

## The Doctor and The Detective

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# The Doctor and The Detective

by [Motherof4dragons](#)

## Summary

Hermione

One bad decision would change my life forever. I couldn't have anticipated when I walked home from work that night that I'd bear witness to the murder of our city's most notorious gangster. The bad guys didn't notice me at the time, but I sure have their attention now. I've sacrificed everything with one goal in my life, to be a doctor, and to save lives. Nothing, not the criminals who walk our streets or Detective Harry Potter, the mule-headed cop determined to protect me, is going to get in my way.

Harry

I took a vow to defend and serve. First, in the royal marines, and now, as a Detective for Hogsmeade PD. Women and romance have no place in a life like mine. But from the moment I laid eyes on Dr. Hermione Granger, she's sparked every protective instinct I have. Smart, stubborn, and a little bit of a badass; I can't help it if she reminds me of myself. If I keep showing up at the same places as her, it's only to keep her safe. I don't do relationships after all. However, I'm not the only one watching her now. If she's not careful, I'm going to watch her get herself killed.

## Notes

Ummmmm, Hi! I'm trying something different for this fandom. I hope people like it. I'm horrible at tagging, so if you guys think of something I need, let me know!

# One Bad Decision

## Chapter Summary

Bloody Hell.

"Come on, sweet princess. Tonight's not the time to let me down. Turn on for mummy."

After an encouraging rub on the dashboard and a gentle stroke of the steering wheel, I turn the key in the ignition again. Nothing.

## Chapter Notes

I'm sure there are going to be TONS of questions after this chapter. Hopefully, all will be answered in time. If not, keep a hold of them and I'll answer as I can lol.

The story is set in England, but in an imaginary township so I don't have to worry about being faithful to landmarks and geography. I am NOT from England, so if I mess up, please tell me!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



## Hermione

Bloody Hell.

"Come on, sweet princess. Tonight's not the time to let me down. Turn on for mummy."

After an encouraging rub on the dashboard and a gentle stroke of the steering wheel, I turn the key in the ignition again. Nothing.

Zip, nada, zilch.

The Queen is dead, long live the Queen.

My parents have been on me to get a new car for years; since I graduated Med School at least. But she was the first thing I bought with my own money, and I'll be damned if I give her up without a fight. Sure, Paula (short for Impala) may not look like much, and she may like to tease me now and then, but she's never let me down in a pinch. Day after day, she

turns over like Big Ben's hourly charm. Or at least she did. It looks like I pushed her one trip too far.

It couldn't have come at a worse time either. After one a.m., I should have been off work two hours ago, but the supervising attending on B shift called to say they were going to be late. Being the only senior resident on A shift at the time, it was officially my A&E until somebody showed up to replace me.

I try to coax my car once more, but she just laughs at me via the utter silence coming from the engine. There aren't even any lights on the dash. Maybe it's the battery? Could I get that lucky?

If I had a shift tomorrow, I'd go back inside and sleep on a spare bed somewhere but tomorrow is my first day off in a week, and hell if I'm going to spend it in hospital.

Thumbing my mobile to life, I debate calling my parents for a ride. They'd come, of course, but then I'd have to listen to Mum or Dad or worse, both, lecture me all the way home on how this would never have happened if I'd let them buy me that new car five years ago. Or every time they've tried to since then.

Angelina then.

Angelina Johnson is my best friend in the world and a trauma nurse at Saint Mungos. I barely hit the call button before I remember she's at her current boy-toy's house for the night. She'd come to get me too, but then I'd get the wingman versus cock blocker lecture from her. I know it by heart by now.

Honestly, it's not my fault.

I have these things called standards. She thinks all a guy needs to be good boning material is 'single with a dick,' and I just can't agree with that.

That leaves me walking or the local ride-sharing app. When I open the app on my phone, I cringe at my rating and my most recent review. Angelina and I may have had a tad too much to drink that night, but I blame the unexpected puke party that happened in the back seat of the car squarely on the bloke driving it. If he hadn't taken those corners so damn fast, none of that unpleasantness would have happened. With a rating that low, it could take an hour before someone agrees to pick me up.

Walking it is then.

I live a little over two miles from the hospital, so it's not exactly a trek. However, it is the middle of the night. There's a reason why my hospital treats the most violent wounds in the Borough, and most of those come in on the night shift. I look around the parking lot, taking in the dark corners and abandoned sidewalks.

Still, so long as I keep my head down and my feet moving, it'll be a quick walk back to my apartment. I shove my mobile into my pocket and hit the lock on my door.

With my bookbag tight to my back and my hand wrapped around my pepper spray, I hit the pavement.

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Saint Mungos is in the heart of downtown Hogsmeade District. Our city is broken up into two halves, separated by a body of water large enough to boat across. The wealthy half of town is spread out in outlandish residences and small cookie cutter communities to the east of the lake. On the other side of the bridge, affectionately known as Cheapside to the locals, industrial areas and businesses are interspersed with houses that don't require a dress code to enter.

It also houses eighty-nine per cent of the town's crime and poverty.

The weather is typical for late September. While it's ungodly humid and uncomfortable during most days, at night, the temperature drops until there's a chill in the air wafting from the surface of the lake a few kilometres over. I'm wearing joggers and a long-sleeve running shirt, my typical off duty attire, but I'm thankful I remembered to grab my windbreaker out of the back seat of my car. I hate strenuous activity when the atmosphere is like this. The power walking will keep me warm, but the sweat it produces will chill my skin. It's an excellent way to get sick.

The moonlight and the streetlamps provide enough lumination on the sidewalk that I'm not walking entirely in the dark. The shadows make weird shapes on the cement around me, elongating and distorting images and activating my imagination.

I'm nowhere near the only person walking around the city this late. It's surprising how alive our city is at night. Even if it's a different type of liveliness than you see during the day. It's the type of activity you find when you enter a cave long hidden from the sunlight, yet find it thriving with vitality. There's a whole ecosystem out here that only blooms in the dark.

The air carries the smells of a city laying down to rest. There's moisture in the wind, carried from the lake, and the atmosphere almost feels heavy, compared to the way it does during the day.

Every few metres, there's a body trying to sleep curled close to a building. With shopping buggies filled with belongings and a nest of bedding on the ground, they've made themselves warm and safe as they can be sleeping on Lincoln street downtown.

I pass women on corners chatting amongst themselves while waiting for a potential customer. Several of the ladies I recognize from A&E, so I nod and smile and wave in their direction. There are clusters of men, boys really, trash-talking each other in the glow of a McDonald's arches. The words sound harsh, but the tone in which they are delivered to each other gives proof that the language is just for show. If push came to shove, I'm sure they'd all scatter in different directions.

I hope.

The older men are more circumvent in their activities. Whatever they have going on, they don't want to draw the attention of anyone who happens to make their way down the street.

I keep myself as inconspicuous as I can while still maintaining a watchful eye on my surroundings. 'Make sure your head is on a swivel,' was pounded into my brain from my self-defence teachers, and it's a habit I've kept with me since childhood.

A glance at the street sign confirms I'm less than a mile from home.

A guy walks in my direction thirty meters ahead, but before I can decide whether to cross the street to avoid passing him directly, he takes the decision out of my hands and does so himself.

He smirks at me, not attempting to hide the way his eyes devour my form.

"Don't worry duckie. I won't scare you, none."

I chuckle at the intended insult, but smile tightly and bob my head in his direction, nonetheless. He shuffle-walks himself to the other side of the road.

"Unless you want me to bother you? Cause I have all sorts of tricks up my sleeve to give a good girl like you a fun time."

He's walking down the middle of the street, backwards, and against my better judgment, a real grin escapes my face. A car comes between us heading the same direction as my stranger, and he takes a few steps closer to the other sidewalk to get out of its way. He pays no attention to the vehicle but waits until it passes to start talking at me again. He isn't frightening me, but I certainly have no intention of engaging with him either. I simply shake my head no and grace him with a wave before facing forward once more.

I never slow my pace.

"Oh, come on now. Don't be so cold, sweet cheeks."

The next holler spikes my adrenaline slightly, and I resist the urge to turn around and look at him. His voice sounds further than it had a moment ago, and I can't hear his footsteps anymore.

But he also seems a little offended.

Suddenly tires squeal across the pavement. Whipping my head around to see where they're coming from, I watch the white sedan flip a bitch at the red light. Gunshots break the stillness of the air ringing out in rapid succession.

Pow. Pow. Pow-Pow-Pow.

In the heartbeat it takes me to register what's going on, I swear I see the sonic boom part the air in front of me.

Without thinking, I drop to the pavement, covering my head with my hands and squeezing my eyes tightly as possible. Every echo of the muzzle blast rips through my body like a physical blow, though I remain untouched from the bullets. I can taste fear on my tongue, and my stomach clenches with the need to purge itself of my last meal.

Quick as it started, it stopped. The tire sounds disappear down the opposite way they came from, and silence blankets over the stratosphere. The only noises audible over the blood rushing through my eardrums are the desperate gasps of a dying man coming from across the street.

With my hands still laced protectively over my head, I raise my eyes enough to see my heckler, who moments before was filled with a zeal for playful annoyance, now splayed out on the pavement with his blood coating the ground beneath him.

Instinct and training take over, and with a shove of my hands, I'm half running, half crab crawling across the street to reach him. I hit the concrete with a velocity that is sure to leave my knees bruised when I wake up tomorrow. Ripping my knapsack from my back, I jab the emergency button on my phone and drop it to the ground on speaker.

Yanking my bag open, I pull the first aid kit from inside, only to realize how horribly inadequate it is for the situation in front of me.

"Hang in there, buddy. I'm a Doctor at Lakeside, Dr. Herman. I've got you, sir."

I push him onto his side and internally cringe at the moan that rips from his body. I try to see if he had any exit wounds.

"Emergency, which service?"

I'd forgotten about the ringing coming from the ground and jerk in surprise when the robotic voice bursts into the air. My head snaps in that direction so forcefully I give myself whiplash. The operator pulls my concentration away from my patient and bile rises in my throat. I glance left and right, thinking about the car returning to ensure it completed its job. The only thing that keeps my hands in place are years of training and practice.

"This is Dr. Herman Granger of Saint Mungos. I'm on the corner of," I glance at the street signs again, "Hogwarts and Diagon. I have a gunshot victim, five shots, maybe more. At least two are still in him. Send an ambulance."

I have no way to stop the bleeding on this many bullet holes, but try my best anyway, using the gauze from my kit and then my jacket. I straddle his thighs and try to use my body to slow the seeping of his wounds.

The voice of the emergency operator is still talking, but I block it out, concentrating on saving my patient.

I can't, of course.

I knew that the minute I saw the amount of blood leaving his body. I knew from the first moment my head left the pavement. That doesn't stop me from whispering platitudes and reassurances into the night sky while his blood quickly covers my hands and torso. It doesn't stop the tears that spring to my eyes when I see the life finally leak out of his.



## Chapter End Notes

Yes! There is a story behind Hermione's name. It will be explained!

# DCI Potter

## Chapter Summary

The clock on our dash reads 2:31 a.m. when Ron, my partner, parks a street down from where the first roadblock and crime scene tape is strung up.

I take a breath of fresh air when I get out of the SUV, stretch with my hands over my head, and let my eyes slide over the neighbourhood. The air is crisp and refreshing this close to the lake. But there's a severity to it as well. Something heavy, weighing down the atmosphere.

Blood was spilt tonight.

## Chapter Notes

Drops and runs lol!



## Harry

The clock on our dash reads 2:31 a.m. when Ron Weasley, my partner, parks a street down from where the first roadblock and crime scene tape is strung up.

I take a breath of fresh air when I get out of the SUV, stretch with my hands over my head, and let my eyes slide over the neighbourhood. The air is crisp and refreshing this close to the lake. But there's a severity to it as well. Something heavy, weighing down the atmosphere.

Blood was spilt tonight.

I'd like to say being hauled out of bed in the middle of the night is a rarity for our department, but I'd be lying. I lead the Investigative Unit for the Hogsmeade Police Department. We get hauled down whenever there's something special about a crime, whether it's a robbery gone wrong or cold-blooded murder.

What is unique, however, is the location. With the hospital one kilometre north, the bridge less than three south, and a police outpost two kilometres east, you don't get too many murder victims in this vicinity. Prostitution and petty crime? Sure. We get tons. Not so much for manslaughter. This part of town is by far the softer side of Cheapside. The further out from the bridge you get, the deeper you delve into the sin that infects our city.

We're not a small community, not by a long shot. But we're no Richmond upon Thames either. We don't have a Chinatown, but we do have a Little Italy. And unfortunately, something in the water system seems to breed a special kind of crazy in our criminal elite.

Hence the need for me and mine.

Ron and I take our time making our way to the crime scene. It always fascinates me the way the underbelly of a civilization scatters when law enforcement appears. I could mosey up this street any other night with my badge hidden and see half a dozen people loitering in doorways and street corners. Still, as soon as I need a reliable witness, the whole damn block turns into law-abiding citizens, tucked safely into their beds by ten.

No matter, we hesitate in front of housing units, taking pictures of residents' names on-call boxes and making notes of the hours listed on business windows. I'll send Neville or one of the junior detectives out tomorrow to start canvassing and knocking on doors. Or, later today since it's technically Monday morning.

A whole block is cordoned off with yellow and white crime scene tape. It seems a little extreme for a drive-by shooting. There's something else happening here that I don't know about yet. That's why it's essential to come in a case fresh without other people's assumptions clouding your vision. Not that I don't trust my fellow officers; I just trust myself more.

There are enough flashing lights at the intersection to make the whole area glow red and purple. The CSU floodlights brought by the crime scene techs combined with the red, white, and blue strobe lights of the emergency vehicles are enough to make even the strongest countenance squeamish. It's my least favourite part of working a case at night.

We approach the barrier, and a patrolman lifts the thin plastic in one hand for Ron and me to duck underneath. We give him a nod of respect and thanks, and Ron pauses to ask about his children. But I don't bother with words. Ron is loquacious enough for the both of us. I wait for my partner with my hands in my vest, taking in the scene in front of me.

Beyond the half dozen patrol cars and another two to three undercover sedans, there's an ambulance and the coroner's van parked inside the perimeter. Two detectives from the Narcotics Department have their heads together on the outskirts of the perimeter.

Drug deal gone wrong?

The body is already in a body bag. It's resting on a gurney in front of the coroner's van with several lab techs standing guard over him.

Members of the investigation unit scramble around the area. Two are taking pictures of what appears to be blood splatter on the main drag and sidewalk. One is walking the space with a video camera while two others are measuring skid marks on the pavement. Plain clothed and uniformed officers alike are milling around in clusters of twos and threes, talking about who knows what.

The lights sparkle in my eyes the wrong way, and a feeling of déjà vu crashes over me. The walls of the surrounding buildings close in and then disappear and the taste of a flash grenade fills my senses. I close my lids and count to five, waiting for the nausea to subside. I dig my toes into my boots and will my feet to plant firmly in the here and now.

"I'm going to go walk the outside," Ron calls as he strides purposefully towards the other end of the blockade and just like that it's over. My senses snap back into the present.

Neville Longbottom, my third, is inside and standing with a pair of uniforms and a woman by an ambulance. The lone female is out of place at a crime scene like this, and it sets off my alarm bells. *She* sets my alarm bells off. I take a moment to watch their interactions.

Of average height, she's curvy in her figure, tiny. From what I'm seeing, I could probably wrap my hands around her waist with only an inch or two to spare. Her hair is pulled away from her face and into a high ponytail. Or, what used to be a high ponytail. Currently, it hangs at a weird angle, strands of hair falling over her face. Very, very curly strands. Her clothing is nothing special. Comfortable clothes you'd expect to see on a housewife making an early morning coffee run. Or a jogger running through the park.

What stands out the most is the one-hundred-pound bright pink, fluorescent sneakers covering her feet, and the thick coating of blood covering the rest of her. This is not a girl who belongs on this block at this time of night.

She looks distinctly worse for wear. There's devastation in the stoop of her shoulders, but defiance in the strength of her spine, and suddenly the need to protect this woman races across my membranes.

The back of my neck tingles, and I take an unconscious step forward before jerking to a halt.

Who is she?

Certainly not a plain-clothed officer.

A witness then? But how? And why? What's a girl like her doing on this side of the bridge at this time of night? She doesn't give off the junkie vibe and certainly doesn't look like one of the local working girls.

What went wrong in her life to put her right here, right now?

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As I approach, the uniforms catch sight of me and quickly excuse themselves from the conversation. Neville watches them scatter and grins at my approach. It makes me want to smirk back, but I keep the scowl on my face. Neville is the perkier member of my team, plucked straight from the academy. He's still new enough that he can smile at a crime scene at two o'clock in the morning.

That, and he thinks the way most people are afraid of me is hilarious.

It's not that I'm scary. Okay, it's not *only* that I'm scary. I like my crime scenes run a particular way, and one of those involves talking to potential witnesses without any outside influences. Untrained officers who've made up their minds two seconds onto the scene qualify as outside influences to me.

Neville puts his hand out to shake mine as if it's been months since we've last seen each other and not five hours ago at Seamus's pub. Having been raised in a titled family, proper etiquette and manners were drilled into his head since birth. Fighting an eye roll, I return the gesture and allow him to make the introductions.

"Boss, this is Dr. Herman Granger. She was on scene when it happened. Dr. Herman, this is Detective Chief Inspector Potter. He'll be the lead investigator on the case."

"I'd offer to shake your hand, but—" she holds her hands out in front of her, and I see the blood still thick under her fingernails.

Herman? Immediately my mind rolls through scenarios that would match a body like that to a name so distinctly male. The voice was undoubtedly feminine. They aren't wearing a ring, and there are no other identifying markers to point me one way or the other. Nothing for it then.

"Dr. Herman? Do you mind me asking your pronouns or—?"

I let the question hang in the air between us and am rewarded with a distinctly feminine chuckle.

"I didn't realize street cops were so enlightened. It's Hermione. Hermione Granger. She/her."

I ignore the quip about being a street cop. Seeing Neville's desire to mention the sensitivity training we've gone through on the tip of his tongue I shoot him a look.

