly.

Magically rolling the parchment into a scroll once more, she looked around and suddenly met the gaze of a handsome, older man whom Harry was talking to. She blushed slightly and surreptitiously continued her glance around the room, damning the heat rising in her cheeks.

Hermione recognized him as Taddeus Winston, a Ravenclaw who had graduated five or six years before she had. She feigned an intense interest in the sculpture serving as the centerpiece on the front table, willing herself not to glance back at him. Once she was satisfied that his attention was again focused on Harry, she chanced another look.

She vaguely recalled that they had taken an optional Potions course together their first year, but he had never returned to the more advanced levels. He had ravishingly good looks long, sweeping brown hair that fell just below his ears, and the most beautiful eyes Hermione had ever seen. Their color seemed to shift constantly from icy turquoise to arctic blue.

Taddeus looked up sharply and caught her eye again, gave her a perfect, dazzling smile and winked. Hermione blushed at being caught twice (*was he flirting with her?*), but she quirked a sheepish smile in return. Taddeus' eyes seemed to grow warmer, but just as she was working up the courage to join the discussion, Nymphadora Tonks bounded up to her side and, literally, fell into the chair next to her.

"Wotcher, Hermione!" Tonks beamed. Hermione wrenched her gaze from the man across the table. "Brilliant job on your exams! I was so excited when I read the other instructors' comments. Those were great essays!"

"Thanks, Tonks," replied Hermione, amused.

She glanced back over at Taddeus once more to find him trying to hide his laughter behind a cloth napkin. Hermione grinned sheepishly before allowing herself to actually pay attention to what Tonks was still saying.

The conversation was rather lost to her, however. Oh, she nodded in all the right places and offered some half-witted responses when required to reply, to be sure, but her thoughts were still on Taddeus. *Merlin's arse*, she chided herself, *I'm acting like a bloody third year with her first crush* She'd never really been one to moon over a boy *Man*, she corrected herself but there was something truly intriguing about the handsome youth across the table.

In retrospect, she would wonder what type of asinine things she had said to Tonks, though the fluttery feeling in her stomach was quite a distraction.

"Hey, Hermione! Wanna go out with us this evening?" Harry asked energetically; he sensed the interplay between his two tablemates and smirked smugly, turning from his conversation with Taddeus. Hermione looked around quickly, having just bid Tonks a slightly exasperated farewell. "Dean and Justin want to grab a few drinks to celebrate. Tad's coming," Harry added pointedly, grinning like an idiot.

Hermione flushed, but smiled back. "Tad?" she asked.

"Nickname." He rolled his eyes and shrugged nonchalantly. "But yes, I'm feeling up to a little celebration," he said, meeting Hermione's eyes openly.

Hermione was forced to yank her eyes from his penetrating stare, but she was able to look back at Harry and reply, "Of course! I'd love to come!"

"Let's go, then!" Harry quickly hopped out of his chair and straightened his robes. "Don't worry, we'll make sure we leave before dawn," he joked and laughed as Hermione pretended to look scandalized. She rose with a mock-stern expression on her face and followed them to the door.

"Just make sure I don't have to Levitate you home, Harry," she sniffed pretentiously, one hand on her hip, and her nose absurdly high in the air, but the corners of her mouth twitched violently as she struggled to suppress her laughter.

"I think I should be the one saying that, Hermione," he said. He winked roguishly at her before plastering an all-too-innocent expression on his face.

She could hear Taddeus snort behind her. Infamous among her party-inclined friends, as well as the entire battalion of eyewitness Aurors at each Christmas party, Hermione Granger could *not* hold her liquor at all.

She grimaced self-derisively and decided a few drinks wouldn't do any harm, however, and she'd probably find a wonderful opportunity to talk to Tad which was certainly a plus.

They waved cheerfully as they passed many familiar faces, a feat made difficult thanks to the sudden light pressure of Taddeus' hand against Hermione's lower back. She had suddenly found him much closer than she'd remembered. Her senses abruptly went haywire, and she concentrated upon making it to the door in one piece.

As they approached the door, she glanced upward at him and, seeing his easy smile once more, continued walking. Her heart leapt into her throat with pleasure, and they headed out into the street. Harry winked and playfully squeezed Hermione's arm as he turned on the spot and vanished with a faint *pop*. The other boys did the same, followed by her.

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Hermione opened her eyes a split second later, quickly inhaling to fill her squashed lungs. As she straightened up and regained her balance, she felt a hand again lightly place itself on her elbow, and this time, she was somehow able to find her voice.

"Thank you, Taddeus," she said.

He laughed again.

"Please, call me Tad."

"Tad." She smiled.

They approached the entrance of the Leaky Cauldron, and Tad bowed gallantly and opened the door. Harry looked slightly puzzled at this gesture of un-manliness and raised bemused eyebrows to Hermione, who was equally taken aback. She giggled a bit girlishly, she admitted and walked through.

"May I buy you a drink, Hermione?" Tad inquired quietly.

"Yes, thank you. I think that would be wonderful," she replied, leading the way.

Tad ordered two glasses of mulled mead from Tom, who recognized him and bestowed upon him a friendly, toothless smile. He then led the way to a somewhat out-of-the-way table near the back of the room. They both sat, and Hermione inconspicuously observed him as he slid gracefully into the booth. The subtle way his tailcoat, a style stolen from the twenties but adapted to fit modern fashion, clung to his muscular torso did not go unnoticed by her.

It was odd that he wasn't in wizards' robes, actually, but she couldn't imagine a handsomer look. In fact, she had difficulty tearing her eyes away from his chest to look once again into his eyes, which had assumed their deep, arctic hue in the dimmed light. His gaze came back to her after waving to Harry and the others, stating that he would be *just fine* without them. A brief period of companionable silence ensued before he smoothly broke into it.

