

One of Our Elves is Missing

by Persevero

Hermione is writing a book on house-elves and their contribution to wizarding history.
But what has happened to Winky?

Eclairs

Chapter 1 of 7

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Copyright disclaimers are legally ineffective. J K Rowling created some wonderful characters, and I am simply borrowing them for my own amusement.

Thanks to red_day_dawning, il_grifone and teamfireyleader for patiently finding my mistakes and being kind to a new author!

'Would you like a drink, Miss Granger?' Professor McGonagall gestured with a Firewhisky bottle.

'No thanks, Professor,' she replied, wincing inwardly. The sun was still two hours short of the yardarm. 'I'd love some tea, though.'

Professor McGonagall replaced the bottle on the shelf with a slightly regretful expression and said crisply, 'Tabby!' A house-elf appeared silently on the hearthrug. 'Tabby is our new senior house-elf, Miss Granger.'

'Hello, Tabby,' Hermione said, leaning forward a little to bring her head lower. 'I didn't know that Dilly had retired.'

'Yes, Miss, last July. Is Miss wanting tea?' The house-elf appeared to recognise Hermione, as she was regarding her with a wary expression in her olive-oil-coloured eyes.

'Tea and cakes, please, Tabby,' Professor McGonagall said, and the house-elf disappeared.

'That was partly what I wanted to see you about, Professor,' Hermione said. 'House-elves. I'm writing a book about them – their history, their magic, their part in the first and second Wizard Wars. I wanted to interview Dilly, actually, and I was hoping you'd smooth the way for me. They've never forgiven me for SPEW.'

Professor McGonagall laughed. 'One thing I do know is that they can carry grudges down the generations. But they are quite forgiving of children, and I'm sure that I can stress that you were very young at the time. Dilly is still here, but she's decided to concentrate on her speciality, which is pâtisserie, and leave the administrative tasks to Tabby. Dilly's nearly two hundred, you know.'

Tabby appeared at that moment with a tray and set it on the small table under the east window. 'Eclairs! Did Dilly make those?' said Hermione eagerly.

'Yes, Miss. Dilly is making all the special cakes and pastries.' She redirected her gaze. 'Is the Headmistress needing anything more?'

'No thank you, Tabby.' The elf left, and the two women drifted over to the table, where Professor McGonagall poured the tea. 'She's given us four – can you eat two éclairs, Miss Granger?'

Hermione laughed. 'All too easily. The catering elves at the Ministry never give us anything this good.'

'I believe that Dilly trained at Beauxbatons before moving to Hogwarts with one of my predecessors – Professor Violette Lorin. She was Headmistress in the eighteenth-fifties.' Professor McGonagall stood up and walked over to one of the paintings, where a rather chubby witch with pince-nez was writing at a desk.

'Violette?' The painting's occupant looked up and smiled.

'That is correct, Minerva. Dilly was my family's elf, and so I was able to bring her with me. At the time, the food at Hogwarts was horrible.' Her long rolled 'r' reminded Hermione of Fleur Weasley. 'She was specially trained as a pastry-cook, and I am afraid that she has been a bad influence on several generations of Hogwarts staff.' She made a slight gesture at her own rotund middle and then returned to her letter.

'If you wish to interview Dilly, I think you should give me several days to prepare the ground. Are you able to stay for a few days?'

'I've taken a couple of weeks' holiday, actually – I was meant to go to The Burrow at Christmas, but Victoire had Dragon Pox, so I postponed my holiday.'

'I hope the poor child has made a full recovery?'

'Yes, she's fine now, but it was frightening for the family. The Glaberolia Potion has made it less dangerous, but it's still a nasty experience for anyone, let alone a child.'

'You could stay until the Saint Valentine's Day Ball. We've no other guests at the moment, and all the staff would love to see a fresh face at High Table. We do get a little tired of each others' company, especially at this time of year with the dark evenings ruling out a stroll into Hogsmeade.'

Hermione flinched a little at the thought of Saint Valentine's Day, but she was grateful for the offer. It would be much easier to concentrate here than at her London flat, and Hogwarts had the largest number of house-elves in Britain. 'That would be wonderful. Do you think you could persuade Dilly to show me the house-elves' quarters? I've been round the Ministry elf barracks, but they're nineteenth-century. It says in 'Hogwarts – A History' that the elf quarters here have been unchanged for over a thousand years.'

Professor McGonagall looked amused. 'I will do what in me lies, Miss Granger. In the meantime, do you have your things here, or do you need to return to London?'

'I'll go back to my flat, and return tomorrow, if that is okay. Thank you for tea, Professor.'

'I will just walk with you down to the Apparation Point, and then I'm afraid I have a staff meeting at five.'

They strolled down to the gates, Hermione bringing her former teacher up to date on the Potter and Weasley hatches and matches before bidding her goodbye and apparating to London.

A/N: The Glaberolia Potion is borrowed with thanks from venivincere's wonderful Snarry 'Twelve Days'.

Winter Air

Chapter 2 of 7

Hermione finds out about the house-elf cemetery.

Hermione folded her one formal gown carefully into her case, along with the only set of underwear she owned where the bra did not show at the gown's rather risqué neckline and the cloth bag containing the frivolous shoes that Ginny Potter had talked her into buying before the Ministry Christmas Ball. She would have avoided such high heels before Ginny had taught her a stability charm that enabled her, not just to walk safely, but to dance in them.

