

New Beginnings

by Jaely

A few days after Halloween in Hermione's sixth year, rumours of a new student, starting after the start of term, begin to circulate around the school. Who could the new student be? Into which House will they be sorted? Is the rumour even true? Join Hermione, Harry, and Ron as they discover these answers and realise that this only leads them to more questions.

Chapter 1: A Long Day

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"Have you heard a new student came in today?"

Hermione Granger, Harry Potter, and Ronald Weasley overheard this as they were heading back to the Gryffindor common room. The three looked to one another and shrugged.

"Have you ever heard of a student coming in after the start of term, Hermione?" Harry asked curiously. If anyone knew, it would be Hermione.

Hermione shook her head slightly. "Not that I can recall, Harry, except for the students who came for the Triwizard Tournament, but that was for a very specific reason." Hermione grew quiet again thinking and going over all the books she had read about Hogwarts. "But it doesn't mean it can't happen."

Hermione, along with her two best friends Ron and Harry, was in her sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The start of term had begun just over two months ago. Hermione was a curious young woman by nature; she had a sharp intellect, and though she took no real notice of it, she was growing to be a stunningly beautiful young woman.

She enjoyed learning, reading, and writing; a lot of her love of reading stemmed from her total dislike of mysteries, so she read and asked questions to gain the understanding she had sought all her life. The downside to her desire for knowledge and understanding became her lack of friends; in fact, Hermione never really had friends until she came to Hogwarts.

"I wonder what House he will be sorted into," Ron pondered aloud.

Hermione sighed. "Why do you assume the new student is male, Ron? You know..."

"Why don't we get down to dinner; maybe if we really do have a new student, he or she will be there?" Harry interjected, not wanting to hear an argument between his two best friends again.

Hermione and Ron turned to look at Harry and nodded in agreement. They all went up to their dorms to put away their books until after dinner when they would go to the

library to do their homework. Hermione had persuaded the other two that it was a good idea to get as much of it done before the Hogsmeade trip planned for the next day.

They had all thought that they would have more free time now that they had chosen the classes that leaned towards their career paths, and normally that would have been the case, but they now had Professor Snape for two of their advanced classes. He had finally secured his coveted position at Hogwarts and was now the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. A new professor had started that year as the new Potions master, but he had become very ill and had been sent to St. Mungo's; therefore, to the dismay of quite a few students, Snape was currently teaching both classes. He regularly gave out far more homework than was required for Advanced Potions, clearly enjoying his authority in two subjects. "At this advanced level, this should not be a problem," he had explained with a sneer. This, combined with the amount of work he assigned for Defence Against the Dark Arts, along with all of their other classes, made even Hermione feel a bit pinched for time.

The trio met back in the common room, chatting about the impending Quidditch tryouts and their various classes as they walked to the Great Hall for dinner. Once they arrived, they took their customary seats at the Gryffindor table, continuing their conversations. They had each scanned the hall, searching the crowd for the rumoured new arrival, but found no new faces.

Harry looked up to the head table and saw that Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall were not seated for dinner; in fact, after another scan of the hall, he did not see them there at all. "Where do you suppose..." Harry began to voice his ponderings to his friends when the side door by the head table opened and Professor Dumbledore stepped out. Harry was about to turn his attention back to his food when he saw Professor McGonagall, followed closely by a rather striking blonde woman.

"I don't think we have just one new student..." Hermione began.

Finally, Ron turned his attention from loading his plate up with food to see what his friends were looking at. "Blimey, how many are there?"

Hermione turned to scowl at Ron and muttered, "You don't have to shout, and I'm sure you couldn't have got this far in school without learning how to count. Honestly, Ronald!"

Harry spoke up, interrupting the impending fight. "OK, so we have five new students, but who is the older woman talking with Professor Dumbledore?" Hermione and Ron both shrugged at the question.

Hermione looked back over at the blonde woman, trying to determine more details about her; if they had been sitting closer to the head table, she might have been able to get a better look. Although Hermione thought that she did look familiar, she simply could not discern anything other than the woman's long, blonde hair worn in a ponytail and pale complexion.

"You know, she might be the new Potions mistress," Hermione suggested to the others.

Harry looked at the woman. "It is possible, but what about the others?" The three, plus Ginny Weasley and Neville Longbottom, who had just joined them, looked up at the new students standing near the head table.

Indeed, there were five individuals in Hogwarts' uniforms listening to Professor McGonagall intently, three boys and two girls. Four out of the group were listening to the professor, Hermione noticed, but the youngest, a girl, was fidgeting a lot and looking nervously about at everything and everyone. Hermione watched as an older girl, whom she assumed to be the youngest girl's sister, gently covered the smaller girl's hand, thereby stopping her from chewing on her nails. Hermione studied the older girl, and even though she had noticed her sister's nervousness, her outward attention never wavered from Professor McGonagall.