"Hmmm," is all I reply.

She bends to grab something out of the bag at her feet and hands me both a business card and her driver's license. I unwillingly make a note of the way her spine curves when she folds herself in half.

"Even in the year 2021, a good portion of our population prefers their physician's male. I use Herman for professional reasons. My legal name is Hermione, though nobody calls me that. I'm known as Dr. Herman at the hospital."

I pocket the business card and hand her license back to her, after jotting down her pertinent information. She lives less than a mile from here, in one of the better condo buildings in this area. It's adequate, but still not where I'd expect someone like her to live. And it doesn't explain what she's doing out here tonight.

"Well, Dr. Granger. I'm sure you're tired of telling the story, but repeat it for me again if you don't mind. What in the hell happened out here, and how did you end up covered in our victim's blood?"

"Before you take her statement, boss, did you see who the victim was?"

I raise my eyebrow in silent question, and Neville motions for our witness to stay put and for me to follow him.

"You're not going to like it."

With a silent nod at the morgue employees standing watch over the body, I tense when the face of my least favourite criminal informant comes into view.

"Peter Pettigrew? Shit."

My vision blurs before snapping back into crystal clear clarity. Death Eater, lifetime gangster, and rumoured to have had a hand in killing my parents once upon a time.

No one could ever prove it, but it was him.

"You okay, Prongs?" Ron asks quietly, blurring the line between boss and friend.

"Yeah," I say distractedly.

I swivel my head around the area, taking in the scene with fresh eyes.

Narcotics makes a shit more sense now. As does the obscene amount of people crawling around my scene like ants.

"Bugger," Ron sighs exhaustedly. "I better call Kingsley."

Our boss. I agree. If they try to take this case from me, heads will roll.

"What in the hell was the Number Two of the Death Eaters doing all the fuck way over here? And without his crew to boot. I'm assuming he was all by himself, yeah? Otherwise, we'd have a hell of a lot more dead bodies on our hands."

Neville scans the scene again, a grim expression on his face.

"Yeah, he was alone. I'll let our witness tell you about it. As for what he was doing this close to the bridge, unaccompanied? Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe his crew found out he was snitching?"

I can't contain my scoff, my fingers itching to fist in frustration. Instead, they flex against the vest pulled tight against my chest.

"Don't be a prat, Neville. His whole fucking crew knew he was a CI. That's how they were able to give us seemingly valuable information and still stay the most powerful gang in the county. He only gave us intel they wanted us to know. Kept narcotics busy while his crew handled their real business."

Their real business being guns, girls, and anything else they could move for a profit. That's another way he was able to avoid going to jail for what happened to my folks. You don't bite the hand that feeds you, and Pettigrew fed us just enough intel to keep him safe.

A flash of neon pink catches my eye, and I turn towards our sole witness. She looks exhausted, but like she's used to powering through anyway. She's bent in half again, this time with her arms wrapped around her knees. She quickly squats, then straightens, stomping her feet and shaking out her arms. Shock? Or is she just keeping the blood flowing after standing in one spot for too long?

"Give me a lowdown of our erstwhile witness, will you? I'm assuming you ran her already?"

Neville gives me a look, before pulling out his phone and going over his notes. Another trick of the new guard. He keeps all his notes electronic. Claims he can type faster with his thumbs than he can write with a pen.

"Hermione Granger, thirty-three; only child, parents live over the bridge. Steady employment history. She's worked at Lakeside for the last five years."

"Did you run her?" I ask, keeping my voice even.

Neville nods his head, pulling up a file on his phone and shooting me an email.

"She's had an ungodly number of parking tickets, the majority of which are still unpaid. She had one arrest in university during the protest of a local magistrate who had allegedly gotten

away with raping several prostitutes.

"Worked a shift and a half at Saint Mungos today when her car wouldn't start. Made the brilliant decision to walk home. Was across the street when it happened. Uni's found her laying on top of Pettigrew. When she couldn't find anything strong enough to stem the bleeding, she tried to use her body weight. He was dead when the ambulance got here."

A do-gooder then.

"She walked alone at night?"

His laugh of derision says it all.

"Yeah, and I thought doctors were supposed to be smart. Still, she tried to save the scum."

"Show some respect, Nev."

I give Neville the comment that look deserves, and he has the decency to look abashed. It doesn't matter that under the right circumstances, I would have killed Pettigrew myself. What matters now is that a man is dead by murder in my city, and it's our job to bring his killer/s to justice.

The doctor, as reckless as it was, tried to save him. For that alone, we owe her our respect. Even if she needs her head examined.

Ron approaches on nimble feet, and we watch in companionable silence as a female uniform offers Dr. Granger a cup of coffee. The good doc smiles in gratitude and brings the cup to her lips. Even though it's CSU coffee, which automatically means it tastes like sewer sludge, her eyes close in bliss, and her shoulders slump in palpable relief. The sight she presents makes something tug hard deep in my chest, and it takes all of my considerable training not to reach up and rub at the ache.

"We good?" I confirm with my second. Ron tips his chin.

"All ours," he confirms.

Well then.

"Let's go talk with our doc fellas."



# Sparks Fly

## Chapter Summary

The night air has dropped several degrees, and the bubble around me is quite chilly now, despite the bustle of people in the immediate vicinity.

I feel the onset of shock and exhaustion trying to worm their way to my frontal lobe and resolutely push all of my feelings back into a corner.

The area around me is bustling, like its own little city. There's even a table set up off to the side, covered with coffee carafes and pastries. Who knew you could order catering at a crime scene? The police arrived first, followed closely by an ambulance, and since then, emergency personnel have been arriving in droves.

## Chapter Notes

Gah! This is so much fun. I hope people like it!



## Hermione

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The area around me is bustling, like its own little city. There's even a table set up off to the side, covered with coffee carafes and pastries. Who knew you could order catering at a crime scene? The police arrived first, followed closely by an ambulance, and since then, emergency personnel have been arriving in droves.

This isn't my first time at a crime scene. But I've never been on this side of it. I usually scoop and run, taking the injured with me.

The detectives that arrived are not at all what I expected them to be. Watching SVU with my folks growing up, (Dad just loves Olivia Benson;) I expected off the rack suits and bucket loads of empathy. Instead, what arrived were giants in combat boots and intimidating scowls.

This certainly isn't my first interaction with the police either. As an A&E doctor, I talk with them on a regular basis. If not daily, then several times a week. But then, it's on *my* turf. I'm in my hospital, in my exam rooms. Plus, it's not me they're looking at. It's the poor soul in the hospital bed.

I can *feel* the detectives watching me from across the street. Yes, I'm not a suspect, but I get the feeling they don't like what I have to tell them either.

It's after three a.m., and I've already lost track of how many times I've described the car and the sound of the bullets ringing out. It's easy to explain. I'm sure it will haunt my dreams for months.

Finally, they make their way back over.

The detectives make quite the sight. The dark-haired one, Potter, I think; stands slightly ahead of the others, who have flanked him on either side. I wonder if they planned it that way, or if they defer to him automatically? Either way, it's impressive, and I'm sure that was the point.

It's not that he's all that big. He is, but no taller than Neville, and not as wide as the red-headed man beside him. But it's the way he carries himself. He reminds me of what my Mum would call a mountain man. There's nothing particularly special about him. He's wearing a black Henley under a tactical vest, light coloured jeans, and boots. With a well-trimmed beard and black messy hair, he's almost putting off a Captain America betrayed by his government vibe. Or maybe more Henry Cavill via Superman, searching for his origins.

Does my comparing him to two different superheroes say more about me and the amount of telly I watch, or more about him and the aura he puts out?

Either way, Mum would swoon.

"I'm sorry about the wait Dr. Granger. If you could run us through the events of tonight, one more time, we'll find a patrolman to get you home. I bet you're ready for a shower."

Detective Neville radiates a good ole' boy hospitality when he speaks, and it helps alleviate some of the tension building between my shoulder blades.

The desire for a shower and my bed surges through me so hard it's my turn to swoon.

"Oh, God, yes. Please, and thank you."

"Start from the decision to walk, alone, in the middle of the night, through downtown Hogsmeade please."

My attention swings to Detective Potter, and the disapproval dripping from his voice. The unvoiced accusation sets my teeth on edge, and I stand up straight as my five foot four will allow. I look Mr. Brooding in the eye, intending to give him a piece of my mind, and a spark of static electricity zings over my nervous system.

His eyes are like emeralds.

Disconcerted, I defensively begin my story.

"Yes, well. My car wouldn't start."

"Make and model?"

I cross my arms over my chest, somehow forgetting the blood congealed into my shirt, then yank them away with a grimace. I cringe as my gaze leaves the detectives for a moment and flicks to the blood dried and caked into my arms.

"She's a 2006 Impala, not that I'm sure what the relevance is."

"Where is it now?"

I look up again, and see Potter has followed my movements with his eyes. They flick over me, taking in everything from the plasma buried in the crevasse of my pants seam to the tremble running through my hands.

I fist my fingers, refusing to let the tremble show.

"My car? It's still in my parking space at the hospital."

"Do you know your license plate number off the top of your head?"

What the hell is this guy's problem? The third guy with them, *not Neville*, has his notebook out and is writing while I speak. Neville is smiling and nodding, urging me along my tale. Potter just stands with his thumbs hooked into his vest at the armpits, boring holes into me with his eyes. I have to resist the urge to squirm.

I pull my phone out, and flick through my photo albums until I get to my important papers folder. I hand my phone wordlessly to Potter, who glances at it for a heartbeat before passing it to Neville.

At his silent assent, I continue my story.

"My car wouldn't start. I debated about calling my parents or someone for a ride but realized I'd be home before anyone could get to me if I simply walked. I palmed my pepper spray and took off."

Detective Potter nods his head, and Neville gives me a reassuring smile. Taking a deep breath, I power on.

"The walk home was fine. I was making good time. The, um, patient, um, the victim I guess," and I cringe, not knowing how best to address the deceased, "was walking the opposite direction of me on the sidewalk. He was yelling at me—"

"Yelling? What was he saying? Did he hurt you?"

Potter takes a half step forward, before catching himself and dropping back between his co-workers.

God, this guy is—intense. His blazing green eyes are boring holes into me, and his fingers stretch and flex across his chest. I run my hands down my legs, ignoring the feel of the slick fabric against my palms. I need to get out of these clothes. I flick my gaze over his shoulder, trying to calm my runaway nerves.

"No. It was playful, or not aggressive at any rate. He even moved to the middle of the street. To avoid scaring me, he said."

" *Were* you frightened?"

The insinuation makes me pull my shoulders back.

"No. I wasn't. He didn't frighten me, but I didn't interact with him either. No need to encourage him. I work in the casualty department. I deal with patients all day long who talk a big game. I can count on one hand the number of times someone physically got aggressive with me. I don't scare easily."

Some emotion flashes behind Potter's eyes, but I don't have the wherewithal to guess what it could be. He dips his chin in a sharp quick nod.

"Good."

I'd hate to be on the other side of an interrogation desk from this dude if this is how he treats his witnesses. The Detective isn't rude, per se. But his posture and tone are incredibly intimidating. I keep trying to turn my story towards Neville, but DCI. Potter's very presence keeps my gaze turning towards him.

"A car drove by us, going east down Hogwarts and I lost sight of him. The victim, that is. We were walking in opposite directions, and his teasing was becoming fainter. Then, I heard tires squealing and turned to see where it was coming from. The car pulled a U-turn in the intersection and came back in our direction. When I heard the first gunshot, I dropped to the ground and covered the back of my head with my hands."

I huff quietly to myself.

"Like that could stop a bullet."

I can't help the self-deprecating tone that slips out. Maybe it *wasn't* the brightest idea to walk home in the middle of the night.

Instead of another lecture though, Detective Potter surprises me. He reaches across the space between us, using his finger to push my chin up.

"No, that was exactly the right thing to do. A hand can't stop a bullet, but it can provide an extra layer of protection against ricochets and shrapnel. It can provide a barrier between kicking feet and swinging fists. When confronted with an enemy you can't beat, flee. If you can't flee, face them with honour. If neither option is feasible, make yourself the smallest target you can. That's what you did. You survived."

He has a scar over his eyebrow, partially hidden by his hair. I clench my fists to stop myself from reaching out and moving his hair out of the way to run my thumb over it. To stop from asking what caused it.

Smiling in gratitude, I take a steady breath and continue.

"When the car was gone, I looked up and saw my patient," *shit*, "um, the victim, on the ground. I could already see the blood pooling around him—two litres at least by then. He bled out right in front of me. I called 999 then grabbed my kit from my bag. It was no help. I flipped him to check for exit wounds. He cried out in pain. I figure when they autopsy him, they'll find five holes, two bullets still inside. I didn't have my wits about me to check for casings or bullets around us. I'm sorry. I knew it was too late. The only way I could have saved him was if it had happened in the hospital parking lot, and I'd had blood and fluids and a shit load of help standing by. Even then it would have been iffy.

"With no other way to stem the bleeding, I climbed on top of him, covering two of the wounds with my hands and using my body pressure on top of that, hoping to at least slow the bleeding. I was still assuring him that he'd be okay when I felt him pass.

"I confront death on an almost daily basis. Sometimes I fight him off; sometimes, I help a soul meet death as friends.

“This?

“This was something different altogether.

"I wish he would have died on impact. Bleeding to death in that manner is not an enviable way to go. It didn't take a long time, but until the shock set in, it would have been very painful. Compound that with my entire body weight squishing him into the rough pavement—it'll be a long while before I can scrub the image from my mind."

If I ever do.

It's somber when I finish rambling. Looking at my audience, I can tell I've hit a nerve. The Detectives have seen the same things I have, but closer. They handle death on a more personal level. I get those that have a chance of being saved. It's their job to handle those that didn't.

Detective Potter breaks the silence.

"Thank you, Dr. Granger. I'm sure we'll have some follow up questions, but I think that's all we'll need from you tonight. You've already given your statement to the officers first on the scene, correct?"

I nod to confirm that yes, I've told this story a half dozen times now.

“And Neville,” I remind them, with a soft smile.

"Were you able to provide them with a description of the vehicle?"

I scrub my hands over my face, past caring about the blood still coating my fingers.

"Umm, yes. It was a white BMW. I think. They said I could come by and look at pictures of cars to see if I can pick it out when I bring my clothes to the station. I understand the chain of evidence from my own work and got an evidence bag from one of the techs."

A wave of exhaustion rides its way down my neurons, and a yawn forces its way out of my face. I try to hide it, to shake it away, but Neville smiles and follows suit after me.

"Don't do that doc," he mumbles as the yawn stretches his face wide. "It'll be hours until I can try to get some sleep."

Potter rolls his eyes in evident exasperation, and I swear I see his lips tip up at the sides.

Maybe.

It's the first sign of humanity I've seen out of him tonight.

"Ron, keys."

The red-headed fellow standing to the left of Detective Potter removes a set of keys from his pocket and places them in Potter's outstretched hand.

I don't miss the look passed between him and Neville, who's still trying to get his yawning under control.

"Stay with Nev. Maybe get him a cup of coffee. We can't have Sleeping Beauty crashing on us before we finish here."

He's talking to the red-head, but his eyes never leave my face. The intensity of his gaze sends a shiver crawling up my spine.

"Dr. Granger, if you'll come with me, I'll drive you anywhere you'd like to go."

Uh-uh. No way.

There is *no* way in hell I'm willingly getting into something as enclosed as a car with Mr. Tall Dark and Intimidating. Like the great genie once said. Phenomenal Cosmic Power, itty bitty living space.

"That's a sweet offer, Detective Potter, but I live just up the road. I can walk home from here."

Three looks of nearly identical incredulity hit me square in the face, and an exhausted giggle escapes before I can swallow it back down. I twirl my finger around my ear as both an explanation and apology at my words.

"Yeah, okay. I just heard it. Sorry. That was barney. I'm going on twenty-four hours without sleep, and the adrenaline has finally left my bloodstream. Let me try that again. Thank you, Detective Potter. I would appreciate a ride home, if you don't mind."

# Too Close For Comfort

## Chapter Summary

The silence is deafening, as we make our way through the buzzing crime scene and back out to the other side again.

“We’re this way,” he tells me and placing his hand on the small of my back, guides me through the police tape and down the darkened road. The brightness of the spotlights fade the farther we get from the perimeter, and this time the shadows on the ground are causing me to double-take in apprehension. As if at any moment, something could pop out of the dark and swallow me.

## Chapter Notes

MASTER OF DYING WILL BE UPDATED TOMORROW!!!!





## Hermione

The silence is deafening, as we make our way through the buzzing crime scene and back out to the other side again.

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Except, of course, for the detective walking beside me, with his fingers stretched across my spine.

Potter must hit the automatic locks button on the keys because the car lights flash in the dark, a moment before Potter steps in front of me, opening the door and giving me room to enter.

“Thank you,” I say quietly, feeling the tension rising between us.

“You’re welcome,” he replies in the same tone, before shutting the door with a quiet thunk.

The driver’s side door opens, and the car rocks when he uses the hand railing to manoeuvre his bulk into the 4X4. It’s not bulk so much as well-honed muscle. He holds himself like only big men do. In constant control of their surroundings.

The radio is on quietly in the background, but I don’t make it any longer than it takes him to put the car in reverse before the oppressive silence eats at my control.

“Thank you for taking me home, but it really wasn’t necessary. The car was parked halfway there. It’s probably like a hundred and fifty metres down the road.”

He looks at me, irritation warring with amusement on his face.

“Speaking of home, what’s a girl like you doing living in an area like this?”

I bristle at his comment, defense of my community and irritation with his assumptions warring for my immediate attention. It probably wouldn’t bother me so badly, if I weren’t so depleted.

“First off, you know nothing about me. So, the ‘*girl like you*’ presumption, totally uncalled for. I may be small, and I may like pink, but that doesn’t mean I’m too gentrified to live on this side of Black Lake. For all you know, I could be running a criminal empire out of my spare bedroom. Second of all, I work in this community. I volunteer in this community; it’s only right I live in this community. It’s a good neighbourhood, with good people. If you’re so jaded you let the bad cloud the good, then I feel sorry for you.”