Not, she reflected, that there was likely to be anyone at the ball who would appreciate her gown and was also over seventh year, but she was blowed if she was going to invest in a different one just for a Saint Valentine's Day ball that she really, really did not want to attend. Since splitting up with Ron, she had avoided all balls and parties where possible: not so much because she missed Ron – the break-up had been more of a relief than anything – but because everyone seemed to feel the need either to treat her with heavy-handed sympathy, or to match-make. Or both.

Hermione had realised that there was no-one she was interested in, either among her colleagues in the Unspeakables or who had been at Hogwarts with her, as a long-term partner. And while she was not entirely averse to the principle of a short-term fling, her status as War Heroine made her feel rather exposed to the wizarding press. Rita Skeeter had wielded her Quick-Quotes Quill to considerable effect over the years.

No, Hermione had taken a strategic decision (rather before she had split up with Ron, in fact) that she needed to travel outside Britain to find a partner. To that end, she had indicated her willingness to take part in any overseas fact-finding trips, conferences and exchanges that the Ministry might see fit to arrange. Her first, a conference in Sweden, would come up in April, and she was looking forward to receiving the list of delegates and doing a bit of unofficial research about them. She hoped to find a partner who was an academic, and preferably an older man. She allowed herself a moment's wistful thought: her preference for older men had been established even before she left school.

And in the meantime she was just not looking.

Hermione closed her case, cast a quick Reducio and put the case in her jacket pocket. She recorded a brief message on her Muggle answering machine, cast a regretful look at her laptop, and seized Crookshanks's carrier before Apparating back to Hogwarts.

She landed in a couple of centimetres of snow, two pheasants rocketing away in alarm. She took a deep breath of winter-scented air to shake off the queasy feeling that Apparation always gave her, then looked around and spotted Hagrid approaching the gates and waving. He let her through and took the cat carrier from her, and they started up the path, Hagrid making a slow pace so that Hermione could keep up without slipping.

'Professor McGonagall told me that you were coming to do some research on the house-elves,' Hagrid said. 'You know, it was watching them made me realise I could still do magic even with my wand broken. They don't need them, see, just like young children don't. I was never that good with my wand anyway, and after practising with just the pieces for a while, I found I could still do the same spells.'

'I never knew that, Hagrid. I knew you'd had your wand broken, of course. Didn't you ever get another after you were cleared?'

'Professor Dumbledore offered. But I said "I'm as good now with wandless magic as I ever was when I used a wand. I don't need one." And he just told me that he always knew I was doing spells and he had decided not to interfere, but if I ever changed my mind about a new wand, I should just ask him.'

'Professor McGonagall is going to ask the house-elves if I can interview them and maybe look at their quarters,' Hermione said.

Hagrid stopped. 'They won't like that. Very private, they are, about their living quarters and their families. But they'll do what Professor McGonagall tells them.'

'I don't want to upset them,' Hermione said anxiously. 'I want the whole wizarding world to understand what we all owe them. Especially the war heroes. Do you know, when I visited Dobby's grave, I found it was covered in flowers? People have been leaving bouquets and messages.'

'D'you know there's a house-elf cemetery here at Hogwarts?' Hagrid asked, starting back up the path. 'On the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Usually, Hogwarts elves are born here and want to be buried here. Most wizards don't see it, but I have to, to trim the hedges.'

Hermione was fascinated. 'Do you think they'd let me see it?' she said eagerly.

'I reckon if you know it's there, you'll see it,' Hagrid said. 'I've been able to since I was made Groundskeeper and the Headmaster told me all my duties. Tell you what, I'll take you there tomorrow morning. How about after breakfast? Likely they'll all be busy then.'

'That would be brilliant, Hagrid, thank you. I'd like to find out as much as I can about their lives and families and their death customs as well.'

The old friends arrived at the main doors where Filch seemed to be surreptitiously taking advantage of a little winter sunshine. Hagrid put Crookshanks's carrier down, and Hermione released the catch. There was a moment of comedy as Crookshanks emerged from the carrier only to find himself nose-to-nose with Mrs Norris – both animals sprang back with tails beginning to fluff up before recognising each other and chirruping greetings. They strolled off together into the castle while Hagrid bade Hermione a temporary goodbye and Filch told her that the house-elves had prepared her a guest-room on the first floor.

'The password is "Connelly",' he told her. Hermione snorted quietly. The Headmistress's office had opened to "Coltrane" the previous day.

'Has someone worked out how to show films at Hogwarts, Mr Filch?' she asked, but Filch looked blankly uncomprehending, so she set off up the stairs to her room.

Apple-wood

Chapter 3 of 7

Hermione examines the Elf Register

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Thanks to red_day_dawning, il_grifone and teamfireleader for being lovely betas and to Southern_Witch_69 and ladyinthecloak for explaining the rules about commas, which I missed by going to primary school in the no-grammar era.

The next morning, Hermione woke to a warm room and the scent of burning apple-wood: clearly one or more elves had already been in and lit the fire and the lamps. Well, at least she was not being boycotted. She disentangled her legs from the duvet and from Crookshanks, who always preferred to sleep between her knees, climbed out of bed and headed to the small guest bathroom, where she peered out of the small, uncurtained arched window over the sink. It was still fully dark and snowing heavily – her elf cemetery visit would obviously have to be re-scheduled.

Hermione thought hard as she showered and dressed. Presumably the Headmistress had an Elf Register for the Ministry's annual census. Perhaps there were family trees, as well, to correlate with any records the elves kept. What records did the elves keep, if any, anyway? And could she read them? The books said that elves had their own languages, and she knew that they could read and write, so probably they kept records in British Elvish. If that was what it was called. Not for the first time, she cursed the wizarding community's profound lack of interest in anything about house-elves beyond their numbers and ownership.