Hermione noticed the older girl had a very strong profile; she was taller than Professor McGonagall with raven-black, long, wavy hair that shone in the light of the hall and a complexion of golden honey. Hermione could not identify the girl's eye colour from the distance. The younger girl and the three boys standing with the older girl all had similar features of dark hair and skin. The oldest boy seemed to look almost like a slightly taller version of the oldest girl, even down to their hair; his was not quite as long as the girl's was, and not worn loose, but in a ponytail.

Professors Sprout and Flitwick, along with the new blonde woman, came to stand by Professor McGonagall. Professor McGonagall gestured to two of the younger boys.

"Well, it looks like one's in Hufflepuff and the other is in Ravenclaw," stated Harry as the Heads of those two Houses each guided one of the boys towards their House's table.

"It looks like the last three are Gryffindors," Ron continued when Professor McGonagall guided the oldest boy and the two girls towards their table.

Hermione made eye contact with her Head of House, figuring that Professor McGonagall was going to request their help as both Hermione and Ron were the Gryffindor Prefects. "So it would appear," Hermione murmured.

"Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley," Professor McGonagall stated as she approached. The professor continued forward as Hermione rose from her seat to greet her and frowned when Ron remained seated, gawping like a fish at the three new Gryffindors. McGonagall had to admit the newcomers all had an air about them, and they were all very attractive, but that was still no reason to stare so much at someone.

Hermione noticed Professor McGonagall's frown and followed her gaze to Ron, still resembling a fish, and she smacked his shoulder to gain his attention.

Ron snapped his mouth shut and tried to stand, stumbling over the bench in his rush. He would have tumbled face-first to the floor had it not been for a pair of strong arms that caught him.

"Ron! Are you all right?" Hermione asked as Ron righted himself.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm bloody brilliant," Ron muttered, brushing off imaginary dirt from his robes in order to regain some of his composure, knowing full well that his face was about as red as his hair. Ron turned to the owner of the pair of hands that had caught him, holding out his own hand in thanks.

"Listen, mate, thanks for..." He stopped mid-sentence as his eyes locked with the most mesmerising, dark chocolate-brown eyes he had ever seen. Ron began blushing all over again as he realised it was not the boy who caught him, but the older sister.

Before the girl could respond to his thanks, Professor McGonagall began her introductions. She waved her hand towards the siblings in turn, providing their names, beginning with the youngest.

"This is Zoë, Alan and Jace Hunter," Professor McGonagall said before turning to Hermione and Ron, saying, "Mr. Hunter, ladies, this is Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley, the sixth year Gryffindor Prefects." McGonagall turned back to the siblings. "I leave you three in very capable hands. Please, take your seats; the evening meal has already begun. Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley." She promptly nodded in farewell and turned, heading back towards the head table.

"Well, this is going to be an interesting year," Alan stated once Professor McGonagall was out of earshot.

Jace snorted softly and lightly elbowed Alan in the ribs. "You best behave, Alan; remember you did tell Mom we wouldn't get into any trouble."

"Yet," Alan returned. "I recall promising our dear mother that we would not get into trouble "quite" yet," he finished, grinning at Jace's eye rolling.

Hermione smiled at the interplay between the siblings; they reminded her of Ron's brothers, Fred and George, with the way they bantered back and forth.

"Sit, please." Hermione blushed lightly at the soft smile she received from Jace. Jace thanked her and sat next to her younger sister. Hermione pulled Ron's sleeve to steer him around to the other side of the table where Harry and Ginny sat.

"You are American, right?" Harry asked when the three had settled into their seats.

"Yeah, our dad is American, though our mom is British; don't know exactly where, but I know it's somewhere close to London," Alan explained with a shrug.

The rest of dinner flowed with easy conversation about little things between the six. When the meal was finished, they all rose together and started to make their way back to Gryffindor Tower. Hermione gave a running commentary on the castle, frequently quoting *Hogwarts: A History*, as she was so prone to doing.

Harry and Ron exchanged glances at this, their eyes conveying the message 'not again' to each other. Ron and Harry then told Alan, Zoë and Jace about the more day-to-day things: what and whom to avoid, where to go and where not to, lessons, teachers, meals and anything else that sprang to mind.

"This place is really weird," Zoë mumbled to herself. Zoë was a rather shy girl. She had said little throughout dinner, instead preferring to let her more outgoing brother and sister do the talking, although Jace was nowhere near as talkative as Alan was in comparison.