He pulls in front of my building, without me ever telling him where to go, and throws the vehicle into park. He gives me an appraising look, his eyebrow raised in curiosity, and I roll my eyes at his examination.

“I didn’t mean to offend,” he tells me, and I get the feeling he’s evaluating me again, his opinion adjusting with every jerk of my head.

If only there was a way to tell if I’ve passed his test.

“It’s been a pleasure, Detective Potter.” I lie, reaching for my car door, but, of course, the annoying man follows me out onto the street.

“I’ll walk you up,” he declares, his eyes meeting mine for a moment. They’re so green, it’s almost unnerving. Not hazel. Not green mixed with blue. But bright and stark, like the eyes of a panther. He settles himself behind me, his hand on the small of my back again. I ignore the shiver that runs down my extremities, chalking it up to shock and exhaustion, and not the feel of him crowding close to my skin. I glance over my shoulder, as he reaches for the building’s door, and notice his eyes flicking everywhere. Head on a swivel, his gaze takes in everything, cataloging it away for when he might need it.

I pause in the lobby and point my finger up towards the ceiling. Hoping he’ll take the hint and say his goodbyes, but he stands there with a bland expression, evidently content to continue our stare-off until the sun rises over the horizon.

I huff in exasperation, pulling my keys from my bag and head towards the lift. Wordlessly, he follows me in.

The air is stale in the tiny metal box. The building is ancient. As the lift slowly crawls up the floors, the light illuminating the rising numbers is the only indication we’re moving at all.

I hike my bag higher up my shoulder, catching a glimpse of myself in the reflection of the lift, and the colour drains from my face as I see the extent of the night’s activities clear on my body. I’m a mess, from head to toe. Outside, and in. Tears well in my eyes, even though I’ve managed to avoid letting my emotions take over so far tonight.

When the doors open on my floor, like a protective shadow, or an annoying stalker, Potter immediately steps forward with his hand on my back again, offering me silent support. I hate to admit that it helps.

The warmth of his hand soaks into my skin, and I find myself leaning back into his touch as we walk towards my flat.

“This is me,” I mumble quietly when we reach my door.

He takes the keys from my hands, and the move is so unexpected, I don’t put up a fight until after the deed is done.

“I’ll check the interior. You stay here,” he orders, leaving me alone in my doorway.

I hesitate a moment, two, before my brain finally catches up with what’s happening.

“Excuse me,” I snark, pushing my way into my home and slamming the door behind me. On second thought, I grab the door before it makes contact with the wood, and push it wide open again.

“Don’t you think you should ask before you shove your way into a woman’s house? For all I know, you’re some psycho rapist masquerading as a cop. Get the hell out of my flat, Potter.”

He glances at me, but doesn’t stop his slow walk around my flat. He peeks into every room, his eyes scanning the corners, before pulling the door back the way he found it and then moving onto the next.

“The way you see it, tonight was a bunch of coincidences. From where I’m looking, a prominent doctor was manipulated into walking home in the dark alone, and then shot at in a failed execution plot.”

I drop my stuff to the floor, my hands crossed firmly in front of my chest. I cringe at the crusty feel of my forearms, and think about pulling away, but that would ruin the pissed off vibe I’m trying to convey.

“You don’t actually believe that bullshit, do you?”

He has the grace to hide a small smile before the bland expression falls back into place.

“No, I don’t. You were in the wrong place, at the wrong time. A brilliant woman made a bad decision and is covered in blood as a consolation prize. That being said, anything is possible, and imagine the ribbing I’d take tomorrow if I dropped you off at home and a ninja assassin jumps out and kills you after I leave. I’d lose my Employee Of The Month parking spot, and I need it for my bad back.”

I bite my upper lip, to keep my scowl in place.

“I needed to check your flat, and if I’d have asked you outright, you’d have told me no. Or would you have said yes, if I’d asked politely?”

I seethe at that, letting his words sink into my brain.

“No,” I huff out, acknowledging the truth in the matter. I have to fight not to stop my foot. “I wouldn’t have.” If Neville had taken me home, I don’t think I’d have put up much of a fight. But, something about this man rubs me the wrong way, and I don’t want to give him the satisfaction of knowing that.

“I can take care of myself,” I tell him, lifting my chin in defiance. He watches me for a moment, before the hidden smile is back.

He takes his wallet from his pocket, and I get a glimpse of the badge clipped to the front of it. He pulls out a card, placing it on my counter. His face searches my kitchen, before finding a pen and scribbling something on the back of the card.

“Call me, if you need anything. If you think of anything. If you simply want to talk. My mobile is on the back. Don’t be surprised if Neville and Ron call you and ask you to come to

the precinct. We'll need to go over your statement again. But right now, you need rest. And a shower."

I jerk my head in little bobs in agreement, all anger draining out of me.

Potter closes the distance between us, stopping when he's right in front of me. I tilt my head back to look at him, then tilt it back some more before I can look him in the eye. His hand lifts halfway to my face, before dropping to his side again.

"You're a brave woman Dr. Granger. But there's a fine line between brave, and stupid. Remember that, please, for next time."

Before I can open my mouth with some scathing reply, he's out the door, shutting it behind him.

# From the Top

## Chapter Summary

"Okay, people. Give it to me from the top."

My team is still trickling in from the crime scene and whatever their tasks were afterwards, but the core of my squad is all here.

We're in our conference room in the bowels of the downtown precinct, aka The Lair. I want to blame the slang on our proclivity for watching superhero shows, but truth be told, I inherited the place, and the nickname came with it.



**Harry**

I let my breath out in a controlled exhale after I shut her door behind me. I can't hear anything from the other side of the wood, but I know when her eye hits the peephole, and the

tightness in my chest lessons some when I hear the deadbolt click into place.

I take the stairs back down to the bottom level, needing the activity to burn some excess adrenaline out of my system before I hit the pavement again.

She's feisty, that one. And strong. I've been doing this a long time, and was in the military before that. It takes a special kind of person who can look death in the eye and keep on trucking like she did tonight. She seems to be focusing on the fact that she wasn't able to help Peter. She's not realizing that she could have just as easily died too.

Is that because that's how her mind is wired? Was it automatic to worry about the health and wellbeing of those around her before herself? Or if, when the bullets stopped flying and the blood appeared, she made a conscious decision not to consider how it could have been hers.

I make note of her building; at the lack of a doorman, but the keypad at the entrance. It would be easy to get around. Her door is wood, which means it would take one kick to bust it down, deadbolt be damned. Of course, to someone not as obsessed with security as me, her building is probably the safest on the block. I walk around the corner, and see the ramp to the parking garage, open and unsecure.

Her building doesn't have a CCTV system either. Which makes perfect sense. She doesn't live in the ghetto, but that doesn't mean her neighbours want their activities caught for prosperity.

I don't bother to contain my eye roll.

Pulling out my mobile I hit the speed dial for Neville.

"Sup, Boss?" he says, smacking his gum in my ear.

My eyes slip closed in exasperation, and I suck in a breath to settle my annoyance.

"The scene is yours. I have an errand to run. I'll meet you guys back at the station when you're done."

His stuttering is loud through the dimness of my car, and despite my best efforts, a grin splits my face.

"You're leaving me in charge?" he clarifies, disbelief thick on his voice.

"Are you not a big boy?" I mock him.

"Yes," he replied, offence warring with disbelief.

"Do you need me there to hold your hand?"

"No."

This time his voice holds the baseline of surety.

“Ron will be with you in case you need help. You know what needs to be done. This is a big deal, Neville. As soon as word gets back to the Death Eaters, they’re going to hit the street looking for answers, if they didn’t do the job themselves. We need to get them first.”

“Understood boss, I won’t let you down.”

“I know,” I say, and I try to let my confidence in him shine through. I drop the line, before anything else can be said.

I start the car, but then, on second thought, send Ron a text.

***Me: Keep him on a short leash, but let him take the lead. Meet you at The Lair***

I sit in the driver’s seat for a moment, my gazing wandering over her building. I latch my stare onto where I imagine her flat must be inside the building.

What do you want to bet she walks back to her car tomorrow, instead of calling a tow truck?

It’s not your problem, Harry. She’s not your fucking problem.

I squeeze my mobile tight in my grip, before I make a decision, and bring it to my ear again.

“Dung, heads up.” I say when the disgruntled voice answers after two rings.

“Potter, you bastard. It’s almost four a.m. Some of us have to sleep.”

“Yet you answered without hesitation, Dung. Doesn’t seem like you were asleep to me.”

He huffs in amusement, and I hear him moving around on his side of the mobile.

“Are you ever going to stop calling me Dung?” he asks, a conversation we have at least once a quarter.

“Have you found a time machine? Because the only way I’m going to stop calling you Dung is if they take it off your arrest reports.”

He grumbles into my ear, but it’s not as disgruntled as he wants me to think it is. Mundungus Fletcher, aka Dung, used to be the prominent car thief in the Hogsmeade district. He’d drive over to the Eastside, swipe a supposedly unstealable car, lead local police on a merry chase until he lost them, and then strip the car for parts.

Now he runs a small auto shop on the edge of town and keeps an ear on the underworld for his friends. And since I pay his CI check, that makes me his friend.

“I need a favour,” I say, pulling into the empty road back towards the crime scene. I take a left at the first intersection, easily bypassing the blockade.

“What kind of favour? The kind that gets me paid, or the kind that gets me killed?”

Sometimes, depending on the situation, those can be one and the same.

“Neither. The kind that has me owing you one.”

That gets his attention, and I can almost picture his ears perking up, like a basset hound catching a scent.

“What kind of favour?”

“Well, not the kind that has me lying on the stand for you, but the kind that you can call in at your convenience.”

“The Boy-Who-Lived, in my debt. I’d be a moron to pass up that opportunity. What do you want?”

I hate that nickname.

I take the last turn, pulling into the first entrance available for the hospital.

“Meet me at the employee parking lot for Hogsmeade Memorial. 2006 Impala. Bring your tools. And something to hotwire the car.”

“What the—?”

I end the call before he can ask questions for which I don’t have the answers myself.

~\*\*~

"Okay, people. Give it to me from the top."

My team is still trickling in from the crime scene and whatever their tasks were afterwards, but the core of my squad is all here.

We're in our conference room in the bowels of the downtown precinct, aka The Lair. I want to blame the slang on our proclivity for watching superhero shows, but truth be told, I inherited the place, and the nickname came with it.

Our department is the basement of one of the most prominent buildings downtown. It was state of the art in its time. Only it's time was forty years ago. Now it's stale, damp, and falling apart around us. They've promised us an upgrade, but I'm not holding my breath. That promise is another thing I inherited.

The only good thing about it is it holds all of our local government's administrative portions in one spot. So, if I need to talk to a barrister, I only need to go up four floors, go up one for court, and the lunch ladies in the cafeteria adore me, so I always get my chips cooked hot.

The room we use for meetings is spacious, but in the way an abandoned basement is spacious. Sure, there's room to store all your shite, but without any windows, crappy lighting, and poor ventilation, it's not exactly our favourite place to be. Unfortunately, when I'm not on the streets, it's where I spend most of my time.



There are long picnic-like tables stretched out in the middle of the room, with a rather epic mismatching of chairs. A few of my guys have brought in reclining office chairs. Others sit in simple straight back kitchen-esk seats. Ron, with a doctor's note and a little manipulation, finagled an ergonomic high-backed throne, as he calls it, that he drags between his desk outside and the meeting room in here. Nev, like the devout millennial he is, uses an exercise ball. Claims it keeps his core tight.

It's also why he has a plant on his desk. For fresh oxygen.

A shudder runs through me every time I think about it. My core is plenty tight, thank you very much, and I certainly don't use some bleeding exercise ball to do it.

Silence settles around the room and all eyes turn to look at me, perched on the edge of the front table. My eyes skim the crowd, and then the whiteboards covering our walls. Every board holds pieces of a different ongoing case. But all of those can wait. The murder of Pettigrew just jumped to the front of everybody's to-do list. My lead tech girl is standing behind me, taping pictures of the scene from last night on the empty board behind me.

Neville clears his throat before grabbing his tablet off the table.

"Victim is Peter Pettigrew, white male, 61. Grew up in the life, he worked his way through the trenches until he became number two in the Death Eaters. Killed at approximately 1:43 a.m. this morning at the corner of Hogwarts Avenue and Diagon Boulevard, in an apparent drive-by shooting.

"The ME hasn't finished processing the body, but it looks like our hot doc was right, and between the bullet wounds and the casings we found in the street we're looking at six shots, with five hitting their target.

"The techs have finished processing the scene, but it was too early to start banging on doors. We'll do that this morning."

"Video?"

"We're pulling street CCTV footage in a two-mile radius, just waiting for the email that it's ready, and when we hit the streets, we'll grab all the footage from the neighbourhood that we can without a warrant."

Silence engulfs our group again, until someone on the crime scene team has the courage to ask "So, boss. Did you do it?"

I keep my gaze steady and look our young videographer in the eye.

"Trust me, Creevy. If I'd have killed him, there'd be nothing left to find." Ron sniggers under his breath as Colin pales and swallows thickly. "I certainly wouldn't leave a witness," I add.

One of my plain-clothed officers raises their hand with a shit-eating grin on his face.

"Question. Who is the hot doc, and is she single?"

Neville snorts out a laugh, and I have to dig my fingers into the edge of the desk I'm perched on to keep from flexing them into fists.

"Dr. Granger was on the scene last night, witnessed the murder. You'll have to ask to find out her availability. Her relationship status didn't come up in our investigation."

Neville's eyes flick to me briefly, before back to his tablet again.

I rise from my perch, grabbing a red marker from the table beside me.

Walking to the whiteboard, I write the letters WHY? in big capital letters and underline it twice.

"On top of the usual who, what, when, where, and how, we have an additional question we need to answer. Probably the most important. If we can answer that, we'll be able to answer the rest. Why was Pettigrew in that neighbourhood last night?"

"He was killed forty-five minutes outside his territory. In a neighbourhood where gang activity is slim to none. Find out what Pettigrew was doing there, and we'll find out who killed him.

"Reach out to your CI's, have them reach out to their CI's. Tom Riddle, the Death Eaters number one, is not going to take this lying down, people. If we don't handle this quick and clean, Peter Pettigrew isn't going to be the last body that drops. I refuse to let a gang war break out in my city over this—quick and clean guys, quick and clean.

"Do we have an ETA on the autopsy?"

Neville rechecks his tablet before answering.

"The body is scheduled to be examined at two this afternoon."

"And where are we on ballistics?"

My tech girl, Hannah, takes this one.

"Give us a few hours, boss. The labs didn't even open officially until twenty minutes ago. We're putting a rush on everything Pettigrew, but it's still going to take a little time. What I can tell you is that the rounds were 9mm, and the shots were spread out. I know it's hard to shoot from a moving vehicle, but even so, I'd wager our shooter wasn't a pro.

"Tire marks indicate they were going the speed limit on their way past Pettigrew, then flipped a bitch and peeled out passing him when they opened fire. Tires were Firestone P225/45R18 by the skid marks on the ground."

Ron speaks up from the peanut gallery.

"Dr. Granger is planning on dropping by the station, to look through pictures of cars, see if she can't pick out the make and model."

"Hold off on that," I say. "We may still get lucky with surveillance video."

I toss the marker back onto the table, watching it roll several inches before slowing to a stop.

"Top priority, people. I want this closed as quickly as possible. Ron, take Tonks and Teddy. Hit the streets. Gather all the video you can, knock on doors. Somebody saw what happened. Find out what Peter was doing in that neighbourhood.

"Nev, we're heading into Knockturn, see if we can't grab a meeting with Riddle. We need to give them some answers before they start asking the questions themselves. Or, we need to figure out why Tom would take out his own lieutenant.

"The rest of you reach out to your contacts. Start putting out feelers. Was there a conflict between the crews that we don't know about? What sort of problems is Pettigrew's death going to cause? We need to get ahead of this thing."

I take the time to let my gaze travel over the members of my team. I meet them eye for eye, hammering home the importance of finding those involved with Pettigrew's murder.

"A man was killed on our streets. It's our job to catch the men who did it. Alright, let's move."

~\*\*~

"Remind me again why we don't just scoop them all up and throw them in jail?"

Neville stops the 4x4 in front of the Knockturn's local hangout and lets the car idle rather than turning it off. The brick of the building, once bright and robust, is now dilapidated and sunbaked. Lack of care combined with years of cigarettes being put out and beer being poured against the hardened clay has made the atmosphere dreary and bland.

The neighbourhood is rough. The kind that finds you checking your door locks if you get stuck at a red light driving through it. Or, in reality, the kind where you go five kilometers out of your way so that you avoid crossing the threshold.

But that's only an outsider perspective. To those that live here, this neighbourhood is home.

It's barely 9 a.m., but I'm not worried we won't find them inside. Things like liquor laws and hours of operation don't exactly matter much in this part of town.

"Well, Neville, there are several answers to that question. One, we have nothing to hold them on. That's why men like these have underlings; to go to jail for them. If we *could* get them locked up, it would only be a matter of time until they're back on the streets, running their crews.

"Second, and more importantly in my opinion, for all that Riddle is a criminal, he runs his streets with a moral code. Of a sort. His product is clean, and for the most part he keeps it out of the hands of children. Riddle thinks of himself as a benevolent lord. The God Father of Knockturn, even if he's a pathetic and slightly unbalanced one."

“And that’s good for us, how?” Neville asks.

“Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t. Besides, we could never get rid of him entirely. Even if we shot him point blank, he’d probably just rise from the grave and start over again. The man seems to be impervious to death.”

Ironic, since I got my nickname on the street for the same thing.

I grab the handle on the passenger door, and Neville pulls the keys from the ignition, and follows me onto the sidewalk. His hand reaches to touch his gun, and I place my hand on his, gently pushing it away. They’ve had eyes on us since the minute we hit the hood. Even with the shield on his hip, they won’t talk kindly to him touching his weapon.