At breakfast, Hermione sat at the High Table but was unable to interrogate Professor McGonagall because she had been placed at the end, next to Professor Vector. She and Professor Vector had an enjoyable conversation about recent developments in Arithmancy, about which Hermione knew more than, as an Unspeakable, she was technically allowed to say.

'I see that you have continued to follow my subject, Miss Granger,' the Arithmancy Professor commented. 'I take it that your work requires you to maintain an interest in the field?'

The staff must have a good idea of the destinations of those of their brighter pupils who disappeared into unspecified departments of the Ministry – in all likelihood Professor Vector had had to provide a recommendation.

Hermione grinned. 'It does.' Professor Vector lifted her coffee-mug in a slight gesture of salute before drinking and then firmly changed the subject to Ron and Harry and their respective marriages.

The Hogwarts students were beginning to leave the Great Hall, and the enchanted ceiling showed that the snow was now falling in daylight. Professor McGonagall moved over to Hermione and said, 'I am free until the second period, Miss Granger, if you would like to come up to my office when you are ready.'

'I just need to fetch my bag from my room, and I can be with you in twenty minutes,' Hermione replied. 'Is that all right?'

'It is. You remember the password?' At Hermione's nod, Professor McGonagall strode away.

Half an hour later, Hermione was ensconced at the table in the Headmistress's office with her third cup of coffee, a stack of parchment for note-taking and the Elf Register.

'You will see that we have one hundred and twenty-seven house-elves at Hogwarts as of this week, Miss Granger, of whom nine are elflings. The Register records their reference numbers, use-names and elf-names, gender, birthdates and birthplaces, the names of their parents, marital status and any changes of abode during their lifetimes. It also shows their specialities and any black marks they may have against them.'

Hermione found it fascinating. She followed one line across the ledger: 33,408; Matty; what was presumably a longer name in elf-script; female; 23/4/1961; Hogwarts; 32,987 Hobby & 33,006 Milly; gardener. From the blank columns, she appeared to be unmarried, never to have changed her abode and to have a blameless record.

'I'll leave you to your research, then,' Professor McGonagall said, and Hermione grunted an acknowledgement as she decided to start by locating the records of the elves with whom she was already acquainted. Dobby, Winky and Kreacher had all spent time as Hogwarts elves, and she could also look up Dilly and Tabby.

The elves were listed in what she thought of as 'accession order', like library books. For most, this meant that they were listed by birth date, but four of her targets had moved to Hogwarts as adults which should make them easier to find. She decided to start with the most recent incomer, Kreacher.

After staring at the wall behind the table with furrowed brow for a minute, she decided that Kreacher had moved to Hogwarts with Harry in the spring of 1997. That was on the next-to-last page; the house-elves' birth-rate was obviously slow, probably because they were such long-lived creatures.

There, in March 1997. 34,201; Kreacher; an elf-name (she really, really needed to learn the language); male; 26/3/1798 (*good grief!*); Black family residence 23 Milsom Street, London (*Grimmauld Place looks Regency - he must have been born before it was built*); parents unknown; widower (she had an unpleasant thought that perhaps Kreacher's wife had figured among the house-elf gallery at Grimmauld Place); ownership transferred to Harry James Potter 15/6/1996; domestic servant.

Hermione seized her fountain-pen – she had abandoned quills the moment that she had left school – and made careful notes. She then decided to locate a more difficult elf and stood up to approach a painting.

'Professor Lorin?'

'Yes, my dear?'

'I wonder if you could tell me when you arrived at Hogwarts, so I can look up Dilly in the Elf Register?'

'I left Beauxbatons in 1851. Circumstances were difficult in France: there was a good deal of pressure to get the wizarding world's support for the Muggle President, and I was never a politician. It was different in Britain, and I never had any contact with the Muggle authorities during my time as Headmistress.'

Hermione thanked the painting and returned to the Register. With Professor Lorin's information, she was able to find Dilly's entry quite easily, and she duly noted down the facts.

She next decided to find Winky. After more staring at the wall, she worked out that Winky had been sacked by Barty Crouch after the Quidditch World Cup in the summer after her third year at Hogwarts, 1994. So she turned forwards to late 1994 and located Winky's entry.

34,087; Winky; elf-name; female; 10/8/1932; Crouch family residence; parents; unmarried; ownership transferred to Hogwarts 12/12/1994; domestic servant; four charges of drunkenness.

There was something written in the small space under the 'transferred to Hogwarts' entry that was difficult to read. Hermione cast 'Lumos' and held the tip of her wand close to the page.

'Ownership transferred to Severus Snape 8/7/1996.'

What?

Legal texts

Chapter 4 of 7

Hermione studies the law pertaining to house-elves.

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Hermione's heart raced at reading Professor Snape's name unexpectedly. She found her eyes filling and chided herself, not for the first time: 'You can't tear up every time you come across his name. It's been five years. And some day someone will notice.' She swallowed hard and turned to the Headmistress.

Professor McGonagall was gathering up an armful of scrolls: probably marked essays that she was about to return to her NEWT-level Transfiguration class. Nowadays, she only took the advanced students, leaving the younger groups to her assistant. 'Would you like to stay here for a while longer, Miss Granger?'

Hermione hastily pushed together her notes and rose from her seat. 'No, thank you. I think I'll go and consult the law section in the library. But I've discovered something rather unexpected that I'd like to discuss with you later, if I may?'

'Of course, dear. I have classes until lunch, and immediately after lunch I plan to speak to Dilly about your research. Perhaps you could come back here at one-thirty?'