Hermione smiled to Zoë; she understood how she felt. "Yeah, it is when you first get here, but it really grows on you," she explained kindly, seeing how nervous the young girl looked.

Zoë smiled, blushing slightly at the fact she had spoken her thoughts aloud. "Thanks," she said shyly.

"Here we are," Hermione said, turning to the three siblings and her other friends. She smiled at the confused looks on their faces. "You will need a password to get in.... Phoenix!" Hermione said, and the portrait of the Fat Lady swung open to reveal the Gryffindor common room.

They all entered through the portrait hole, the three newcomers finding it most bizarre that the entrance to the common room was hidden behind a portrait. Hermione dutifully began a round of introductions to the milling Gryffindors, who were all intrigued to meet the three. They settled in easily and soon were chatting merrily in armchairs by the fire, surrounded by some of the other students, who were all keen to hear about where they had come from and how it differed from Hogwarts. After a pleasant two hours of getting to know everyone, Jace felt her eyelids starting to feel heavy, and she looked around for her sister, who had seemingly vanished amongst all the excitement. She finally located her curled up in an armchair in the corner, fast asleep.

Jace sighed, upset with herself. She knew she should have checked on Zoë before now; they had had a very long trip to England and had arrived only that morning. Zoë, though very strong in mind and spirit, was not strong in body. A sickness had ravaged her heart when she was very young, and the doctors, both Muggle and magical, had struggled to save her. Save her life they did, but they were unable to cure her completely, and she had been left with a weak heart. She frequently became breathless when she got excited or over-exerted herself, and she tired easily, needing a lot more sleep than other girls her age did. It had also stunted her growth: although eleven years old, she stood no taller than most six or seven year olds.

Jace knelt down in front of her sister and pushed some hair off her face. "I'm sorry, Little Bit," she said quietly, feeling incredibly guilty. She felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to look into her twin's apologetic eyes. Jace stood and moved aside to let her brother pick Zoë up. They knew from experience that there was no waking her up now, her body was just too tired.

"Where are your rooms?" Alan asked as he cradled Zoë in his arms.

Hermione had watched the older siblings with Zoë and had rushed over when she had seen Alan pick up the tiny girl. "Is she all right? Does she need to go to the hospital wing?"

"Naw, she's just really tired, that's all. If you can just show us where she is to sleep, then we'll put her to bed," Alan said.

"All right then, if you're sure, but I'm afraid there are Charms on the staircase leading to the girl dormitories that prevent males from gaining access," Hermione explained.

Alan stared at Hermione blankly. "Well, that's... different," he said, looking befuddled. What else strange was there about this school?

Jace chuckled softly. "Don't see why it's any different than what it was like back home; we had something similar, if you remember," Jace said as she eased her sister from her brother's arms. "Night, Alan. I'll see you in the morning. I'm going to head to bed myself after I've settled her."

Alan smiled at his sister and then hugged her around the sleeping frame she held in her arms. "Don't beat yourself up, Jace. Zoë's fine, she just got tired, that's all." Alan knew his twin sister very well; she would dwell on the fact that she had not made sure Zoë was all right sooner. It was not that Alan did not worry about Zoë's well being; he simply worried in a different manner. Alan pulled away from his twin and kissed Zoë's forehead. "Night, squirt. Love you," he said and moved back to talk with Harry and some of the other Quidditch players.

Hermione was charmed by Alan's display of affections towards his sisters; showing emotions was not a strong suit for most of the males she knew. Hermione led Jace to the first year's dormitory. "There is a floor for every year; since Zoë is a first year student, she is on this floor and will share a room with three other first years," Hermione explained, leading them to a big oak door, which had been left slightly ajar. Hermione pushed the door open and noticed that two of the girls, whose names escaped her, had already gone to bed. "Oh, some are asleep already... We'll have to whisper. Here is her bed," she went on, indicating the empty bed in the room, "and her bags are... here," she said as she pulled them out from underneath the bed. "Do you have trunks?"

Jace shook her head as she gently laid her sister on the four-poster. "No, not yet," she said quietly, slowly removing her sister's shoes, stockings and over-robies and tucking her under the covers. Surprisingly, the girl did not wake. "We had just about enough time to order uniforms and school supplies, but nothing to keep them in. We'll be getting the rest a bit later," she whispered. "Night, Little Bit, see you in the morning."

Hermione led Jace back towards the door and through the doorway when a girl came bustling around the corner. "Oh, Hermione, hi," she said.

"Hello, Mia, I'd like you to meet Jace Hunter, a new sixth year student, and her sister Zoë," Hermione greeted and waved her hand to the bed Zoë now slept in. "Zoe has just joined Gryffindor and will be in your dorm; would you be so kind as to make her welcome and show her around this weekend?" Hermione asked, knowing Mia was a kind, patient, and outgoing girl and would be more than willing to assist Zoe in learning her way around.