"So, Hermione," he began easily. "How does it feel to be an official Auror?" He grinned that easy grin of his.

"I'm ecstatic actually. I'm really pleased that I passed all the tests," she said.

Tad scoffed in disbelief at that, but winked.

"Your friends told me you weren't considering it at first... something about pursuing a *more worthwhile* career option." He suppressed his laughter rather wickedly.

"Oh... erm... well, I... you see..."

He laughed outright at that and placed his hand atop hers before asking silkily, "Didn't have anything to do with a certain organization called... what was it? Something about *spewing*...?"

Hermione immediately burst out laughing, turning slightly pink. Tad chuckled along with her, laughter dancing in his eyes.

"Well, yes. Thankfully, I'm over that stage in my life," she conceded, wiping a small tear of mirth from her eye.

Their conversation flowed seamlessly forward after that, and Hermione felt herself warming immensely toward this beautiful young man. A strange, not at all unfamiliar feeling was circling her stomach, not a trace of the anger that had come so suddenly upon her at the ceremony, but rather a feeling of air-light butterflies suddenly dancing the conga. Their motherly waitress beamed knowingly down upon them with each refill of their mead, obviously happy at witnessing such carefree, innocent flirting.

Hermione noticed that each time Tad looked at her, he held her gaze a little longer. Sometimes, his stare was intense and enrapturing, at others, he looked just like a twelve-year-old boy.

"What is it?" Tad asked, looking slightly anxious, after Hermione had let out a quiet sigh at that thought.

The concern in his voice as he asked the question took her aback.

"It's nothing really. You just have the most beautiful eyes," she blurted. Her already glowing visage tinted just slightly rosy as she heard herself speak the truth.

Tad's gaze was unfathomable as he leaned toward Hermione slightly. Hermione felt her body unconsciously mimic his movement until they were only about a foot apart.

"Oi!" came a shout from another table.

Tad and Hermione jumped apart like startled rabbits, both blushing slightly at the sight of Harry and Justin grinning like idiots.

"Hey, Dean!" called Harry.

"Yeah?"

"Fancy stopping by Justin's before we head home?"

Dean looked slightly confused until he saw both Justin and Harry widen their eyes and jerk their heads in Hermione and Tad's direction.

"Oh, yeah, yeah. There's still enough time to catch that West Ham game on the telly, if we hurry," he hastily offered up as Harry and Justin rolled their eyes at the transparency of the excuse.

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Hermione, as much as she hated it, had wisely given Tad the address of simply Grimmauld Place, knowing that she could not reveal the Order's secret, no matter how much she would like to have. They Apparated together to a small, quiet corner a few blocks from number twelve. A light summer breeze wafted down the street, ruffling Tad's impeccable hair slightly.

They walked silently down the street, Hermione smiling softly as Tad's hand reached out to grasp her own. Both were loathe to break the friendly, magical silence, so they continued without speaking. When they reached Hermione's block, they stopped under the streetlamp at the corner. They stared at each other for a moment, each tentative, each waiting to gage the other's reactions. The soft glow from the streetlamp illuminated half of their faces in pale orange light, leaving the other half in shadow.

"Well..."

"Hermione..." began Tad.

They both grinned at each other sheepishly. As the grin melted slowly off each face, replaced with a glow, Tad hesitantly stepped forward and Hermione leaned into him instinctively. He brought his arms to her shoulders gently, placing a very sweet, very chaste kiss upon her lips, one hand a ghost behind her head, the other whispering down the length of her spine. The rustling sound of the trees that lined the road to their left was the only noise that could be heard. After a few moments, he pulled away infinitesimally.

"I had a most spectacular evening tonight, Hermione," he said softly.

"So did I."

Hermione could think of nothing else that would sound appropriate, so she simply leaned forward again and brought her mouth once more to his. This second kiss became deeper and tasted amazingly sweet. When they broke apart, Tad wordlessly raised Hermione's left hand to his mouth and pressed his own lips tenderly to it. Their eyes met intensely for a second, an hour, a year, until he turned on the spot and was gone in the blink of an eye.

Hermione stood on the street corner, savoring his scent; he smelled simultaneously of leather, and soap, and the faintest trace of cologne. She realized she had been staring at the spot from which he'd Disapparated for several minutes and, with a shake of her curls, began the slow, meandering walk of the love-struck toward number twelve.

When she reached the doorstep, she felt an uncomfortable sensation creeping across her body, raising goose pimples on her arms. Her senses sharpened rapidly; she felt only a lingering trace of that heady warmth that had accompanied her to the door.

It was almost as if she was being watched by someone or something. The years she had spent being Harry Potter's best friend, combined with an innate sense of her surroundings, warned her to be cautious. She Disillusioned herself silently and remained on the stoop, keenly eyeing the street to her left and right.

Satisfied in her search, which resulted in nothing, she warily turned back to the door. She shook the fleeting sensation off as imagination and gripped the front door handle. The others would be asleep by now, so she silently eased the front door open and crept past a pair of dark curtains to her room on the second floor.

Inside her room, Hermione quickly shed her dress robes and pulled on a nightdress. After removing her earrings and taking down her hair, she slipped under the covers and snuggled into her pillows. Drowsiness came swiftly, and with it returned the tingling feeling of Tad's hands on her shoulders, his soft lips brushing hers. She was a little surprised at how quickly she had fallen for an almost total stranger.

*There'll be time to analyze in the morning* she told herself groggily as she drifted into a contented sleep.

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Out on the street, the wind increased slightly, making the leaves rustle more loudly. A keen pair of dark eyes watched the young woman enter the house and close the door. The man behind the eyes stood slowly, ensuring his presence would go unnoticed, turned on the spot and was gone with the faintest *pop*.