'Thank you. I will.' She stuffed her belongings into her bag and preceded the Headmistress down the spiral staircase before parting from her and heading in the direction of the library.

She immediately regretted trying to traverse the corridors at class changeover time: she was no longer used to the hubbub or the need to anticipate the movements of an opposing stream of bodies who were looking at each other, or in their bags, or at the floor, but never where they were going.

She reached the relative tranquillity of the library with a sigh of relief. Madam Pince was nowhere to be seen, but Hermione was familiar of old with the library's limited stock of books on house-elf matters and made her way to the correct shelf. She dumped her bag on the nearest table and pulled out two legal texts. During her SPEW days, Hermione had been more concerned with the elves' nearly nonexistent employment rights; now, she scanned the chapter headings for the legal process of transferring ownership.

Both books, as it turned out, had nearly identical coverage of the process, which was simple. The head of a family (or someone holding his power of attorney) or the head of an establishment such as Hogwarts (or his legally appointed deputy) could sign an elf over to another person or institution without notice and without the elf's prior consent. The necessary form of words was given.

The following few paragraphs considered various circumstances that might arise to complicate the matter, such as what might happen if the signed-over elf was pregnant (the elfling reverted to the previous owner, once born) or if the new owner did not wish to keep the elf (tough). There were footnotes listing legal cases over a remarkable number of centuries.

So, for the transfer to have been legal, it must have been performed by Professor Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall. Presumably Winky would have been transferred into new ownership once Professor Snape had died, but would this have been recorded in the Hogwarts Elf Register? She had belonged to the Headmaster, not the school. Hermione decided to discuss this with Professor McGonagall after lunch and settled to making detailed notes.

At lunch, Hermione sat next to Hagrid, who informed her that the snow was now nearly a metre thick, and he didn't think that she should try to visit the house-elf cemetery until he had dug out the paths and cleared the tombstones.

'That'll not be until tomorrow at least, after I've cleared the courtyards and the path to the greenhouses. Care of Magical Creatures practicals are off for the time being, along with first-year flying lessons. It may be soft to fall into, but Madam Pomfrey doesn't want them standing in the snow while they listen to Madam Hooch.'

Hermione laughed. 'I saw a few brave souls flying low over the snow in the front courtyard on my way past: they seemed to be trying to lean over and write in it.'

'Sounds as if I'd better get to work clearing up before the Headmistress reads what they wrote then. It can only've been sixth and seventh years: they're the only ones have free periods in the mornings.'

Hermione determined to glance out of one of the windows that overlooked the front court on her way up to the Headmistress's office before Hagrid could remove the evidence.

When Hermione arrived in Professor McGonagall's office, she was still chuckling slightly. The snow had read '**GRYFF 300 SLYTH 0**' in honour of a recent and memorable match.

'I have good news, dear. Once I explained what you were doing, Dilly appeared to be quite interested in talking to you. In fact she seems to be planning a dissertation on the exploits of the Hogwarts house-elves down the ages – you might want to use a dictation charm. I suggested you meet after dinner tonight: will that be convenient?'

'Yes, that would be brilliant. Thank you for arranging it, Professor.'

'Oh, do call me Minerva, dear. I expect we'll be seeing you quite often from now on.'

'I'd be honoured,' Hermione replied. 'Did you have to make excuses for my youth and foolishness?'

Professor McGonagall smiled. 'I simply reminded her that you were an English Muggle-born who had not encountered a house-elf until she was twelve years old. I think that Dilly still regards herself as a Frenchwoman and holds the English to be rather eccentric, especially English Muggles.'

'Perhaps I could speak to her in French, then. I'm fairly fluent because my parents have a holiday home near Gers.'

'Why not? Now, I believe you had found something of interest in the Register?'

Hermione showed her the entry. 'Were you aware that Winky had been transferred to Professor Snape?'

'Good heavens. No, I was not. That is Albus's handwriting.'

'I wonder why he did it?' mused Hermione.

'Oh, I can understand why he might have wanted to transfer an elf to Severus's sole service, though I would not, myself, have selected Winky. Severus needed someone who could help him when he came back injured or distressed without sharing his secrets with the whole body of Hogwarts elves. Especially as Hogwarts has acquired a number of elves from Death-Eater households over the years.'

'I understand that,' Hermione said. 'Harry was far from sure of Kreacher, for instance. But Winky had belonged to the Crouches: why would Professor Dumbledore trust her?'

'It was probably easier to trust her if she was bound to an individual family, rather than to Hogwarts as a whole, actually. And Severus had no relatives to whom she would also have owed allegiance.'

'I wonder who inherited her, if Professor Snape had no relatives? The Register would show if she'd come back to Hogwarts.'

'In fact, the Register should show her current ownership regardless. The personal elves of staff members are included if they live in the castle: Tabby, for instance, is a McGonagall elf who came to Hogwarts when I became a professor. I myself recorded her marriage in the Register. And Severus was still Headmaster when he died.'

Hermione and Professor McGonagall both stared in puzzlement into the crackling fire.

Kitchen

Chapter 5 of 7

Hermione interviews Dilly.

After dinner, Hermione went back to the guest-room and put a plentiful supply of parchment into her bag. There was a spare quill in the drawer of the small desk provided for the use of guests – she Transfigured it into a Dictoquill and added it to her bag with a bottle of ink. Then she made her way down to the entrance hall and took the door to the left of the bottom of the staircase, into the kitchen corridor.