Mia looked into her room and saw a small lump under the covers of the bed to the right of hers. She turned back to the sixth year Prefect with a small smile. "I'd be happy to help, Hermione. Jace, welcome to Gryffindor!"

After Jace and Mia finished their introductory greetings, Hermione led the way back to the stairs. "Once you get to your sixth year and beyond, the girls are split into two per room instead of four.... Here we are," Hermione said, stopping in front of a large, wooden door, not unlike the door to Zoë's room. Hermione opened the door, and Jace followed her into the room.

Jace's eyes filled with wonder at the ornate furniture and the two enormous four-poster beds. These were bigger than the one in which she had laid down Zoë.

"These beds are so beautiful; all the furniture is actually," Jace commented. She noticed that there were dressers that stood a little higher than her waist with half-length mirrors set within beautifully carved frames. "I don't recall seeing dressers in my sister's dorm," Jace stated observantly, running a hand over the deep mahogany wood of the mirror frame.

"You wouldn't as she's only a first year," Hermione stated. "All sixth and seventh years students have the privilege of having a small dresser for their clothes; our trunks can then be used for storing our personal items and the extra books we need. We have less people per room, you see, which affords us space in which a dresser can be added."

Jace nodded in understanding. "So... who am I sharing with?" Jace enquired, smiling at the Prefect, wanting to see her blush again. Jace's smile widened as Hermione's blush spread to not only her neck, but her cheeks as well.

Hermione coughed to clear her throat; for some reason she was feeling shy around Jace. "Umm... I am your roommate actually," she said, pretending to straighten the curtains on the bed.

Jace's eyes widened slightly. "Cool.... Surprising, but cool." Jace gave a quick smile and looked down to her bed where her opened suitcase lay waiting for her to unpack.

Hermione walked over to her own bed and sat down. Crookshanks immediately hopped up onto her lap as soon as she had done so. He curled up and started purring. "Surprising? Why?" Hermione asked after a time.

Jace looked to Hermione. "Huh? Oh..." Jace blushed slightly. "Just that all the DL's at my former school had their own rooms.... " She shrugged, smiled at Hermione and continued her unpacking.

"What are DL's?" Hermione asked in confusion.

"Dorm Leads," replied Jace. "I'm not really sure all that is involved in being a Prefect, but a Dorm Lead makes sure nothing untoward is going on in the dorms and the rules are being followed," Jace said as she put her clothes away in the dresser.

Hermione smiled. "Ah, yes... well, the only students allowed their own rooms are the Head Boy and Girl; the Prefects still share rooms. I had this one to myself because Lavender and Parvati wanted to share."

'Jace really is a stunning girl,' Hermione thought to herself as she subtly peered out of the corner of her eye whilst under the cover of stroking Crookshanks. She guessed that Jace had to be about four inches taller than she was. Her hair was as black as night with a slight wave to it, giving it a nice, full-bodied look. 'Nothing like my hair,' Hermione thought. Hers was only pretty once she tamed the frizz. What captured Hermione's attention more than anything was Jace's eyes: they appeared as black as coal, but carried such warmth and...

"...mischief."

"What?" Jace asked, stopping her movements mid-action.

"Oh, my... did I say that out loud?" Hermione squeaked, covering her blushing cheeks.

Jace resumed her unpacking, chuckling softly. Seconds later, she turned and leaned against the dresser. "Afraid so, Miss Granger, so spill it. What's the mischief about?"

Hermione looked into Jace's mirth-filled, mischievous eyes and smiled, relaxing slightly. "Well, Miss Hunter, I was looking for a way to... erm... define your eyes." Hermione liked the look of polite confusion in the aforementioned eyes.

"And mischievous was the adjective you came up with?" Jace asked with a small raise of her left eyebrow.

Hermione giggled and went to her own dresser and began to pull out her nightdress and dressing gown in order to go to the Prefect's bathroom. "Among others," she informed Jace with a mischievous smile of her own.

Jace straightened up and took a step, following the retreating Hermione towards the door. "Well, now, Miss Granger, I am intrigued!"

All Hermione did was laugh and reply, "I'm going to get ready for bed now. Good night, Miss Hunter."

Jace smiled at Hermione's back as she closed the door behind her and leant against one of the large posts of her bed. "Score one for Miss Granger. This is definitely going to be an interesting year."

A/N: This is my very first story in the Harry Potter verse. I would like to thank my wonderful, patient beta reader, Drusilla, without whom I would never be able to post this story, so thank you. I hope you all enjoy the story and please leave a review to let me know what you think.