The inside of the pub doesn’t quite match its exterior. Neat and tidy, everything is in its place, even if it is well used. There are one or two old-timers at the bar, a kid that should be in school lining up a shot at the pool table, and Riddle and his entourage, sitting at a corner booth.

One of the goons at the table starts to rise, but at a slight gesture from Riddle, resumes his spot.

“Harry Potter, long time no see. To what do we owe the honour?”

His tone is flippant, bordering on bored, and I get a sinking sensation in my gut. I feel more than sense Neville’s eyes flick in my direction, but I can’t risk giving him confirmation either way until we’re out of the snake’s den.

“We’ve come to offer you our condolences.”

He doesn’t react with any visual confirmation, but the thug twitches in his seat.

“Condolences? What’s wrong, *Boy-Who-Lived*?” Riddle mocks. “Someone kill your puppy?”

I hate that nickname. I’ve had it since before I became a cop. Before I started primary school. When I survived the slaughter that killed my parents.

“No,” I say, and send a silent prayer that this doesn’t go to hell. “Someone killed your rat. Peter Pettigrew’s dead. Watched them put him in the body bag myself. Someone is speaking to his mother at right this moment.”

The room freezes, the very air held in stasis. The earth’s rotation stops, before they collectively take a breath.

As one, every person in the building turns to look at Riddle. To take their cue from him.

“I apologize, sincerely, Tom. I thought you would have known by now. I didn’t realize I’d be the one breaking the news.”

He picks at the wrapper of the bottle in front of him, and I give him a moment to collect himself.

“How?” he asks, his voice bland and lacking emotion. His face is an unreadable mask. The emotion is in his hands, and the way they tremble as they pick, pick, pick, at that label. He wraps his fingers around the neck of the bottle, and I tighten my muscles in anticipation of him throwing it across the room.

“That’s what I came to ask you.”

His gaze jerks up to meet mine as he shoves his way out of the booth, anger radiating from his every pore. The bottle flies through the air, the weight of the half gone liquid giving it heft, whizzing arse over end before smashing against the wall.

My eyes flick to the side, and the person behind the bar reaches behind them and comes back with a sawed-off shotgun sitting on the countertop.

“You think I had something to do with this? Think I killed my own man. My best friend? Fuck you, pig! Get the fuck out of my pub. We’ll handle this ourselves.”

Neville rocks on his feet next to me, but I tuck my hands deeper into my vest, setting my toes into my boots.

“Peter was by the river, Tom. Hogwarts and Diagon. What was he doing there at one in the morning?”

“Do I look like his keeper?”

I let the moment stretch between us, feeling the air go heavy and stale.

“As a matter of fact, Tom, yes, you do. No one does anything without your say so around here. No one makes a move without your knowledge. So, I gotta think, if your number two was in that part of town at that time of night, you gotta know something about it.”

He stands a little taller, pulling his shoulders back and finding his equilibrium. The people in the bar squirm in their seats, not wanting to acknowledge the truth of my words. And what it must mean for them that Pettigrew is now dead.

I speak, before he has a chance to respond.

“Let the police handle this. Let me do my job. Dead bodies dropping on the corners while you look for the person to finish isn’t going to do anyone any good.”

I take a step forward into his personal space. He takes a step back, but looks me in the eye.

“I promise, I’ll find the son of a bitch who killed Pettigrew, and I’ll make sure he spends the rest of his life in prison. No matter how long that life may last. But don’t take matters into your own hands Tom. Not yet. Give me a chance to find who did this, and punish him properly.”

“They deserve to be dead.”

“Isn’t death too quick a punishment?”

“Who said it would be quick?.”

“Stay out of it, Tom. If you find anything, you call me. Don’t get in my way.”

He’s silent for a heartbeat before he gives a small jerk of his head.

“Get out of my pub,” he growls.

I turn on my heel, and follow Neville out of the building. The itch between my shoulder blades spreads into a burn. I’ve never liked giving my back to an enemy.

We’ve barely hit the sidewalk before Neville’s mouth is on the move.

“Think he did it, boss?”

I wait for him to unlock the car, before dragging myself into the 4X4.

“Nope. I don’t.”

“Think he’ll leave it alone.”

He starts the car, and the air conditioner blows warm air onto my face.

“Not a chance in hell. We’re officially on the clock. We have to find whoever did this before they do, if we don’t want any more bodies in our morgue. Let’s hit the street.”

# What Is An Alpha Man

## Chapter Summary

“Make it go awaaaaayyyy.”

The light from outside the window is filtering through my curtains. There’s a single ray of sunshine slipping from between the panels bright enough to cut glass, penetrating my eyelids and boring daggers into my skull.

I roll over onto my stomach, grabbing my pillow and using it to smother myself into the mattress, then I have to spit out a mouthful of hair as my sleep crazy curls try to smother me. It doesn’t work. Part of the pit falls on being an on-call doctor. Once I’m awake, I’m awake.

## Chapter Notes

Remember, I'm an American trying to write a British fic. Be kind lol.



## Hermione

“Make it go awaaaaayyyyy.”

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Then the chirping starts from my bedside table.

“Urrrgh.”

I yank my pillow from my head, throwing it at my imaginary assailant across my room.

Funnily enough, it doesn’t stop the sound.

It’s been chirping for an hour at least. But without the sun gleaming in my face, it’d been easy to ignore. Now the beeping appears to get louder with every bleep of the notifications chime.

I shove my hair out of my face, then reach for my mobile while still laying on my belly. The time on my mobile tells me I slept for a solid five hours. The ache in my body feels like I slept on a pile of rocks.

There’s a pile of messages, and I open my app, flipping through what’s important.

***Hospital: Daniels went up to room 416, surgery scheduled for 3pm***

That’s a sigh of relief. I had a patient come in with a bowel obstruction, and the surgeon on call wanted to wait to see if it would pass on its own. To say I strongly disagreed would be the understatement of the week. I submitted an official complaint to his supervisor, then asked the charge nurse to keep me informed of the patient’s progress.

I’m going to have to avoid Dr. Knob Head for the immediate future, but at least the patient is getting surgery. Knob Head isn’t going to be pleased that his initial patient plan was overridden.

***Guilt Trip: Not a problem, Mia. See you when you get here.***

Mum. I sent a message to our family chat before I collapsed into bed that I wouldn’t make brunch this morning. We normally try to get together at least once a week for brunch and cocktails. Or brunch and orange juice, if I have a shift that evening. I was debating about



cancelling altogether, but if I go too long without visiting, then they come looking for me. They're my parents, and they can always tell when something is wrong. Even if Mum is on a "when am I getting grandbabies?" kick and I've taken to avoiding her calls. Besides, a hug from the people who raised me might be just what the doctor ordered.

***Angelina: Missed your call? What's up? BTW, Zabini's dick? Could move mountains.***

Ugh. Her I text back right away

***Me: I'll tell you later. And Ew!***

The last message is from a number I don't recognize. It came through about six thirty this morning, right after I fell asleep.

***999-999-9999: Dr. Granger. I took the initiative and had your car brought back to your flat. It's in your assigned spot. My car guy replaced the battery and the positive battery terminal. I left his note and his card on the dash. Call him if you have any problems. DCI. Potter***

***999-999-9999: Also, we'll be in touch about you dropping off your clothes from last night for evidence, and will probably need to speak to you again to go over your story, in the event the case goes to trial. DCI. Potter***

***999-999-9999: I hope you slept okay.***

I read through the trio of messages, then read through them again, my incredulity growing with each pass.

The fucker fixed my car? It's got to be a joke. Or he sent it to the wrong number. Maybe his wife was having car problems too. Because I know there's no way on this planet that Tall Dark and Doucheey would overstep his boundaries so freaking far as to move my property without asking.

I mean, that's grand theft auto.

Right?

I drop my mobile to the bed before crawling off and running to the bathroom. Five minutes later I'm wearing shorts, a tank, and a pair of flip flops with my mobile and keys crushed in my grip running down the stairs into the underground parking garage that sits beneath the building.

That stupid, foul, cocky little—

Sure enough, sitting in spot 304, is my poor little Paula, rebuking me in silent condemnation that I allowed strange men to fondle under her hood.

The doors are locked, and I yank my keys from my pocket, before unlocking the door and diving inside, turning the key in the ignition.

She purrs to life without a moment's hesitation, the clock on the radio already reset to the correct time. There's a note on my dash, in chicken scratch so sloppy he could be a doctor, with a mobile number, and an itemized list of things they checked. There also seems to be computer codes at the bottom, with a sentence about telling my mechanic if he asks.

That high handed over-bearing...

I pull the texts back up on my mobile, then hit the dial button next to his number.

"Potter," he answers, without any salutation.

"WHAT THE HELL YOU INSOLENT, POMPOUS, TOSSER?"

I hear him excuse himself from whatever I interrupted, before the noise levels around him lower substantially.

"You'll have to be more specific than that."

My anger whooshes out in a huff, and I run my fingers through my tangles before pushing out of my car.

"Oh? Make it a habit of ticking off women, do you? Why am I not surprised? Well, let me refresh your memory for you. You kidnapped my bloody car! You and your bloody God Complex. Mr. Tall Dark and thinks he can do whatever the fuck he wants. Is that what it is? Does the badge on your hip usually let you get away with this sort of shite? Or do women like it when you kidnap their babies?"

I'm pacing the length of my car, and my voice is echoing horribly in the parking garage. Anyone who caught sight of me would think I'm a bloody lunatic. I don't really care.

"I mean, I thought you were presumptuous last night, pushing in and doing a walkthrough of my home. But this? This is beyond the pale. I should call the police. I should press charges. Have you arrested for kidnapping?"

"Kidnapping?" he parrots, and I swear I hear him smiling.

"Yes! Kidnapping. You stole my car! I'm sure you didn't tow it here, so that means you what? Hotwired it? I mean—" My voice putters out into furious stuttering, and he uses the opportunity of my incoherence to speak.

"Did it start alright?"

I want to hang up the mobile, but the lack of a slam would really defeat the purpose. Instead, the sincerity in his voice pulls an answer from my lips despite the inferno raging inside me.

"Yes."

I don't sound like I'm pouting. I don't stomp my foot either.

“And you slept okay? I mean, sometimes it’s difficult to sleep after a traumatic event like that.”

Again, the answer slips out without my explicit approval.

“I slept fine, thank you.”

“Good. You’ve got my number. Ring me if you need anything.”

Just like that, I’m standing alone in the middle of my parking garage with a perfectly functioning car, and the desire to punch Detective Potter in the face.

The bastard hung up.

~\*\*~

“I’m here,” I holler into the foyer of my parents living room, slamming the door behind me with slightly more force than strictly needed.

I love coming here. For all that it’s much too big for just the two of them, they’ve managed to give their house a homey lived in feel. If you didn’t know better, you’d think they’d lived here for half their lives. In reality, since the day I left for college, they’ve followed me across the world. First, Stanford in California, then Atlanta for Emory Medical, then back to Britain and Hogsmeade when I started my residency. I have no doubt that if I don’t get a fellowship and permanent position in Hogsmeade, they’ll pack up and follow me again.

“In here, honey.”

Here, being the sunroom Mum has set up to paint in. Mum is an artist, and Dad works with the stock market. Theirs is a quintessential case of opposites attract. As different in looks as they are in personalities, still, they’d die to protect each other.

And me.

I drop my bag off on the table, kick my shoes off at the door, and follow the sounds of Lady Gaga into the sunroom. Or the drawing room, which is what I prefer to call it. Because that’s why they hang out there; so, Mum can draw.

I place a kiss on each of their cheeks, Mum at her easel, and Dad with his tablet on his lap sitting in a lounge, before dropping onto the couch.

There’s an open bottle of wine and two glasses on the table, and I reach for the goblet closest to me, taking a healthy swig.

“Sorry I couldn’t get here sooner guys. I’ve had a hell of a day.”

Does the shooting count as today, since it was after midnight? Or does it still count as yesterday, since I hadn’t gone to sleep yet when it happened? Maybe it counts as yesterday for me, but today for all the first responders pulled from their beds to handle the aftermath.

The thought of first responders makes me think of Potter, and I feel the scowl slide over my face.

“What’s happened, Easy Peasy?” Dad asks, pulling my feet into his lap and digging his thumb into the ball of my foot.

I moan in ecstasy, and take another sip from the wine. I smile at the childhood nickname I can’t seem to break my Dad from using. When I was learning how to talk, apparently, I couldn’t say Hermione. It came out Easy until I started speech in primary school. Somehow, the nickname stuck. My mum calls me Mia, a nickname one of my teachers gave me, but my dad calls me the miss-matched name of my youth almost exclusively.

I take another quick sip of wine, my parents giving me identical questioning gazes, before I lean forward and place the mostly empty glass back on the table.

“Okay. First, you’re going to be cross. At me. Like, a lot, probably. But then, after I finish the story, you’re going to be quite irate on my behalf.”

“Okay,” Mum says, hesitating, making the two-syllable word break into four. She puts her charcoal back into its case, and moves to sit in the chair next to Dad.

I reach for the wine one more time, swallowing down the remaining droplets in the glass.

“It started with my car.”

~\*\*~

That could have gone better. I glance up from where I’ve been staring in my lap for the last ten minutes, waiting for Mum to catch enough breath for me to get a word in edgewise. I fought back when she yelled at me that we were selling Paula first thing tomorrow. After all, I’m 32 years old. I’m well past the age where my parents can force me to do anything I don’t want to do. But then she crushed a charcoal pencil in between her fingers, and I thought that maybe I’d better just shut up and take it.

It seems the wind is finally puckering out of Mum’s sails however, and she collapses back into her chair, from where she’s been pacing the last five minutes.

Is this where I get my temper from? Did I look like this four hours ago in my parking garage? Dad picks up the bottle of wine and refills both of their glasses, before giving me an accusing look. He takes the empty bottle from the room, leaving me to deal with Mum on my own.

“Did you hear what I said about him kidnapping my car, Mum? Certainly, there’s something we can do about that. Can’t you call your lawyer and ask?”

She stands to lord over me again.

“I know exactly what I’m going to do. I’m going to call his office first thing tomorrow and offer to shake his hand. From the sounds of it you’ve treated him horribly, and he was still nothing but a gentleman towards you.”

It's my turn to stammer in righteous indignation, and I shove up from my chair while Dad comes back with two bottles of wine this time. Mum does the same, staring daggers at me from three feet away.

"You're staying over, yes?" Dad asks, already assured that the answer is what he wants it to be. He hands me a bottle of my favourite pale Moscato, and pours two goblets of white for he and Mum.

"Don't I get a glass," I huff, already bringing the bottle to my lips. It's a small bottle anyway.

"Do you need one?" he quips at me with an eyebrow raised.

"Not particularly," I sass back in my best fifteen-year-old in a tizzy attitude.

"Sit down dear," Dad says to Mum, dropping a kiss on her cheek and handing her the bottle of wine. Mum does as dad says, taking a bracing gulp of the wine as soon as her arse hits the cushion.

"I for one," Dad says, doing his best to play peacemaker, "want to hear more about this Alpha Man. It's been a long time since anyone got your knickers in a twist, no offense intended dear."

I scoff at the outrageousness of his statement. One of the pitfalls of being raised by quasi hippies is they have no qualms whatsoever of talking about my love life. Or lack thereof.

"Well, offense greatly taken! And what the hell is an Alpha Man anyway? Is that another word for self-indulgent asshole?"

Mum titters in disbelief, placing her wine glass on the table and reaching for the tablet.

"Why did we waste all that money on your schooling if you didn't learn anything important? An Alpha Man is the king of men. The one they all strive to be."

"Speak for yourself," Dad mutters under his breath, before sipping another draft of wine. Mum ignores him, and instead hands me the tablet. It's a YouTube clip of Chris Evans helping Regina King up the stage stairs at the Oscars.

I suck down a surprised breath at the same time I try to swallow from my bottle, and end up spewing the beverage in a spectacular arc across the couch and table, coughing and sputtering as it shoots out my nose. The tablet drops to the floor, as my parents lurch out of their chairs, one grabbing for the bottle, the other grabbing for me.

My sinuses burn with the intensity of the beverage I just shot out like a super soaker water gun, and it takes me longer than I'd like, with snot running from my nose and wine dripping from my chin, for my coughing to subside and my breathing to return to normal.

My parents never leave my side, asking me questions I can't answer and rubbing my back in an attempt to ease the pain. And the white-hot embarrassment now surging through my body.

“Why,” I pant out, my voice wheezy from the tightening of my vocal cords, “did you hand me that?”

The word *that* spits out, as if I’m referring to a poisonous python, instead of an adorable video of America’s favourite superhero.

Mum looks at me like I’m mental, before picking the undamaged tablet up from the floor and gingerly wiping the droplets of my explosion from the screen.

“I was using it as an example. An Alpha Man. You don’t get much more Alpha than Chris Evans. Strong, smart, well mannered, athletic, gentlemanly. Falls in love with a nice British girl in that movie. Watch how he jumps up from his seat to offer Regina his arm, all without taking the limelight off of her.”

“It’s very dreamy, I’ll admit,” my father contributes to the conversation.

“Why did you spit a forty-quid bottle of wine out through your nose when I handed it to you?” Mum asks, amusement pouring out over her words.

I bring said bottle back to my lips, slowly letting the liquid coat my tongue. Only when I’m able to swallow several gulps without issues do I answer Mum’s question.

The wine was a great idea. Which means I’m going to regret this tomorrow.

I avoid her eyes, looking somewhere over her shoulder. I’m never going to live this down.

“My first thought, when Tall Dark and Wankish was introduced last night, was that he sorta looked like Captain America. In *Infinity War* when he was all dark and brooding. Only with pitch black hair and green piercing eyes.”

I was right. Mum swoons.

Dad, who doesn’t drink all that much, and so is already half-way pissed, decides to hop into the conversation.

“According to Wikipedia, in studies of social animals, the highest-ranking individual is sometimes designated as the alpha. Males, females, or both, can be alphas, depending on the species. Where one male and one female fulfill this role together, they are sometimes referred to as the alpha pair.”

“Ohhh,” Mum says, warming up to the subject, “Brangelina!”