It felt strange to be there for legitimate purposes and without Harry and Ron. She reached the fruit painting, tickled the pear until it became a door handle, then entered the kitchen. It was very warm and smelt wonderful. Cleaned plates were being floated over to stack themselves on the shelves of the huge presses along the walls, and a group of elves was directing flour sacks to empty into an enormous mixing-bowl for the next morning's bread.

Hermione found Dilly sitting in a high chair at a magnificent pigeonhole desk. The elf summoned a second, human-dimensional, chair. 'Miss is to be sitting here. Dilly is pleased to be answering Miss's questions.'

'Thank you, Dilly.' Hermione glanced at the paperwork in front of Dilly, which appeared to be a list written in English with comments against some items written in elf-script. 'Dilly, would it be possible for me to learn your language?'

'French, Miss?'

Hermione smiled. 'I meant the house-elf language. I already speak French.'

'Quand même! Alors, parlons nous en français?'

Hermione agreed and explained the purpose of her project in painstaking and somewhat stilted French. Dilly grew quite excited.

'This is an excellent undertaking, Mademoiselle. Perhaps wizards may develop more understanding of house-elves as a result of your work and more of us will be treated with sympathy and dignity. I believe that all the elves of Hogwarts will endeavour to assist you.'

Hermione noticed that Dilly's French was much less stereotyped than her English and wondered if this was typical of French elves or whether Dilly had received an unusual level of education. She mentally reshuffled 'education' higher in her list of research topics and wondered if she was embarking on a book or an encyclopaedia.

'That would be very pleasing to me, Dilly. I have always felt that wizards failed to recognise the intelligence and magical strength of non-humans, particularly elves, and I hope to redress the balance.'

'Perhaps in a better way than knitting terrible hats, I think?' Dilly asked slyly.

Hermione laughed. 'Without doubt, a better way. I think that this is the right time to remind the wizarding world of the achievements of elves in the first and second Wizarding Wars before memories fade and wizards slip back into complacency.'

'The Headmistress told me that you want to include biographies of certain specific elves, no? Whom do you wish to include?'

'Well, a biography of Dobby is essential. He was a friend of Harry's, and his grave seems to be becoming a place of pilgrimage on anniversaries with people leaving flowers and cards. Do you know if any of the elves here knew him well?'

'He was not at all popular with the regular Hogwarts elves, Mademoiselle. But their opinions are valuable, are they not, even if they are not favourable to Dobby?'

Hermione sighed a little. She accepted that the elves' views did not necessarily coincide with hers, but it was still a matter for regret.

'I would like to include some of the other elves I have met personally,' she said. 'The stories of Kreacher and Winky, who were involved in the war and who both came from notable pure-blood families, would be very interesting. And it would be good to compare your experience of Beauxbatons with Hogwarts and to contrast it with that of someone who was born and raised at Hogwarts. Perhaps you can recommend someone. And Tabby is another incomer, is she not? I wonder if she is willing to be interviewed?'

'She is willing to be interviewed if I say she is, Mademoiselle. I am still the superior elf at Hogwarts.' Dilly drew herself up as straight as her bowed little frame would allow.

'I will ask Professor McGonagall if she can lend me a room for interviews. I can talk to Kreacher at the Potters' house. And Dilly, do you know where Winky lives now?'

Dilly suddenly hunched her shoulders and twisted away from Hermione. 'I cannot say, Mademoiselle.'

Dilly's tone did not imply that she did not know but rather that she had been forbidden to say. Hermione felt a slight shock of adrenaline. 'Do you mean that you know, but are unable to tell me?' she asked cautiously.

Dilly gave a slight squeal and hunched herself over even further, muttering in English, 'Miss is not to ask. Dilly is not to say.' She swung back towards Hermione. 'Dilly has to check lists now. Miss must leave and return tomorrow.'

Hermione suddenly realised that the purposeful sounds of the great kitchen had ceased and she was being surveyed with suspicion by all the elves. She was very aware that she was effectively on probation with the elves and had come close to transgressing.

'Thank you very much for your help, Dilly. I will come back tomorrow. I hope you will continue to be patient with my French.'

She directed a general polite smile around the room and retreated through the portrait-door with as much dignity as she could summon.

She was fully aware that item one on her list of research topics had become 'Find Winky and ask her about Professor Snape.'

Waxed Jackets

Chapter 6 of 7

Hermione visits the house-elf cemetery

Everything you recognise is J.K. Rowling's.

Thanks to my betas [il_grifone](#) and [teamfireyleader](#) all remaining mistakes are my own, as are the inconsistencies in Hagrid's speech: I find him very difficult to write.

As she made her way to breakfast the next morning, Hermione glanced out of the window and saw that Hagrid's paths through the snow were unblurred and the area in front of the main doors looked freshly swept. She peered upwards at the sky and decided that the sky, although grey, was not looking unduly sinister; she hoped that the morning would be free of further snowfall so that she could persuade Hagrid to take her to the house-elf cemetery.

When she entered the Great Hall, she saw that Hagrid was sitting at one end of the High Table, working his way through a huge basin of porridge. She moved to one of the free places next to him, said, 'Good Morning!' and received a slightly muffled reply as she reached for the nearest toast-rack.

After a couple of minutes, the smell of damp moleskins rising from Hagrid's coat suggested to her why he had been sitting alone. She hardened her stomach muscles and

kept eating, deciding that perhaps she would just have one slice of toast and marmalade.

When she saw that Hagrid had put down his spoon and was reaching for his mug, she asked, 'Will you have time to take me to the cemetery this morning? Is the path clear enough? I don't want to put you to any extra digging.'

Hagrid turned to her and smiled; Hermione tried not to look at the oddments of porridge clinging to his beard. 'I dug out the path ter the cemetery yesterday and it's clear enough this mornin'. We could go right after breakfast. Yer'll be needin' proper boots - Professor Sprout's got sum spares at the door ter the greenhouses. Yer'll find sum yer size.'

'I'll get my cloak and gloves, then, and meet you at the door to the greenhouses in twenty minutes. Thank you, Hagrid.' She hoped that the smell of his coat wouldn't be quite so powerful in the open air.

Back in her room, Hermione wondered how she should set about making notes while wearing gloves. After a little thought, she Transfigured a small picture-frame from the mantelpiece into a clipboard and tucked a few cut-up sheets of parchment under the clip, before putting it and her new Dictoquill into her bag. She unhooked her cloak from the back of the door and swung it around her shoulders before fastening it with the caduceus badge that marked her as an Unspeakable, then tucked her Muggle gloves into the cloak's deep side-seam pocket and set off downstairs.

Hagrid joined Hermione at the east door of the castle after she had been waiting for a couple of minutes. Next to the door was an open cloakroom, with low wooden benches where students could sit to pull on their boots; along the walls were rows of elaborate brass hooks that were cluttered with cloaks, hats, umbrellas and, at one end, adult-sized Muggle waxed jackets. The wire lockers under the benches were stuffed with gloves, scarves and muddy boots. Hagrid directed Hermione to a selection of rather ancient and stiff pairs of boots housed under the waxed jacket section. She sat down to try a pair, then stood up and stamped several times to settle them.

'These are fine. Shall we go?'

They emerged from the atmosphere of elderly waxed jackets and damp leather into a clean chill. The air was completely still, though biting cold. The path was clear and dry, with vertical walls of snow to either side which were so straight and even that Hermione realised Hagrid had probably employed his pink umbrella. The flapping edges of Hagrid's coat brushed little wisps and flurries of crystalline snow in his wake as he led Hermione away from the greenhouses, up a low slope beyond which she could just see the edge of the Forbidden Forest. The top of the slope turned out to be one of those misleading convex summits that receded as they climbed, so that Hermione was thoroughly out of breath by the time they reached the top, where there was a plain wooden gate in a snow-capped cypress hedge. She stopped to pant.

'Ere.' Hagrid proffered a hip-flask the size of a hot water bottle.

'No thanks, Hagrid. Too close to breakfast.'

Hagrid shook his head and took a mighty gulp before recapping the flask and stowing it in the recesses of his coat. He pushed open the gate and ushered Hermione through, before turning himself sideways to better squeeze through the house-elf width gap. He gave a surprised sort of snort.

'I din't clear in here they must've done it theirselves.'

Hermione looked about her. The cemetery was quite different from a human one. The paths were of smooth, loose cobbles, the tops of which had been meticulously swept so that they looked as if they were floating in the remaining snow. Between the paths were thick plantings of snow-covered evergreens surrounding small, bowl-shaped clearings that contained clusters of pyramidal blocks which were completely clear of snow.

'Do you think they mind us looking around?' she asked Hagrid.

'I dunno,' he replied thoughtfully. 'They're very private about their homes and maybe they'd be the same about graves. They don't mind me workin' in here.'

Hermione approached the nearest clearing without stepping off the path and peered at the stones. They were engraved only in elf-script, which negated the value of her Dictoquill she could not dictate a language that she could not read. Instead, she drew off her gloves and tucked them into her bag, took out her clipboard and started to draw the inscription on the nearest block. She repeated this for the next block, but by the time she had finished, her fingers were becoming stiff and clumsy, and Hagrid had started to stamp his huge boots on the path to keep the circulation going in his toes. She put away the drawings and replaced her gloves.

'How big is the cemetery?' Hermione asked.

'It's a funny place,' Hagrid answered. 'Takes me a full day ter trim the outside of the hedge. First time, I started to do the inside and I worked all mornin' without gettin' ter the end of the first side. I couldn't even see the corner. It's as if it's bigger on the inside than the outside. I said ter old Solly he was head gardener then that I wasn't gettin' anywhere, and he said ter just trim a bit every time I came in. I'm not sure I've seen it all and I've been groundskeeper more'n fifty years.'

Hermione gazed along the central path, which did seem to disappear into infinity. She wasn't yet sure if she wanted to study the cemetery in detail, but its Tardis-like properties certainly raised a challenge one she wouldn't attempt without asking permission of the cemetery's owners.

'Let's get back,' she said. 'My feet are freezing and I've got to meet Professor McGonagall at eleven. Thank you for bringing me, Hagrid.'

As Hermione went out of the gate, she noticed a house-elf standing in the snow just outside, clearly waiting for them to leave.

'Lo, Wilky,' said Hagrid. 'Just been showing Miss Granger the cemetery. We haven't touched nothing.' He turned to Hermione. 'Wilky's one of the gardeners yeh want ter know how ter prune just about anythin', ask her. Works with Professor Sprout in the greenhouses when new plants come in, magical or reg'lar.' The elf grinned up at Hagrid, but sidled nervously around Hermione to enter the cemetery.

'Didn't know they were still scared of yer, Hermione.' Hagrid looked concerned.

'I think it was something I said to Dilly last night in the kitchen,' Hermione said as they set off back to the school. 'I asked about Winky. Did you know she'd been signed over to Professor Snape?'

'She used ter spend a lot of time with him, I know that,' he said. 'She'd wait fer him if he'd been off the grounds, yer know? In my hut with me sometimes. It used ter annoy him I reckon he talked ter her a bit like he talked ter Neville, to be honest. But she still followed him about. Thought it was because she didn't get on with the other elves.'