“Sweetie, they aren’t together anymore. I don’t think they count.”

I really should put an end to this. Once they get rolling on a subject, it can be hard to get them to stop. But I’m afraid if I drag them away from—whatever it is that’s happening right now, they’ll circle back round to their yelling at me.

So, I guess I’m learning about the Alpha Man tonight. I pull out my mobile and do my own Google search.

“Okay, fine. Urban Dictionary says,” and this I could get behind, “*“ The man at the top of the male dominance hierarchy. This prototype of a man typically displays all of the conventional masculine traits that are considered toxic today. ’ See! That’s what I’m saying guys. Toxic masculinity!”*”

Mum, however, follows up right behind me.

“Not so fast, cherry picker. It also says, ‘ *The hallmark of his persona is 'confidence'. The man that conducts himself with such class and possesses a swagger that attracts most women to him like a magnet; also, he's usually calm when it comes to pressure.* ’ What do you think Mia? Did he have a swagger that attracted you to him like a magnet?”

I'm-I'm not having this conversation with my parents.

“He had a swagger that made me want to kick him in the balls.”

Dad gets up from his chair, coming to plop down on the couch next to me. He still has his mobile in his hands, and moves so that we can both see the screen.

“What do you think, Barb? Who’s your favourite Alpha Man?”

They order Chinese to be delivered, and grab another bottle of wine from the cellar, and I spend the next three hours with my favourite people on the planet, comparing pictures of the celebrity Alpha Man.

It’s like last night didn’t happen at all.

Plus, I think I was right. Harry is more Superman than Captain America.

# Unannounced

## Chapter Summary

Angelina and I are in the kitchenette in the A&E, where we keep crackers and beverages for the patients. On the counter sits a coffee pot of regular and decaf, and hot water for tea, kept filled on a twenty-four-hour basis by whoever sees it getting low. We have a break room tucked away from the primary patient care areas, but this is much easier when all you need is a quick pick me up and a place to gossip between patients. It's large enough for a fridge and a table and not much else.

## Chapter Notes

This chapter was short, so I combined it with the next.



**Hermione**



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I thought about taking a sickie. After all, I had a ready-made excuse. One day off after what happened doesn't feel like enough. But the hospital is my happy place. I never feel as at peace as I do when I'm helping someone feel better.

It's slow this morning, or as lackadaisical as an inner-city A&E room ever gets. I pulled Angie with me into the kitchen area to give her a rundown of my latest adventures and the conversation with my parents that followed it. I was hoping she'd be on my side. I should have known better.

"Oh, yes! I love me an Alpha Man. I only have two questions for you. Is he cute, and how big is his dick?"

*Alpha Man.*

Right.

Apparently, I'm the only human on the planet not aware of that term. Of course, I am. Mum is right. I really should read more romance novels.

"Ugh, Angie. No. You sound like my parents! Did you not hear what I told you? The asshole hotwired my car. And why does no one seem to care about the bullets whizzing by my head."

Instead of sharing my irritation, her eyes cloud over in concern, before quickly lighting up in excitement.

"Oh sweetie. I know. What happened to that guy was just terrible. But your car? That is so hot. It's a shame you weren't with him when he did it. Then he could have given *you* a ride. I bet a man like that could drive a woman wild."

Her face scrunched in anticipation. I swear a tiny shiver runs through her body. Angelina is a goddess incarnate, and the intimate movement momentarily makes me wish I was bi. She reminds me of Ashley Graham, but better. Tall, thick, and gorgeous, her skin is dark as ebony. Even in plain black scrubs, she radiates sex appeal. This month her hair is bubblegum pink, but you never know what you'll find one day to the next. You'd think it would clash with the wine-red lipstick always coating her lips, but you'd be dead wrong.

She's got a chip on her shoulder the size of Stonehenge and the attitude to back it up. She's the best damn nurse in the hospital. The best friend too. Despite her constant desire to get me laid.

I shake my head in exasperation of her relentless sex drive. That woman could make *Penthouse* blush. Pouring myself another mug of coffee, I try to shove the now graphic image of me riding Detective Potter squarely out of my brain.

"Eww, and again, no. Besides, this whole thing is your fault. I wouldn't have walked home if I thought you'd have picked me up without a lecture on interrupting your sexy time."

"No. Nonononono. You do not get to blame this on me. It was your bright idea to jaywalk at two in the mor—"

She trails off into a confused silence as I drop to a squat and push my back up against the cabinet of the countertop tops.

"What is he doing here? What is he doooooing hereee?"

God dammit!

Instead of scolding me for my sudden imitation of a two-year-old, she whips around in anticipation, eager to see what caused my age regression.

"Oh Herman, *please* tell me that snack of tall, dark and scrummy is the detective you've been winging about for the last forty-five minutes. Because if so? That moronic walk in the dark is the best decision you've ever made."

She purrs out the word best, and now it's my turn to shiver. What is he doing here? Keeping my moments as small as possible, I turn so that my front is pressed against the cabinets, rising from my squat enough to peek my eyes over the counter.

My haven is being violated, and the only thing separating me from the object of my ire is a pane of glass and forty feet of hospital hallway.

What an arshat. He could have at least called before he showed up unannounced. Of course, if he'd called, they wouldn't be unannounced then, would they?

Potter and the proper mannered one are stopped in the middle of the clearing, talking to Dr. Binns at the nurse's station. Gone are the vests from the other night, to be replaced with something much more intimidating — undeniable sex appeal.

Fine. I admit it. He's hot. It doesn't mean he's not an asshole.

"Quick, which one is he?"

"You seriously have to ask?"

The nice Detective is wearing more of what I think of when one thinks of a homicide cop. A cheap suit, slicked back hair, and I see what looks like stains from a jelly donut. He's probably a good ten years younger than Potter, if not more.

"He's wearing a Henley, Herman."

Her sing-song voice says it all, and I drop back below the cover of the counter. I rest my forehead against the cupboard doors and try to get my galloping heartbeat under control. I love Henleys.

Love them.

Don't ask me why. I couldn't tell you. It's not as if they are the be all and end all of men's fashion. But ever since I watched that first episode of Dexter and saw the way his muscles flexed in his serial killer uniform, a man in a Henley just flat out does it for me.

Potter is wearing a torso hugging cerulean blue Henley and a pair of black fitted jeans that, if I was looking, make his arse look phenomenal. His beard is neatly trimmed, but his hair is loose and wild. Not like it's supposed to be that way either, but like he honestly didn't take the time to run a brush through it this morning. Or like a woman has been running her fingers through it. He looks good enough to eat.

I hate him for it.

"Unless you want him to catch you on your knees, and please, *please* let him catch you on your knees for him, I'd get up off the floor quick. Ghosty's pointing them our way."

Usually, I'd lecture her on using Dr. Binns's sex name in my presence. She knows I hate that. Plus, eww, *again*, that I even know he has a sex name. Another fault I can lay squarely on my best friend's shoulders. She claims it's because when he slides inside you it makes you shudder. Like a ghost walking over your grave. That's a detail I should not know about the man that signs my evaluations. Today, I let it pass. I have more important things to worry about.

"Hide me!"

Crawling on my hands and knees like an infant, I stop when she's in front of me then use her hips as leverage to pull myself into a standing position. Never one to let me down, she blocks me entirely, standing in such a way to let her breasts and personality take up as much space as possible while I get myself together.

"Before they get here, can I have him? Please?"

God. Yes, please. He deserves whatever Angelina gives to him.

"Done!" I whisper-yell beside her. Faster than lightning, her clip is out of her hair, and she's bent in half, flipping her mane in a mermaid arc on the way back up.

By the time I hear the masculine voices, my composure has been regained, and Angelina is practically purring beside me.

~\*\*~

I'm regretting talking to my parents right now.

No, I never regret talking to the people who raised me.

The wine during the conversation may have been a poor choice. In the seconds remaining before the detectives join us in the coffee room, the list of characteristics of an Alpha Male that Dad pulled up on his tablet runs rabid through my mind. Potter certainly has the pleasing to the eye part down.

The young one reaches his hand out for mine, and when he smiles, it reaches his eyes. I smile in return, giving him a warm squeeze. Flicking my eyes to Potter, he's staring again, but without the warmth that his partner has.

Angelina is positively glowing next to me. Though nothing interesting is going on, her gaze is flittering between the two men as if she's watching a tennis match.

"Dr. Granger, it's so good to see you again. I hope you've recovered from your experience the other night."

My eyes land on the young one, and I give him my full attention.

"Yes, thank you so much. I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name."

"It's not like you had more pressing matters on your mind now, is it? It's Longbottom, Neville Longbottom. But please, call me Neville."

Neville is positively charming, a glowing warmth radiating from his every movement. Potter, on the other hand, seems content to stand in silence watching our interactions.

He doesn't reach for my hand, so I don't bother either. Is he angry with me, for what I said to him yesterday? Not that I really give a shite. He shouldn't have kidnapped my car.

I sense Angelina appraising them and doing evaluations in her head. Watching her take down a man is like watching a mathematician work a blackboard. Part science, part art, and part imagination. It's a beautiful, beautiful thing to behold. She flicks her eyes between them, then makes her move.

"Are you a detective too, Neville?"

That's... *not* the move I was expecting.

Angelina used her dumb voice.

Ah man.

I sigh internally, knowing what's about to happen.

Her eyes are wide. She sweeps her fingers lightly across her chest, like she's never seen anything as fascinating as the man in front of her. Just like that, I see the hook sink deep into his soul. He's as good as hers. What happened to taming the asshole?

"Yes, ma'am." Potter turns his head slightly to the younger man, his eyebrow raised in a silent rebuke. "Or well, I'm an investigator. I joined this department straight from the academy."

I swear his chest swells to twice its size with those ten little words. His uppercrust accent went from barely there to a hunter on the prowl. Or, maybe, a little boy trying to please a princess. I have to drop my gaze to stop the laughter from escaping.

"Oh my. How brave you are. I'd love to hear more about it. I've never had the opportunity to talk to a real live hero before."

She bats her eyes at him, posture leaning towards his every word. No man alive can withstand Angelina when she's set him as her goal. Honestly, it's fascinating to watch. Neville opens his mouth to respond, but she turns her whole body to face Potter, effectively cutting Neville off at the knees. His face kind of stutters, wondering without words what the hell just happened there.

Ouch.

"We're so rude. I'm sorry, I didn't introduce myself properly. I'm Angelina Johnson. What's your name, handsome? Herman didn't tell me that so many good-looking men came to her rescue Sunday night. I was so afraid for her when she told me what happened. Thank you for taking such good care of my friend."

She reaches to shake Potter's hand, and he responds automatically, engulfing her hand with his. The bait and switch. Her eyes widen a fraction of an inch, and she pulls her bottom lip between her teeth, sighing slightly as their hands slowly separate.

She's good.

"DCI Harry Potter, ma'am. Most people call me Potter, or Harry. There's really no need to thank us. Your friend took care of herself. We just came in afterwards to clean up the mess. Now, if you'd excuse me, I'm here to talk to Dr. Granger."

No wonder he gets on my nerves. I hate the name, Harry.

Mimicking her move from moments before, he shifts his posture so that she's out of his direct line of sight and puts me squarely in the crosshairs.

Great.

"Well, I'll be damned," Angelina whispers so quietly I can't be sure she meant to be heard. She sounds awed, but I can't see why. The man is insufferable.

"How can I help you, Detective Potter?" I inquire.

I debate about mentioning the incident with my car, but decide I'll wait to say something until he does. I'm still not sure how I feel about it. Okay, I know exactly how I feel about it. It pisses me the hell off. I seem to be the only one who's had that reaction, however. Everyone else I've talked to seems to think it was sweet that he arranged to bring my car home, even if he had to hotwire it to get it there. Besides, I think I made my opinion on the matter pretty clear yesterday.

Still, though, I'm not apologizing for what I said. The man is an overbearing asshole.

"First and foremost, we wanted to check and see how you were doing. I know you said you're used to death, but being around men dying and watching men be killed are two different scenarios. The station has a counselor we can recommend if you need it."

Seriously? I work in a freaking hospital. Neville twerks his head in a bemused expression, but doesn't add to Potter's words.

"Thank you, but I'm fine. I appreciate the concern."

God, damn it. I'm going to have to apologize.

"I'm sorry about yelling at you yesterday. I was—" Narked? Irritated? Pushed beyond my mortal limits? "It was kind of you to bring my car home. I apologize for how I reacted."

It comes out rushed and clipped, and I cringe on the inside. So much for waiting until he brought it up.

"Your car?"

There's that same strange look from Neville again, but Potter doesn't do anything other than nod his head in acknowledgment and spread his fingers at his side.

Angelina, probably sensing my need for rescuing, takes my hand and gives it a squeeze. Nerves bubble in my stomach. Why the hell did I bring up my car?

"We wanted to ask you a few more questions about the other night if you're up for it?"

My mind blurs with irritation that they just assume, in the middle of the workday, that I'd be able to drop what I was doing and come at their beck and call. Then, it surges with the desire to help catch whoever killed my patient this weekend.

Because that's what he was. Above all else, he became mine, my responsibility to care for, the minute I laid my hands on him.

"Of course, but you'll have to give me a moment. I'm technically in the middle of a shift. Angelina, could you entertain the Detectives for a few minutes while I let Dr. Binns know what's going on?"

It takes a moment for Angelina to respond. She seems to have gotten sucked into the blue of Detective Potter's shirt or something. She angles her face towards my voice, but her eyes never leave the detectives.

"Yeah, Sweetie. I'll call Sue on my walkie, let her know I'm staying with you for emotional support."

"Yeah, okay." I turn to face Potter, giving him a look that says I'm telling you, and not asking. "It's okay if Angelina stays, right?"

Neville looks to Potter for confirmation, and at his slight nod of approval, Angelina gives them one of her most brilliant smiles. I head out of the room to the sound of Angelina

offering the detectives coffee or tea.

~\*\*~

Dr. Binns is in the same spot he always is and assures me it's okay to take all the time I need. I haven't told anyone outside of Angelina and my immediate supervisors what happened this weekend, but as he falls into that chain of command, he already knew. The look of pity on his face makes me want to kick him in the shin.

I take my time returning to the kitchenette. I'm in no hurry to answer questions about Sunday night. Besides that, it won't do to let Mr. Drop Everything and Do What I Tell You, to think that I'll, well, drop everything whenever he tells me to. While I have zero issues with helping with the investigation, I do have a problem with him stopping by without warning me first.

The man seems to have zero understanding of personal boundaries.

They're sitting at the table when I come back in, mugs resting in front of three of the four seats.

Surprise, surprise; Potter seems to be the one spot without. I bet he doesn't drink coffee. I bet he doesn't need to eat, either. He's probably some inhuman robot.

He stands when I enter the room, pulling out the chair next to Angelina for me. After I lower myself into it, he gently scoots it back to the table until folding himself into the seat in front of me.

Why does he have to be a gentleman? It's so frustratingly attractive.

It certainly doesn't go with his pushy personality.

*The Alpha Male knows how to treat a lady. He respects women, often because he's had some great ones in his life.*

Is that what this is? Did his mother instill in him the ways to be a gentleman?

Angelina winks at Neville, and his answering grin is ear-splitting. Then it immediately slips from his lips when he sees Potter giving him a bland expression. If anything, that just makes Angelina smile wider.

Once again, Potter doesn't pull out anything to take any notes. He leans forward slightly with his forearms on the table and turns his eyes back to me. Jesus, he's intense. His eye contact is bordering on intimate, and I resist the urge to squirm in my seat.

"Do you mind if I record you?" Neville asks, "It makes it easier to make connections away from the conversation."

He hesitates with his hand halfway back into his suit jacket and pulls out a USB recorder at my nod of consent.

The four of us sit in silence for a moment, and at some unseen signal between the boys, Neville starts the inquisition.

"First, let's talk about before you saw the deceased, Peter Pettigrew. What was the environment like before that point? Was anyone aggressive with you? Did you see anything suspicious? Did anything stand out as out of place?"

I think for a minute, but nothing really comes to mind.

"Not really. There were prostitutes, but that's not unusual. No one even spoke to me except—Mr. Pettigrew; Peter, I guess you said his name was. There were teenagers hanging in groups. They were trash-talking each other, but not in a serious sort of way. I didn't get any indication that anything violent was about to go down. No one was making an attempt to watch, or an obvious attempt to be ignored. Nothing set off any warning bells."

Neville is making notes on his mobile, Angelina is holding my hand, and Potter appears to be pondering the meaning of life.

"Let's talk about Peter. Where did he come from? When did you first notice him?"

I close my eyes for a moment to try to recollect, then open them to respond.

"No, keep them closed. It'll help. You're walking down the street; the air is cool against your skin. There was a slight breeze. Maybe your hair was blowing. Remember the weight of your bag on your back. The feel of the pavement through your shoes. What did you see?"

Potter's hand lands on top of my own, and my eyes drop to where his thumb is pressing into my wrist, before looking up to look at him. He nods at me in small reassuring jerks, and I do as he says, and close my eyes again.

Potter starts to speak, to paint the picture of Hogwarts Avenue at one a.m. at night. His tone catches me off guard at first, but the timbre of his voice is pleasing to my ears. The way he touches me is soothing. Comforting.

And he's right, dammit. Closing my eyes does help.

"He was directly in front of me, walking down my side of the road. I didn't see where he came from. I was just past the corner, and it was half a block until another intersection. If he came from one of those streets, I didn't see it. There was still plenty of space between us when he left the sidewalk."

"Did you see him interact with anyone else before he got to you?"

"No, he—."

I let my head fall backwards, trying to picture it clearly in my mind.

Potter's thumb rubs soothing circles into my wrist. His voice, deep and penetrating, calms my ragged nerves. And then he has to go and fuck it all up.



“That’s okay. It’s common to not remember much after an attack.”

Suddenly, what was once comfort, now sounds condescending.

I open my eyes and glare at them, frustration building in my chest.

“I’m not an idiot, you know. No matter what everybody seems to think.”

“No one is saying that you are,” Angelina soothes, a questioning look in her eyes.

“Yes. You are. Everyone has told me how stupid I was. The detective here says it with his fucking tone of voice, and the way he assumes I’m some pathetic little female who needs him to hold my hand.”

I yank my fingers out from under his, and he leans back in his seat, lacing his hands together on the edge of the table. He hums low in his throat.

“I knew it wasn’t a good idea to walk home. I wouldn’t let a woman walk alone that late, even in my parent’s neighbourhood. But I can take care of myself. I know how to be inconspicuous. But I also know how to watch my surroundings. So no, I didn’t see him talking to anyone else. I didn’t see him interact with anyone. I kept my head on the swivel, looking for signs of trouble, and my patient appeared from the shadows straight ahead, and didn’t interact with anyone but myself.

“You need to drop this poor little her attitude at the door. I wasn’t the one attacked, I’m not in shock, and I’d appreciate it if you’d stop treating me like a trauma victim.”

“Okay then,” Potter says, looking me in the eye. I take a deep breath, fighting the urge to apologize for my outburst.

I put my hands up in front of me, flexing my fingers, before closing my eyes.

“I was considering moving to the other side of the road, to get away from him, but he beat me to it. He didn’t move to the other sidewalk, though. He was walking down the middle of the street. He was hitting on me in the way construction workers hit on birds in old Pepsi commercials. Terms of endearment that were rude enough not to be effective but not so insulting that I would get offended. When the car came towards us, he shuffled to the other side of the road.”

My hands end up palm up on the table, and Angelina immediately wraps my right hand in hers. I sense Potter’s hand move closer to my own, but he doesn’t touch me again.

"I remember the car. It was a white BMW. I'm positive. I looked at pictures online yesterday."

I squeeze my eyes tighter, and Angelina strengthens her grip on my other hand. I squeeze back hard, then separate from her completely. Her closeness is pulling me out. As if he can sense it, Potter's voice leads me back in.

"The car. Tell me about the car. How was the paint job? Were the windows tinted or could you see inside? Did it smell like marijuana?"

I nod my head and try to think of the car.

"The windows were tinted. I didn't pay enough attention to the paint job to notice anything special about it, but I don't remember any body damage. It was a newer model. 2018 and above. There wasn't a smell coming from it, but there was a slight scent from Peter himself. I didn't notice if the car turned onto our road or came straight on. I was trying to watch everything at once while not being observed. Admittedly, by that point, Peter was taking up a good portion of my attention.

"The car passed us by without slowing. It gave no indication of what was about to go down. I heard the tires squeal maybe ten seconds after it left my line of sight. After the first shot rang out, I hit the ground and didn't look up until the air was silent again. By then, the car was gone. Peter was in the same spot I last saw him in."

I see it play out in my mind, like a slow-motion picture. My eyes fly open as it dawns on me. I know most people wounded in a drive-by shooting don't expect it. But Peter, he had no idea what was about to go down.

"He wasn't expecting it."

I'm sure they realized this already, but to me, it seems like a revelation.

"He made no move to run, no move to get out of the way. He didn't even have the chance to cover as I did. I messed up the crime scene by trying to save him. I realize that now, and I'm sorry. But he didn't run. He didn't try to save himself. He dropped where he was. He was still facing the bloody car."

Potter's expression is as neutral as ever, but there's a sea of thoughts and emotions cresting behind his gaze. He gives me the briefest of smiles. Not even; just an uptick at the corners of his lips, really. Still, suddenly I feel like I've won the lottery. A buoyancy I haven't felt in days rushes through my system like a brushfire.

At Potter's motion, Neville reaches up and stops the recording, slipping it into his pocket again. Angelina envelopes me in a hug. Taking comfort in her teddy bear embrace, I inhale the scent of her perfume. When we separate, she looks at me with pride and fierceness in her eyes.

Thank god she's on my side.

She turns to the boys, a smile on her face.

"Well, that was intense. I think we deserve a drink after that. How 'bout it, boys? Cold one on us tonight? I promise we won't keep you out too late."

Neville pounces at the suggestion, and I let Angelina make plans to meet Neville at a local pub.

I rise from the table, and Potter follows suit, leaving Angelina and Neville to finish up their conversation. Potter has reverted back to unnerving mute, observing rather than participating

in the goings-on. I find it interesting that Potter says so little, but Neville obviously defers to him. Another part of the Alpha Man's qualities rattle off in my head, and this time I don't resist the smile.

*An Alpha Man is a leader not because he chooses, but because he has no other choice. As if those around him can sense grace and a warrior's heart, others follow him wherever he will lead them.*

"Thank you for your time, Hermione. I suppose, I'll see you tonight."

Hmmmm. He's back to Hermione, instead of Dr. Granger.

"You can call me Herman. Everybody does."

His eyes twinkle in amusement, but his cheeks don't even twitch.

"No. I don't think I can."

Potter reaches out to shake my hand, and the coarseness of his palm feels rough against my own. He keeps me in his grip longer than strictly appropriate, the power emitting from him palpably. As the connection is sliding from uncomfortable to *uncomfortable*, he lets my fingers slip from his grasp.

Angelina and Neville hug, and I know from the look on Neville's face she whispered something dirty in his ear. He doesn't know what he's in for, poor guy. She is going to eat him up, and spit him out alive. With a final nod, Potter turns to leave, Neville following in his wake.

We're silent as we watch them walk away. I can admit I'm admiring the view. The man does have one fine arse.

"Hey, Herman?"

"Mmm, hmmm?"

Her voice sounds distracted and far off. I spare her a glance, then return to watching the retreating detectives' backs. A few more feet and they'll turn the corner.

"Can you go get me a pregnancy test?"

Now *that* gets my attention. Moving so I'm directly in front of her; she's still watching the hallway over the top of my head. Her cheeks are flushed, and she's fanning herself with her hand.

"Oh, my God. You're pregnant? How? When? Why are you just now telling me?"

Angelina takes her bottom lip between her teeth and makes a sound that's half pain, half pure sex.

"Yes. I am absolutely one hundred percent pregnant. The way that man was staring at you? Mmmm, it just knocked me the fuck up."

# Easier Than I Expected

## Chapter Summary

What was Pettigrew doing there?

What was he doing so far out of his territory? There weren't any drugs on him, no weapons. He doesn't have any known associates on that block.

So, what was he doing there at nearly two o'clock in the morning?

It's the one question about this case I don't have an answer to.

That, and who killed him.



**Harry**

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That, and who killed him.

I lean back in my chair, tossing the golden stress ball with fluttering wings that relieves absolutely zero stress into the air and letting it fall back into my hands.

"What was Pettigrew doing there?" I ask the empty lair.

It's after ten. Everyone else went home hours ago.

I twist my neck around on my shoulders, relishing the pop of tension as joints merge and snap. I suppose it's time for me to go home too. I'm not going to magically divine the answers staring at The Lair's stained ceilings.

I grab my coat from my chair, and open my drawer, checking the chamber and clip of my gun before slipping it into its holster.

It's more habitual than breathing at this point.

My weapon is strictly another part of my body; like a hand or a foot.

I never leave home without it.

I'm halfway out the door when my mobile rings a familiar ringtone.

"Uggghhhhh."

I can't ignore it. The one time I do is when he'll be tied to a chair and the strippers are walking out with his wallet.

Though it would serve him right.

"What do you want, Neville?"

It's loud in the background behind him, and I remember that he's at the pub with the girls.

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm going home with Angelina."

Of course, he is.

"Good for you, Nev," I laugh. "Wear a condom."

"The hot doc is still here."

Hermione Granger. The smile falls from my face.

“Don’t call her that,” I snap at him automatically.

I’ve made it to my bike, and I swing my leg over the body, settling my bulk onto the seat.

“She’s probably going to walk home again,” he sing-songs. He’s had one too many beers, if his dippy tone of voice is anything to go by.

“No, she’s not,” I say firmly, already knowing what he’s getting at.

He spent half the day talking about the doctor and her friend. That is until I threatened to punch him in the nose. I spent the entire day thinking about her.

“You’re probably right. She’s made quite the impression tonight, as I’m sure you can imagine. The girls are a right sight better than what we normally get through the doors. I bet any one of Hogsmeade’s finest hanging out here tonight will be willing to drive her home.”

My eyes close and breathe through my nose as I pray for patience.

“Spit it out, Neville.”

“Come make an appearance, before we take off for the night. I’m worried about leaving her on her own.”

I stick the key in my ignition, then hold my mobile with my shoulder, so I can twist the clutch and hit the start button. She purrs to life underneath me, and momentarily blocks out Neville’s whining. He has an audience now, or maybe a choir, because people are trying to coax me to the pub in the background.

I’ve just about made up my mind to hang up on him when he starts to yell in my ear.

“He won’t admit it yet guys, but he’s on his way. Let’s hear it for Prongs!”

I shake my head.

Neville is pissed.

Perfect.

I hit the disconnect button on my mobile as a rousing chorus of cheers bursts through the line, and I’m surrounded by the peace and quiet of my bike once again.

I have to go now, if only to make sure the man-eater returns him to me in one piece.

I drop my mobile into my pocket, grab my helmet from the back of my bike, and contemplate how quickly I can get out of the pub once they get me in there.

~\*\*~

“PRONGS!”

I freeze two steps into the building, the screaming of the patrons an assault on my senses. My eyes scan the crowd, taking in the familiar faces of my co-workers, and the regulars that sit along the bar. Neville's affable personality seems to have garnered him an entourage, and he's sitting at a squad of tables pulled together, regaling his audience with who knows what.

From the gales of laughter turned my direction, and the way he beams up at me in a drunken lopsided smile, I have a feeling it's not going to be good for me.

"Har-ry! Har-ry!"

The chanting starts quietly, before morphing into a sound that would rival that of a stadium arena, and I know that any hope I had of making a quick escape are gone.

I lift my finger at Seamus behind the bar, indicating that I'll take a beer. Seamus was on the job before he bought the pub, and the pub was owned by another bobby before him. The place reeks of stale liquor and gunmetal, but he's got cheap ale on tap, and that's all most of us care about at the end of a long shift.

I sometimes wonder who will inherit the building next. If I'll be one of the old-timers, mocking and giving advice to the rookie cops sitting at the bar twenty years from now?

I don't bother to take my jacket off. Hopefully I won't be here that long. As I approach the tables, a younger detective abandons his seat, gesturing for me to take it.

I wink at him, and he startles, then smiles broadly before gesturing to his friend.

"Knock it off you heathens," I bellow above the racket, gesturing for them to calm down with my arms, and they titter off into raucous laughter.

I nod my head in thanks to the kid who made room for me, before lowering into the chair.

"What sort of nonsense have you been telling our beautiful guests, Neville?" I ask with a half-smile on my face. "Don't believe a word he says, ladies. Especially if they're chanting Prongs. Total bollocks, every word."

"Nice of you to join us," Ron says, lifting his beer in salute. A rookie, whose name I don't remember, hands me my pint before retreating to the bar again. I lift my beer in acknowledgement, before taking a healthy swig.

"Unlike you swine, I was trying to solve a case. Besides, what are you even doing out this late, Ron? Isn't it past your bedtime? I figured Luna would have you all tucked in by this hour."

He throws his head back and laughs good naturedly. There's some truth to my words. Ron is definitely a family man. At almost eleven, we're past when he's usually home with his wife.

"You see, Prongs, when you're a good boy, your wife gives you special treats. And I was a *very* good boy last night. And again, before I left for work this morning. Luna needs time to recover. Hence, I get to hang with the boys."



Cheers and encouragement of his prowess surge among the group, and Ron pretends to take a bow.

“And the girls!” Neville adds, grinning in a devilish way, raising his glass in a sloppy toast. “Don’t forget the girls.” Angelina is sitting next to him, cheeks pink with heat, but I don’t think she’s nearly as sloshed as he is. She has a bottle of water in front of her, and seems to be more high off life, instead of anything consumed in the pub.

Hermione is sitting two chairs down, locked in conversation with a constable from patrol, with the guy on her other side listening with rapt attention. Her eyes flick to me as I settle myself, but she doesn’t acknowledge my presence.

“Speaking of girls,” Neville says, and a hush falls around the bar, “I hear you had a fun interaction with one the other day?”

“I did?” I ask, at a genuine loss to what he’s talking about. I haven’t had any *interactions* in months, and even those were nothing to write home about.

“Steal any cars lately, Prongs?” one of the older patrolmen asks with a smirk, and the whole bunch burst into laughter again, slapping the table and whooping into the air.

My gaze trails to Hermione, where a blush creeps up her throat and blossoms into her cheeks. She mouths the word, ‘sorry’ to me, before sucking her thumb into her mouth and biting on the tip.

Something stirs in my gut, and I bring my gaze back to the inquisition.

I roll my eyes in an obvious manner, then take another swig of my beer, before raising my arms and bringing the tables to order.

“Alright, alright, alright. Yes, okay. I had her car brought back to her house. I apologize if my Uncles raised a gentleman. She’d had a hard night. I thought it only right to arrange to have her car there when she woke up the next day. Laugh it up all you want, yolk-heads. I regret nothing.”

They’re silent for a moment, before laughter explodes throughout the space, echoing and redoubling until I’m chuckling along with them.

“You ready?” Angelina asks Neville, who nods his head before chugging back the rest of his beer.

I catch Angelina’s attention, then point my beer in her direction. “You know, Ms. Johnson. It was Johnson, yes?”

She leans forward in her seat, giving me an ample view of her cleavage. I catch a glimpse of Hermione out of the corner of my eye, and her amusement is plain on her face.

“Please, call me Angelina. Ms. Johnson makes me think I’ve done something naughty.”

She says it in a sultry tone, her innuendo coming across loud and clear. The drunkards at the table hoot and holler, giving her the response she was looking for, but Ron quickly shushes them to silence, to better hear our interaction.

I sit up in my chair, mimicking her posture. I clasp my hands together on my knees, giving her my full attention.

“Well then Angelina, take a good look at my boy there. He may be a pain in my arse,” and Neville exclaims in indignation, “but, unfortunately, he’s my responsibility. If it were the other way around, I’d say you were too far past the point of consent. You really think I should let him go home with you?”

Hermione snorts, then covers her mouth with her hands. The men at the table immediately come to Neville’s defence, assuring anyone who would listen that he’s been offering his consent since long before he got shit faced. Angelina, however, seems to grow under my stare, her smile widening until its bursting ear to ear.

“An excellent point, DCI Potter. I’ll tell you what. You have my word that I’ll take him home and deposit him into bed. I won’t pop his cherry until he’s sober. I won’t even suck his dick for him.”

“You bastard,” Neville exclaims, slamming his fist onto the table. He’s looking back and forth between us like he doesn’t understand how his night went so wrong, so quickly. One of the older detectives is laughing so hard I’m afraid he might fall off his chair.

Angelina reaches out her hand across the table, and I grasp it in mine, giving it a firm shake. She jerks her head to the side.

“Take my girl home, would ya? You already know where she lives, and I don’t want anybody trying to pop her cherry either.”

Hermione reaches over the man on her left and smacks her friend on the chest, but she’s laughing all the same. I nod my agreement and push up from my chair. There’s only a little bit left in my bottle, and I swallow the rest down, before pulling out my wallet and leaving a twenty on the table.

This was easier than I expected.

~\*\*~

Neville is still grumbling when we make it outside. Hermione too, for that matter. I pull my keys from my pocket, check the time on my mobile, and watch with amusement as Angelina firmly handles her friend and her soon to be conquest.

She gives Hermione a tiny shove in my direction, before latching onto the front of Neville’s shirt.

“I’ll take this one with me. You make sure that one gets home safe,” she says to me, effectively ending any arguments. She leans forward and hugs Hermione one handed,

dropping a red lipped kiss onto her cheek. “Text me when you get home, sweetie, so I don’t have to hunt the Detective down and surgically remove his balls for him.”

I accept the threat for what it is when she stares at me over Hermione’s shoulder, and give her an assuring nod. The only thing that keeps me from smirking is my years in her majesty's Marines.

“Okay then.”

She lets go of Hermione and takes off towards the parking lot at the side of the building. I twerk my head in that direction, and with a huff of annoyance, Hermione falls into step next to me.

I don’t try to break the silence, so she doesn’t either. Instead, we watch in amusement as Neville starts pleading with Angelina, trying to convince her that I was only joking.

She opens the passenger side door of her newer model Toyota, and shoves him inside, slamming the door before he’s barely got his feet in. I can’t control the chuckle that slips through my lips, and Hermione does the same beside me.

“Twenty quid says he’s asleep before they hit her house,” Hermione says, watching as her friend pulls out of the parking lot.

“You’re on,” I say, knowing Neville better than her. “You’d be surprised how long a man can stay awake when he’s thinking with his dick.”

She lets out that unexpected snort again, then brings her hand to her face, covering up her mouth.

I keep my expression neutral, though all I want to do is smile at how damn cute that is. It’s been a long while since I associated the word cute with anything not wearing diapers.

“Come on, let’s get you home before Angelina comes back and castrates me,” I say, walking the last few feet to my 1969 Firebolt. I open the biker friend situated on the back of the two-seater and pull out my spare helmet. Only when I turn to hand it to Hermione, she’s still five feet back, watching me with a look of consternation on her face.

“I’m not getting on that,” she says, resolution set firm in her voice.

“Why not?” I ask, knowing where this is going.

She closes some of the distance between us but doesn’t reach to take the helmet from my hands.

“Do you know what we call those things in the A&E? Donor cycles. I’m not getting on that.”

I swallow back my amusement, stepping into her personal space.

“Do you think I’d do anything to let you get hurt?”

“No, but—”

“No buts. I promise, you’ll be safe with me. You saw how they rode me in there about your car. And that was me doing something nice for you.” This time her snort is in derision. “Imagine what they’d do to me if I let you fall off the back of my bike? I’d have to wear a paper sack to work for a week.”

She tries to keep her scowl on her face, but it slips its grip in layers, finally giving way to a reluctant smile.

“The Alpha Male can laugh at himself,” she mumbles under her breath.

“Huh?” I ask, suddenly desperate to know what she’s talking about.

“Nothing,” she squeaks out, that beautiful blush creeping up her cheeks faster than last time.