'Did she fight in the Battle?' Hermione asked, speeding up to bring herself level with the half-giant.

'I suppose so, seein' as she's dead. I can't remember seein' her fighting.'

'Is she dead, then? There isn't a date of death for her in the Elf Register. In fact, as far as the Register's concerned, she's still at Hogwarts.'

Hagrid stopped and turned towards Hermione. 'I jest assumed. I haven't seen her since the Battle. Hang on, though. She wasn't fightin' that day. She was helpin' the Healers. She was with that St Mungo's chap, Pye.'

Hermione pondered Winky's usefulness to the healing team. Most house-elves made admirable assistants, so long as one took their ruthless literal-mindedness into account, but in Winky this quality seemed to manifest itself as a kind of petulant stubbornness that would probably have driven the Healers crazy. It must have infuriated Professor Snape beyond reason. Still, she would have carried out direct orders: that was built into every house-elf Hermione had met except for Dobby, who had been something of a free spirit. Perhaps fetching and carrying under constant supervision had been Winky's métier. Hermione had an unpleasant feeling that Winky's association with Snape might have been good preparation for battlefield first aid.

'I wonder if Healer Pye knows where she is? Surely the Register would say if she'd moved to St. Mungo's?' Hermione wondered as they reached the cloakroom door.

A/N The two-snakes-and-wand caduceus is not a medical symbol (that is the single-snaked Rod of Asclepius) the caduceus is the symbol of Hermes, messenger to the gods, and represents the wisdom to aid, assist and enlighten.

The Infirmary

Chapter 7 of 7

In which they learn that Hogwarts may be threatened with dragon pox.

Everything you recognise is J.K. Rowling's.

Thanks to PyjamaPants for her hard work on my punctuation and her thoughtful discussion of the number of pupils at Hogwarts I have elected to go with a larger number than Steve suggests in his Lexicon essay *How Many Students Are There At Hogwarts?*

Hermione went up to her guest-room to divest herself of her outdoor clothes, then collected her notes and made her way to the Headmistress's office. As she reached the gargyle, it stepped aside and the wall behind split and disgorged a rather pale-faced boy of fifteen or so who was wearing Ravenclaw-badged robes. He looked startled at nearly running into her but nodded politely before hastening away. Hermione stepped onto the bottom step and was borne upwards to the Headmistress's door.

'Good morning, Minerva. Did you have that lad on the carpet?'

'Och, no. Mr Holdworth rarely presents a disciplinary problem. I had to tell him that his sister is in St Mungo's with dragon pox.'

'It's still going round, then?'

'Indeed. It seems to come in waves every few years. This strain seems to be particularly serious, especially with older children and adults who missed it when they were younger.'

'I didn't realise that it varied,' Hermione said.

'It's like the common cold; there seems to be a slightly different set of symptoms every time. And it's a lot less easy to treat than a cold. I'll need to let Poppy know just in case we get it here: Hogwarts has been relatively lucky in the past, but I suspect that we are more vulnerable nowadays.'

'I wonder if there's been any arithmantical analysis of the outbreaks?' Hermione mused. 'I don't know if there are any wizarding epidemiologists.'

'I have no idea, but I would expect such research to be based at St Mungo's or in your own department.' Professor McGonagall cocked an eyebrow at Hermione.

Hermione smiled. She was not allowed to discuss what actually went on in the Department of Mysteries or even to mention where she worked, but it did not require much insight for someone to realise that she was an Unspeakable from precisely those omissions. She said carefully, 'I am not aware of any current research in that area, and we are a small department. That doesn't mean it hasn't been attempted in the past. I'll ask around; it would fit in very well with my own interests.'

'I intend to speak with St Mungo's later today,' Professor McGonagall said. 'It may be necessary to trace young Miss Holdworth's contacts, and Mr Holdworth was home at the weekend a fortnight ago for a family wedding. I've sent him to Madam Pomfrey who will put him up in the old isolation ward, but if he's infected it's probably already too late.'

'How many students will be at risk?' Hermione asked. 'I can imagine what a full-scale outbreak would be like at somewhere like Hogwarts.'

'Not many, fortunately. Most wizarding children get it when they are small, and Muggle-borns don't seem to be susceptible. The biggest risk is to half-bloods who grew up outside the wizarding community: they aren't exposed until they come to Hogwarts.'

Hermione felt slightly relieved. As there had not been an outbreak during her schooldays, most of her information on dragon pox came from *Hogwarts, A History*, which mentioned several occasions when the disease had swept through the school, causing many deaths. However, Muggle-borns had not formed a large proportion of the school population until the middle of the twentieth century, and the book had not mentioned their immunity. 'Presumably Madam Pomfrey has records of who has already had the disease?'

'She's just looking out the records for me now. In fact, I wonder if perhaps you could postpone your work with the Elf Register for a couple of hours and go over to the infirmary? I know that there are several patients under Poppy's care at the moment who are taking up a great deal of her time and I'm sure she would be grateful for some help.'

'Of course I'll help,' Hermione said quickly. 'It's the least I can do.'

'In that case, I'll call Poppy and then you can go through the Floo here. No reason to hike through the corridors.' Professor McGonagall tapped her wand on the unicorn boss over the centre of her fireplace and a puff of powder was released into the flames so that the fire flared emerald green. She held a short conversation with Madam Pomfrey before stepping back and beckoning Hermione forward. 'Tap again and then step through,' she said.

Hermione tapped the boss and stepped in as the flames turned green again, saying firmly 'Hogwarts Infirmary'. She landed with a jolt in the narrow, upright fireplace in Madam Pomfrey's office, and as she stepped forward the matron immediately swished her wand. Hermione felt the ash and soot being sucked off her, even the small amount that had gone in her nose and eyes.