“Hmmm.” I think out loud to myself, and her blush only deepens.

She takes the helmet from my hand, but when she makes to put it on her head, I stop her with a touch to her wrist.

“Take your hair out of its knot, first. The helmet will fit better.”

I take the helmet from her grasp again and watch as she pulls the holder from her hair, securing it around her wrist instead. She runs her fingers over her scalp, then bends at the waist and tosses her hair back, letting it flow behind her shoulders.

Waves and waves of curls cascade down her back and I bite the inside of my lip to keep my smile to myself. I’m done for. Absolutely ruined.

That rumbling takes hold of my gut again, this time working its way up my diaphragm. I take another step closer, pushing her hair behind her ears with my free hand, before settling the helmet on her head.

“There,” I say, and my voice is deep and husky. I clear it as I step out of her space.

She moves her purse so that it crosses against her chest, and on a spur of the minute decision, I take my jacket off, slipping it over her shoulders. She reacts instinctively, pulling it tighter and shoving her arms through the sleeves. She’s swimming in it so severely I can’t see her fingertips at the bottom.

It takes all my willpower not to smile at the sight she makes.

I walk to my bike, lowering the passenger foot rests on either side.

“I’ll get on first and hold the bike steady. Put your foot on here,” and I grab the foot rest on the side she’s on, “and pull your leg over. You look like you don’t weigh more than ten stone, so you should have plenty of room back there. Wrap your arms around my waist, and I promise I’ll ride like it’s my grandmother on the back.”

“Lean when I lean, and you can rest your hands on the gas tank,” and I put some of my weight on the bike to show her how sturdy it is, “if you feel like you’re leaning too far forward. Okay?”

She swallows audibly, and I watch her throat contract and release, before she nods her head yes. Then I climb on my bike, and kick up the stand, holding it balanced for her.

She places her foot on the pedal, and I reach my arm out to steady her, my hand encircling her knee. I knew the first time I saw her she’d be warm under my touch, but I wasn’t expecting the way my palm seems to burn where it wraps around her knee. She lets out a tiny squeak when she swings her leg over my bike, before centreing her mass and lowering to the seat.

Her arms immediately tighten around my abdomen, and I place my forearm across hers, soothing away some of her trembles.

“You okay?” I ask, raising my voice to be heard clearly inside her helmet.

“Uh-huh,” she says into my ear, but there’s a definite waver to her tone. I let my smile show, since she won’t be able to see it.

“I won’t be able to hear you with my helmet on and the bike going, so if you need anything, just give me a squeeze. Remember, lean when I lean, hold on tight, and I’ll have you home in a jiffy.”

I pull my own helmet from where I slung it over the handlebars, securing it snugly on my head. When the bike roars to life underneath us, she jumps against my back, plastering herself as tight as the helmet will allow.

I think she feels my laughter because her nails dig into my abs before she tightens her grip around me again.

It only makes me laugh harder.

~\*\*~

It’s a fifteen-minute drive to her flat from the pub, give or take a few. I give a few and keep us slow. Going straight in spots I’d normally turn; I take the long way back to her place. Hermione’s trembles against my back eased after the first few minutes, but I don’t want to put her through any more turns than absolutely necessary. If that meant she stayed plastered to me twenty-five minutes instead of fifteen, well then that’s the price I have to pay.

I spend the last few minutes of the drive with my hand running up and down her calf. It seems to calm her nerves, at least a little bit. She loosens her grip around me just enough that I can take in a deep breath of air.

She feels so solid against my back. I’ve never been more aware of a person in my life. I can feel her heartbeat thundering against my spine. Her presence is so alive against me, that within minutes my heartbeat rises to sync with hers.

When we pull up in front of her flat, I expect her to jump off as soon as she can. But she hesitates a minute or two, and we sit together in silence. The bike is quiet underneath us, and my hand continues to unexplainably run up and down her calf, her foot on the passenger rests behind me.

"Thanks. For the ride," she hollers, a little louder than strictly needed. Even with both of our helmets on, she sounds awkward and unsure in my ears. I give her leg a squeeze before letting go completely, and she flings her foot back off the bike, already tons more comfortable than she was getting on.

I take my helmet from my head and shove it on my handlebars, then watch with fascination when she removes hers and immediately bends in half again, shaking the tangles from her hair. When she rights herself, her face is glowing, and her windblown hair makes her look like a fairy.

Without asking she walks to the saddlebags, dropping the helmet back from where it came from. She slips my coat from around her shoulders, handing it back to me without a word.

"That wasn't as bad as I anticipated, but I'm never doing it again," she says, looking pointedly at my bike. There's an air of the '*lady who doth protest too much*,' about her, and I try to fight back my smile, giving her a disbelieving glare instead.

"Sure, you won't," I tease her, and enjoy the way the heat fills her cheeks. "Want me to walk you up?" I ask, already knowing the answer. I'm rewarded with a glare filled with daggers, and she looks like she may smack me.

"Try it, Detective Potter, and I'll tase you into next week."

There's no hiding my smirk now, and she fights to keep the scowl on her face despite her rising amusement.

"Why do they call you Prongs?" she asks me suddenly, and I fight back my eye roll at the stupid nickname.

"It was my call sign in the Royal Marines," I tell her. "Ron and I were in together. It followed me back into civilian life."

"Ah," she says quietly, running her fingers through her hair. "And the other?" she asks, nibbling on her thumb again. "I heard one of the older guys refer to you as The Boy Who Lived."

My heart speeds up in my chest, and for a painstakingly long moment I consider telling her. About my parents, about Pettigrew and Riddle. About everything. I've never told a soul about what happened to my parents. Those who know, know because they were around when it happened, or someone else told them the story.

But I can't. Especially not out here on the sidewalk.

"That's a tale for another night," I tell her gently, and she softly nods her head.

“You better go,” I say and nudge my chin towards her building. “Let Angelina know you got home okay, so I don’t have to sleep in a suit of armour tonight. I’ll sit here, until I get a text, letting me know you’re safe behind your dead-bolted door.”

“And what happens if I forget?” she sasses me with her hand on her hip.

“Then I’ll stay out here all night. Or kick down your front door. Whichever I think will irritate you the most.”

“Why are you so obnoxious?” she asks, with a different type of heat lacing her voice.

“Why do you make it so easy?” I snark back and bite my tongue to keep my laughter in check when she growls in frustration. She turns on her heel and shoves her way into the building.

My mobile beeps two minutes later with a selfie from the exasperating woman. She’s against her locked front door, smiling ear to ear, giving me the V’s.

I throw my head back and laugh, louder and longer than I have in ages.

This woman, man. I’ve never met anyone quite like her.

When it’s finally out of my system, I save the picture to my mobile, twist the key in the ignition, and leave sleeping beauty to her rest.

# Those That Do Not Belong

## Chapter Summary

"Thanks for picking me up."

I climb into Ron's precinct assigned car and pull the seat belt tight around me. When he's with his family, he drives like a little old grandma. When it's just us in the car, I find myself praying to the divine on a regular basis.

"No problem, Prongs. I kinda figure it's part of my job description now."

I roll my eyes at his half-hearted jab. He's been my best mate since we were in leading strings. It's just good fortune that life has kept him at my side.



**Harry**



"Thanks for picking me up."

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"You know it's not, which is why I thank you every day. Now stop itching for compliments. How are the kids this morning? I hope they made you cry before breakfast."

He laughs good-naturedly then turns out of my neighbourhood towards the Meadow Wood Cemetery.

"The kids are fine. Luna might make me cry. She keeps harping on about this stupid chicken coop she wants."

I've been watching the scenery outside the window but turn and face my partner instead.

"A chicken coop?"

Luna is always collecting weird animals, but this is new.

"Yes. A chicken coop. If I hear one more thing about the benefits of raising poultry, my head is going to explode."

"It could be good, I guess."

His facial expression is disdain itself.

"No. Nothing good would come of that. First, it would be chickens. Then it would be a goat. Next thing you know, I'm moving to Cornwall and living on a farm. No thanks, I pass."

I snicker at the image it presents. Farmer Fred. Or Ron, as the case may be. One of his twin brothers is named Fred.

"How'd you get us invited to this thing anyway?" he asks, making another turn.

We're on our way to Peter Pettigrew's funeral. After the autopsy, the city released the body back to the family. They set his service for Saturday at ten a.m. I don't make a habit of going to the funerals of career criminals, especially ones suspected in the murder of my own parents. Except maybe to watch him be put in the ground. But if his death wasn't a hit, there's a decent possibility that the killer will be there. Or someone who knows something about it.

"I called Pettigrew's mother up and told her that since her son was such a pillar of the community, it would be our honour to stand graveside at his funeral. She happily accepted."

"Really? Wow. I guess he *was* a pillar in his community. So long as nobody mentions to her that his community was gangbangers and pimps."

He looks over at me from the corner of his eye, his gaze giving me the once over.

"I'm glad to see you dressed up for the occasion."

My eyes wander down Ron, impeccably dressed as always. He's in a black suit, tailored to him like a glove, with a light grey dress shirt. With his cufflinks and his tie clip, he could be going to work at one of the brokerage firms downtown.

He can't claim any of the credit for his wardrobe, though. I've seen how he dresses when Luna isn't around to lay out his clothes for him. Which is sorta ironic, when you consider her favorite pair of earrings look like radishes. But she's got good taste otherwise. The ten days she spent at that knitting retreat last year was a rough time for all of us.

He chances a glance at me again.

"A ballistics vest, Harry. Honestly?"

I take a gander down at my clothing. Black combat boots that stop at my ankle. Dark blue jeans, my normal black shirt, and my ballistics vest. I did add a black blazer. I figured that was good enough.

It's not like I'm going to a family member's funeral. Though, to be honest, this is probably what I'd wear to one of those too. The difference being, they wouldn't expect anything less from me.

"What? Did your father not give you the lecture at sixteen about not leaving home without protection? You never know when you're going to need it."

"As a matter of fact, I did get that lecture. Only my father was referring to condoms, not body armour. I know you have a suit. I've seen you wear it a time or two. It wouldn't have killed you to put it on today."

"A fat load of good his lectures did you too. You guys procreate like bunnies. Besides, condoms *are* a type of body armour. Just like ballistics vests. The modern-day suit of armour. I like to think I'm wearing the only suit that matters."

"Yeah, still not what my old man had in mind. Are you honestly planning on wearing your vest to the funeral Harry? Don't you think it's a little too much?"

God, it's like having a wife. Only I don't get the benefits of hot food and regular sex that come with it.

"Do you have a problem with it?" I ask, giving him the side-eye.

He smirks while staring straight ahead.

"Nope. You're the boss."

Somehow, he doesn't sound sincere.

Despite his protestations that what I'm wearing is fine, when we get out of the car, Ron gives me a look that I've seen Luna give him countless times before. It says *really*, Harry? *Really*? As if a look alone can guilt me into doing what he wants.

Which it can. But only because it's not worth the aggravation.

Rolling my eyes in exasperation, I walk to the back of the car, then remove my blazer, tossing it onto the trunk. Yanking on the Velcro that holds my vest in place, I take that off and place it on my blazer. At Ron's self-satisfied smirk, I reach around my back and pull my shirt over my head, double-checking I don't get it inside out, then place it on the trunk as well.

I've caught the passers-by's attention and give them a glare when someone starts to reprimand me for stripping along the side of the funeral procession. The way she scatters away in righteous indignation is almost funny.

Making sure my grey vest is tucked into my jeans, I pull the ballistics back over my head, strapping it down with the Velcro again. Next comes my shirt, now pulled tighter against my arms and chest because of the extra layer underneath it. I give my blazer a dutiful shake, knocking out any wrinkles, then slip it over my shoulders.

"There, mum. No vest."

I'm re-adjusting the gun on my hip, manoeuvring it behind my jacket when Neville comes sauntering up. He, as usual, is dressed like a barely held together slob.

Now there's a man who needs a wife. Or to move back in with his gran.

"If I'd have known this was that kind of party," Neville snarks, grinning ear to ear, "I'd have stopped at the bank on the way here for a roll of quids."

"Hardy, har, har, har."

I give him a death glare, and he takes a step backward involuntarily. As soon as he realizes what he's done, he takes the action back. But the damage has already been done. Neville drops his gaze, looking somewhere around my feet instead. I turn and face Ron, both of us hiding our smiles.

I rotate my shoulders to settle both the vest and the jacket across my back. I prefer my armor on the top layer. It gives me more than just physical protection; it helps my peace of mind.

It's chilly out, and most of the attendees are in suit jackets or frilly coat frocks that look like they belong to another generation.

It pains me to say it, but Ron might have had a point about blending in. We're the only members of the team here today. Everyone else is back at the station, working on other cases, or making another round of door knocks. They're hoping to reach some of the residents we've missed in our initial walkthroughs.

I'm not holding my breath.

"Keep your eyes peeled, boys. Don't let the setting fool you. We're deep in the snake's den."

At that moment, Mrs. Pettigrew crosses our path, a half-circle of older women crowding her like an honour guard.

Ron gives me a soft pat on the back, and I step ahead of my team, following the grieving mother into the cemetery.

The Memorial Gardens are neat and trimmed, the grass a rainbow of hues from neon green to darkest brown. The vegetation is cared for regularly, but they certainly don't have the funds for things like watering and fertilizer. It's patchy in places and covered in weeds in others.

The path between the headstones is a rough one, and the older women take their time across the terrain. Careful of their low-heeled shoes and the potential for twisted ankles.

I step into Mrs. Pettigrew's personal space, towering over her diminutive frame. It takes several long minutes for her to stop her conversation with her companions and acknowledge my presence. If I were expecting to use intimidation to gather additional information from this group, I think we're in for a big disappointment. You don't raise a man like Peter Pettigrew and bend to threats easily. Insinuated or otherwise.

"Hmmm," she hisses, a layer of hostility I wasn't expecting lifting between us like a wall. "You must be the police. Thank you for your condolences."

I didn't offer her any yet, but I return her hostility with a bland smile, offering her my hand to shake. She stares at my fingers but doesn't reach for the proffered arm.

"Have you found the person who killed my son yet, constable?"

Right to the point then. I link my hands behind my back, scanning the gathering crowd before turning my attention back to the woman in front of me.

"It's Detective Inspector, Potter, Mrs. Pettigrew. And no, not yet. That's why we're here today, ma'am. In situations such as this, it's not uncommon for a killer to want to interact with the deceased family. They, like us, will try to gather information to see who knows what. And to see what sort of impact they've made by taking your loved one's life. With your permission, my team and I will hang back and observe."

She bristles, and the women around her close ranks, offering her support and snide comments to me.

"Ain't nobody here who would take poor Peter's life. He was a good boy. Everyone loved him."

"Seeing as you're the police, I don't see as I have any choice whether you're here or not. But I don't want you bothering our family as we grieve for my baby boy."

As one, they begin to walk, leaving me standing at the edge of the chairs, watching as they find their way to the empty row of seats at the front.

"Uh, boss," Neville says, sounding half-amused, half uncertain. I pivot in his direction, trying to keep the irritation off my face. I scrub my hand over my beard, my mind drifting over what could have caused Pettigrew's mum to have such a drastic change in her attitude between today and last night. Yesterday, she wept at the idea of us being here, today she barely kept civility by not kicking us out.

"Yeah, Nev. What's up? See anything?"

"Yup, but I'm not sure you're going to like it. The hot doc is making her way up the hill."

My head whips to where he's pointing, and sure enough, Dr. Granger is walking up the slope with her friend at her side. Their fingers are linked, and Angelina, considerably taller than Hermione, is leaning sideways and whispering something for only Hermione to hear.

I feel my sigh in my boots. Is everything going sideways today?

"Don't call her that," I say automatically. "What's she doing here?"

It's a rhetorical question, but Neville feels the need to answer me anyway.

"Don't know, boss. Angie didn't say anything about it, and I talked to her this morning."

Of course, he did. He went home with her again last night.

"Want me to go talk to them?"

Absolutely not. We're here to work, not for Neville to spend the next hour and a half flirting with the Amazon with the pink hair.

"No," I sigh and rub at the bridge of my nose, then march in the direction of the girls making their way up to the graveside memorial service. I wait until I'm standing directly in front of them, forcing them to come to a halt, before I open my mouth. I look around, seeing what sort of attention they've already brought to themselves.

Our girls are both high quality. Even in the simple black dresses and knee-length sweaters, they stand out in the sort of crowd a funeral like Peter Pettigrew attracts. An older woman with grey hair, wearing a pair of Louboutin's walks past where I've stopped the girls on the trail, and I make a mental note to talk to her next.

There's another that doesn't belong at a party like this.

"What are you doing here, Hermione?"

I know I'm brusk, but I don't have time to guard her and watch the crowds simultaneously.

"DCI Potter," she seethes, pulling her shoulders back and rising to her full height. It still isn't much.

We're back to Detective Potter again. I resist the urge to scrub my hands over my face.

I'm almost a foot taller than her and outweigh her by four stone easy. But anger flares behind Hermione's eyes, and I have to fight back a smile at the defiance she shows that straightens her spine when my own team members take a step back from my glare.

"I'm here to pay my respects. I thought that would be obvious."

She tries to move around me, but I slide to the side, effectively blocking her path again.

"You should leave."

Her chin tips up just a tad, and her nostrils flare as she meets my stare, glower for glower.

" *You* should get out of my way before I kick you in the shin."

Delight at her brazenness makes my skin itch in anticipation. I pull a scowl on my face when the urge to smile grows at the same pace as her attitude.

I step into her personal space, leaning forward and wrapping my hand around her arm, resting it above her elbow.

"I'm not trying to be an asshole, Dr. Granger," I say.

My voice comes out in a rumble and she leans in closer to hear me. My face is inches from hers, and to anyone looking, it would appear if we're having an intimate moment. I hope it's enough to keep us from being overheard. My thumb rubs soothing circles into her arm where it's pressed into her skin. "You're a witness to a violent crime, Hermione. A crime that may very well have been committed by someone at this funeral, which means that *you can't* be here. Whether you like it or not, you could still be in danger. I can't protect you and do my job simultaneously."