'Is that a medical decontamination spell?' she asked. 'It's brilliant. I normally have gritty eyes for hours after travelling by Floo.'

'It was a domestic spell, originally. In fact, Professor Flitwick adapted it from one used by house-elves; I believe that it was considered de rigueur to have an elf waiting by the fireplace to cast it on guests as they arrived for parties and so-on. Unfortunately, it is very directional so one cannot use it on oneself.'

'I'd love to learn it when you have time. It should be among a host's duties, and it would prevent people traipsing soot all over my flat. I didn't know that wizards could use house-elf spells.'

'Professor Flitwick has created several spells based on ones used by the elves here. I think they originate more spells than most people realise.'

'Really?' Hermione was intrigued. Another area of possible house-elf research, and perhaps one that her department might fund. 'Still, that's not what I'm here for this morning, and I know you're very busy. What can I do?'

'The student records are here,' Madam Pomfrey said, indicating several long wooden boxes that were lined up on a side table. 'I'm afraid I know of no magical method of searching them for the information we need, so you'll just have to look at each card individually. I suggest that you pull all the cards of students who are potentially susceptible and then separate them by house and birth. The one spell I can perform on them is to re-sort them into the boxes when we have finished, so don't hesitate to make as many stacks as seem useful. There's one box for each year. Well, I'll leave you to get on with it, if I may. I have a couple of students who are regrowing bones after an attempt to sledge down one of the staircases on trays, and they are rather uncomfortable at the moment.'

'Why the stairs, when there's all that snow outside?'

'Unfortunately, I asked the Headmistress to ban the younger students from sledging because it is so cold most of them haven't learnt any warming charms yet. Energy spells require a lot of control. I should have realised that they would be inspired to circumvent the wording of the ban.'

Hermione laughed. 'Gryffindors?'

'Actually, an unholy alliance of Gryffindors and Slytherins. Anyway, I must get on. I'll be back soon.'

Hermione pulled up a chair and extracted the first card, for a Megan Ackroyd. Almost all the information she needed was in the header and the records of diseases suffered before entry to Hogwarts were just below, so she was able to reject Miss Ackroyd immediately as having had dragon pox when she was a toddler. The next, Jack Anderson, was a Muggle-born; the next four, purebloods who had already had the disease. Her next card belonged to a half-blood who had not had dragon pox, so she started a 'Ravenclaw susceptibles' pile and reached for another card.

After about half an hour, Hermione had eleven susceptibles from the first year box. She looked up as Madam Pomfrey came into the office and said 'It'll be lunchtime in a few minutes. Would you like to go to the Great Hall or have some sandwiches here? I'll be staying in the infirmary while my two miscreants are still so miserable.'

'I'll eat here and carry on. I know Professor McGonagall wants to Floo St Mungo's this afternoon and I daresay she'd like to have the numbers by then. I have eleven from the first year, and I'm about to start the second box.'

'I'll ask the elves for sandwiches for us two, then, as well as for Mr Holdworth. I don't think the Skele-Gro patients should eat anything until the stuff's out of their systems; it tends to make people queasy. I'll update the Headmistress while I'm on the Floo at least fifty susceptible pupils, from what you've found so far.'

'What about staff?' Hermione asked.

'Heavens, I'll need to check the teaching and ancillary staff straight after lunch. Most are purebloods and half-bloods. I really have no idea if Professors Hagrid and Flitwick will be vulnerable to dragon pox at all. Professor Chambers and Professor Gowers are both Muggle-borns and thank goodness Firenze and Professor Binns can't catch it. I know Argus Filch must have had it that's why his skin has that greenish tinge. That only happens to people who catch it after puberty.' She gave a distracted sigh and stepped over to the fireplace to Floo the kitchen.

By early afternoon, Hermione and Madam Pomfrey had established that they had fifty-six susceptible pupils, with most being in Gryffindor and Ravenclaw and fewest in Slytherin, and probably only two members of staff, Professor Sinistra and Madam Pince. A quick Floo-call to St Mungo's elicited the opinion that half-giants could probably not catch dragon pox. Professor Flitwick, however, had had the disease as a child. 'But,' Madam Pomfrey said, 'that doesn't really help us be sure about Hagrid, because he had a non-human parent, whereas Filius's goblin ancestry is quite a way back.'

'Hogwarts might not get dragon pox at all,' Hermione pointed out.

'We have to assume the possibility, though. I really think we need a proper meeting with St Mungo's to take their advice on whether we should segregate the vulnerable pupils and whether we should risk Hogsmeade visits and the Saint Valentine's Day Ball. I'll just step through and suggest it to Minerva.'

'I'll bring the pupils' cards,' said Hermione, hastily collecting her possessions and following Madam Pomfrey through the Floo.

Madam Pomfrey gave the headmistress a succinct description of the scope of the school's potential dragon pox problem and repeated her suggestion that they organise a face-to-face meeting with St Mungo's. The headmistress, however, had anticipated them and told them that she and Madam Pomfrey were expected at St Mungo's at four.

'I would be very grateful if you could accompany us, Miss Granger,' said Madam Pomfrey.

'I hope that won't be an imposition, Hermione,' said Professor McGonagall with an apologetic smile. 'I'm sure that an extra mind will be helpful while we are agreeing the necessary arrangements, and Augustus Pye can be a little hard to follow when he is excited.'

'Of course I'll come,' Hermione replied. She wanted to meet Healer Pye.