She stares at where I'm touching her, her tongue darting out to wet her lips.

"I don't need your protection," she whispers, never breaking her stare. But her tone of voice, and the way her muscles, moments ago coiling for a fight, lose some of their tension, tells me I've finally made my point.

"I know you don't think you do. But you have it, whether you want it or not. So, I can't have you here. For your safety and my peace of mind. Leave, please, so that I can do my job."

She looks at me, her eyes flicking over my face, and I think she might refuse, just because she can, when Angelina steps into our circle, clasping her fingers with Hermione's.

"Come on, Herman. He's right. We didn't think this through. Detective Potter will text you Mrs. Pettigrew's contact information, and we'll send her a card and a casserole."

I nod in agreement, and thanks, quietly promising them both to do as they've asked. Angelina graces me with a knowing smile, giving Hermione's arm a gentle tug.

Hermione hesitates for a moment longer, then nods in silent agreement. Oxygen leaves me in a slow exhale. My lungs burn as they release a breath I didn't know I was holding.

Without another word, Hermione turns, taking Angelina with her, and they make their way back to their car, sitting at the bottom of the hill.

I watch until they drive away, flexing my neck from side to side, trying to ease some of the tension building between my shoulder blades.

"That looked intense," Nev says, walking with Ron to stand at my side.

"Shut up, Neville," I snark back, without any heat in my voice.

"Why do the only things out of place," Ron queries, with an amused tone of voice, "seem to be beautiful rich white ladies who do not belong." I follow his line of sight and take note of the woman I clocked walking up, sitting in the back row of the graveside service.

"An excellent question," I say, falling into step with my men. "Peter Pettigrew must have been one lucky man."

Ron and Neville scoff so loudly, people turn and look in our direction.

Most chairs are already in use, and I'll admit that I'm surprised about the turnout. There are people here of all races, both sides of the economic food change. He seemed to have had a hell of a lot of friends for all that he was a pretty bad guy.

That or people want to confirm he's dead. That's a sentiment I can relate to.

I nod in silent instruction and let Neville's happy go lucky personality take the lead of our impromptu interrogation.

"Good Morning, Ma'am," Neville drawls in his best proper accent, tipping an imaginary hat in the woman's direction. She smiles at him in pleasure, warmth blooming in her cheeks. "I'm Neville Longbottom, from the investigation unit. Do you mind if I take this seat?"

"Good Morning," she replies, reaching out to shake Neville's hand. "I'm Professor Minerva McGonagall," she says, introducing herself to Neville. Ron and I follow suit, but after the introductions I step back and keep my mouth closed, content to listen and learn.

"How did you know, Peter?" Neville asks, hitching his *'I was raised in the palace ,'* smile higher on his face, his eyes twinkling in the stranger's direction.

Her smile widens to genuine pleasure at the fake sympathy Neville bestows on Peter's memory.

"I'm a volunteer at the Hogsmeade Gateway Community centre. Peter generously donated his time several days a month. He was teaching the boys how to play football and helping out

with homework after school. We were devastated to hear what happened to him. It's tragic that such a fate would befall such a wonderful man."

She has a slight burr, but a posh well-educated quality about her. She doesn't seem the type of woman to be snowed by Pettigrew's bullshite.

"Really?" Neville pushes, not doing a great job at concealing his scepticism at the pretty picture the greying woman paints of Pettigrew.

Her eyes lose some of their lustre, but her smile remains firmly in place.

"Really. I'm aware, from some of Peter's," she hesitates, a look of distaste crossing her features, " *associates* , that perhaps his business dealings weren't always on the up and up. But the Peter I knew was one with a brave heart, and I, for one, will miss him very much."

I make a mental note to run a background check on Mother Teresa here and all the other volunteer centre workers. If Pettigrew was hanging around, it was probably to recruit. But when the minister calls the attendees to order, I take my place at the back and settle in to watch the show.



# **We Might Have A Problem**

## Chapter Summary

I hate paperwork. My desk is my least favourite place to be in the world. I prefer to be on my feet, in the field, chasing down answers. Unfortunately, a good portion of police work is done sitting on my arse, scrolling through files and flipping through paperwork.

Neville pauses at the entrance, and upon spotting me, strides into the labyrinth that holds our desks. It's a maze in here. Whoever designed this setup probably had good intentions, but years of trying to squeeze in just one more chair and one more desk has turned the space into less office, more obstacle course.

“Boss,” he says when he gets close enough to not have to yell, “we might have a problem.”

## Chapter Notes

I combined two chapters into one for this :) I'll probably be doing that a lot when chapters have the same pov back to back. I know with ff we're accustomed to fat wordy chapters.

Thank you so much to Happily for the awesome beta and proofing. This story is only as good as it is because of him!



## Harry

I hate paperwork. My desk is my least favourite place to be in the world. I prefer to be on my feet, in the field, chasing down answers. Unfortunately, a good portion of police work is done sitting on my arse, scrolling through files and flipping through paperwork.

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"Boss," he says when he gets close enough to not have to yell, "we might have a problem."

"What kind?"

"I was talking to my contact in the MI5—"

"You mean your cousin?" I cut him off, not bothering to let him finish.

"My contact—"

I raise my eyebrow at him in mocking disbelief. He rolls his eyes in exasperation before starting all over again.

“Fine. I was talking to my cousin about the Pettigrew case. He sent me this first thing this morning.”

Without bothering to ask for permission, he leans over my desk and inserts a USB drive into my laptop. After a few clicks on my media player, he turns up the volume and gestures towards the screen, handing me a pair of headphones.

The noise is scratchy, and I can tell immediately it's from a wiretap.

*“I have a favour to ask you. I'm looking for a friend. A special friend. We went to high school together. Rumour has it he lives in your neck of the woods.”*

*“Of course. Do you know where I can find him?”*

*“If I knew I wouldn't need you to put the word out, would I, idiot? His name is Herman. Dr. Herman Granger. I don't know more than that, other than the fact that he's currently a doctor working in the city.”*

*“It'll be my usual fee.”*

*“Done.”*

The subject changes and I reach for the cord of the headphones, but Neville shakes his head and indicates I should continue. They spend a minute talking about product before they mention her again.

*“What's so special about the doctor?”*

*“ Bidh mi a 'toirt aire dhomh fhin .”*

It goes on after that, but the rest is of no concern to me. I rip the buds out of my ears and give my full attention to Neville.

“Tell me.”

“I was talking to my cousin. He sent it to me this morning. His email said that he thought the name of my witness sounded familiar and that he pulled the tape to verify this morning. Dr. Herman. Only that's not her real name, right? The guys on the recording made it sound like they were looking for a dude. Do you think they're looking for her?”

The rumbling in my gut turns into a creature, digging its claws into my gullet.

“It would be one big fucking coincidence if they weren't. Who were the wankers on the call?”

Neville shakes his head with an air of obvious irritation about him.

"No bloody clue. John wouldn't tell me."

I'm already on the move by the time he finishes his sentence.

"Call him. Now."

I grab my gun from my desk drawer, checking the chamber before jamming it into my holster. My jacket is next, and I yank it from around the back on my chair, listening at Neville attempting to gather intel from his cousin.

I hold my hand out in front of Neville's face, and he immediately drops his mobile onto my palm.

"John, where are you, you bastard? Don't try to pretend like this whole operation is being run from Banger. If you're listening to a wire that caught a hit on *my* witness, then your arse is sitting somewhere in my town. Where are you?"

"Harry, man—"

I cut him off before he has the chance to finish. We make our way out to Neville's 4X4, and he tosses me the keys and heads towards the passenger side. Good man.

"You tell me where you are right now, or I swear to God, I'll bust Neville back down to the academy. By the time he's out of uniform, robots will be patrolling the streets."

Neville climbs into the passenger side, grinning ear to ear. He doesn't know me very well if he thinks I'm kidding.

"We rented out an office space on Tenth. I'll text the address."

I climb into the driver's side and toss the mobile back into Neville's lap before firing up the ignition and peeling out of the parking lot.

~\*\*~

Bland. It's the only way to describe this particular block of business complexes. Which is what MI5 wants. They can't exactly set up a billboard that says Secret Intelligence Service located here. The plaque on the outside of the door says Dr. Fleming, Dentist.

Cute.

I didn't realize MI5 has a sense of humour.

I pull the front door open, and a bell chimes over our heads, letting the office know someone's arrived. There's even a receptionist sitting in the front desk, wearing puppy dog scrubs.

Jesus Christ.

I pull my badge from my belt, flashing it into the undercover's face.

“I need John,” I say, straight and to the point.

She starts on a general line of denial, but an older version of Neville comes from behind the door, and her excuses putter into silence.

“Back here,” John says, not bothering with so much as a handshake.

“Thanks for letting me know you were in town, asshole,” Neville snarks from beside me, loud enough to ensure his cousin heard him clearly. John’s shoulders don’t so much as twitch.

He leads us into a back room, where boxes and boxes of papers cover every available surface.

“How long have you been here?” Neville demands, an anger I rarely see radiating from him.

His posture mimics mine, with his hands shoved into his vest, and I duck my head to hide my smile.

John doesn’t bother to answer his cousin, instead turning his response to me.

“From what Neville told me, your unit is investigating a homicide that might be connected to the Scottish Mafia.”

I fight to keep my expression neutral, but Neville’s surprise is written all over his face.

“You didn’t know?” John asks, looking between us.

“We didn’t have any actionable intel to point us one way or another until my witness showed up on your recording. When was that taken?”

John looks behind him at the agent in a suit sitting behind the desk, waiting for the seal of approval. Boss man stares at me for a moment, before flicking his hand in a go-ahead motion.

“Thursday.”

My eyes bulge at the knowledge that they’ve had this information going on four days and decided to do nothing with it.

“Has MI5 made a habit of ignoring hits ordered on British citizens?” I squeeze out the words between the anger in my chest.

“There’s nothing on that tape that proves it was a hit, one way or another. As far as we know, they could honestly be looking for a friend they lost touch with after university.”

I snort my disbelief, and turn my back on the men to pull my anger back under my control.

“That’s bullshite, and you know it.”

Neville, still exuding hostility, joins the conversation.

“We don’t have the Scottish Mob in Hogsmeade. We’re not that sophisticated.”

“That’s what they want you to think. Hogsmeade is the perfect town to hide an organization like this. Strong drug trade, large enough to blend into the crowd, but not so big that they’d have any major competition. We’ve been building a case on this group for over two years. We followed the trail to Hogsmeade thirteen months ago.”

“Thirteen months,” Neville half shouts, but everyone ignores him.

“What the hell did the Scottish Mob have to do with Pettigrew?”

“At this point in time, we aren’t able to furnish you with that information. Just know that the person on the recording was a low-level operative.”

“How come I haven’t heard about them on the street then, if you’ve been set up here investigating them for over a year?”

“Because, frankly, it’s been above your paygrade. Up until now, they’ve been operating on a more corporate level. When it comes to the drug trade, they provide services, *quietly*, to rich bored housewives and stressed out corporate executives. Now from what we’ve gathered, they’re ready to make themselves known as a major player in town. Both sides of the Black Lake.”

I don’t take offense. He’s right. I have no interest in money laundering and corporate espionage. I police the streets, not the boardrooms.

“What’s the hold-up then? And aren’t you supposed to let local law enforcement know when you set up shop in their town?”

John’s eyes flick between me and his cousin again, and the apprehension is clear in the set of his shoulders.

“We did. They must not have told you.”

He resolutely refuses to look at Neville when he speaks.

“You could have told your fucking cousin!” Neville shouts, all attempts at holding in his anger gone. “Does Gran know you’re here? How did you manage to avoid her in the grocery store in the last thirteen months?!”

Because we’re a city forty thousand proud, but I don’t have the heart to point that out to Neville. Either way, John didn’t answer my question.

“It sounds like you have everything you need. Why are you still here?”

John nods his head along in agreement, then shoves his hands into his pockets.

“Yes. We have a lot. But we still don’t have the top dog. We can’t take down all the bit players without taking him in too. He’d just move and set up shop somewhere else.”

I give Neville a significant look, reminding him of our conversation about Riddle out in Knockturn last week.

“Well, good luck with that. Just give me the name of the men on the recording, and we’ll be out of your way.”

John looks back at his superior again, before trying to copy Neville’s *aww shucks* facial expression. He doesn’t pull it off nearly as well as his cousin does.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t risk them spooking and pulling up shop. We have an informant, who’s working on making contact with the boss. As soon as that happens, we’ll take down the whole organization. Until that time, however, we have to let the status quo stand.”

I take a step forward, my fists tightening at my sides. Neville, understandably worried about his cousin, steps up between us, and I take the step back. Neville stays where he is.

“So, what the fuck am I supposed to do in the meantime? Tell my witness we’re sorry that your life is in danger, but we can’t risk fucking up MI5’s case?”

John lifts his hands in front of his face, offering a sign of peace.

“No, of course not. We’d be more than happy to take him into the scheme of the witness protection programme, until we wrap all this up. As soon as we get confirmation of the danger.”

“Confirmation?” I ask, disdain dripping from my lips.

“Absolutely.”

“Great. When my witness is on a slab in the morgue, I’ll let them know you’re prepared to protect them now.”

Neville makes a sound of disgust, stepping from between me and his cousin and standing at my side.

“Look, as soon as everything is wrapped up here, we’ll share with you everything you know. You can question anyone you need to. Until then, we can’t risk a local case messing up a two-year federal investigation.”

I let my eyes scan the room, looking for any information lying about that I can squirrel away for when we leave this shite hole.

“Yeah. Sure. Thanks.”

Neville turns to leave, but another question comes to me.

“Hey. What did the guy say in the foreign language? I didn’t recognize it.”

The man from the chair answers my question for the first time.

“*Bidh mi a ‘toirt aire dhomh fhin.* It’s Gaelic. Some kind of family motto. It means, *I take care of my own.* It’s the calling card of the MacCoinnich Mafia.”

Gaelic.

“Yeah. Thanks.”

John makes like he’s going to follow his cousin, who’s shoving out of the room, but at a silent shake of my head, he collapses back onto a table ledge, his breath whooshing out in resignation.

I follow Neville out at a more leisurely pace, trying to gather as much intel as I can. There isn’t much to see. Most of their evidence is tagged and stacked in boxes. It’s a corrupt organization’s case anyway, so the majority of their evidence is going to be on paper. It won’t be physical, like the bullet shells that riddled Pettigrew’s body.

Which just gives me more questions without answers, because I’d bet money Pettigrew had never been in a boardroom in his life. So how is he connected to them? And how did it end with him dead in the middle of the street?

By the time I make it out of the building, Neville is taking his frustrations out on the tires. I toss him the keys, and he catches them out of the air, seemingly grateful to have something productive to do. We’re on our way back to The Lair before either of us speaks again.

“What did we learn?” I ask.

“That we’re totally fucked,” he replies, and I swallow back a chuckle at his language. Neville swears the least out of all of us. I bet his gram used to wash his mouth out with soap.

“Okay. But what else?”

“Pettigrew was playing both sides,” he says with confidence in his voice.

“That’s what we have to find out.”

“But I thought we just told my cousin we’d back off.”

“Not really. I said okay to them, giving us what they had when they could. Did I say that we’d stop our investigation?”

“No.”

“Is it going to make sitting around the table at Christmas Dinner too awkward for you?”

“Not at all, sir” he replies with relish in his voice. I almost pity his cousin at this point.

Almost.

"Don't-Don't call me sir," I say with a shudder. I'm not that old yet. "You know I hate that."

Nev looks at me quickly and grins.

"Sure thing, boss."



“Now that we know what to ask, we hit the streets again. Branch out. I don’t care what colours they wear or who they report to. Drag their arsees down to interrogation if you have to. Someone knows something about the new player in town.

“Your cousin fucked up, and he doesn’t even know it yet. I want every scrap of information we can dig up on the MacCoinnich Mafia on my desk by the end of tomorrow. When we get back, grab a team and start pounding the pavement.”

The silence that falls is comfortable between us, each of us contemplating the next steps in our investigation.

“What else did you notice?” I ask, breaking the stillness of the car.

There’s a reason why I nabbed Neville straight from the academy, besides our similar upbringing. He doesn’t let me down.

“MI5, and therefore the people on the street, don’t realize Herman is a woman.”

“And that’s what’s going to save her life. This stays between us. I don’t even want you mentioning it in your evening prayers.”

He bobs his head in agreement, looking at me before turning back into the government building car park.

“What’re you going to be doing while I’m sweating my arse off rounding up gang bangers?”

“I get the honour of letting our doctor know that she’s now on the radar of the mob.”

~\*\*~

Class is over, and Dean is yammering in my ear about the second gym location he's hoping to open on the other side of the District.

I nod where appropriate and give some random pieces of advice, but really my attention is all on Hermione.

She's in the corner with the rest of the class, putting her equipment back into a small duffel bag. She didn't wear boxing gloves, instead wrapping her hands in exercise tape, and the move made my good impression of her jump another notch. I hate practicing in unnecessary protective gear. How are gloves going to help you when you get into a real situation on the street? Ask your attacker to kindly wait a moment while you get your gear on?

I don't think so. My uncles would be so proud.

As if she can sense me staring at her, she glances over her shoulder and scowls. A chuckle escapes me unbidden, and Dean changes his direction to see what’s caught my eye.

Her hair is up in a braid with the tail tucked inside. It's a style that my youngest sister wears often. I've never given women’s hairstyles a second thought, or the first thought for that matter. On Hermione, however, the way her hair is up off her neck lends her a sense of

elegance, even in exercise clothes. Her sports top has thin straps that criss-cross down her shoulders and back. The amount of skin showing is by no way indecent, but that doesn't stop me from both admiring the view and itching to throw a jacket on her.

"Now I know why you honoured me with your presence tonight." Dean adds. "Do you know Herman?"

"Hermione," I answer, not taking my eyes off her, "and yes, we've met."

"Well, I can't deny you've got good taste. Every man in here, myself included, has tried to pick that bird up. She's like Teflon, we all just bounce right off her. Maybe you'll have better luck. That arse is fine though. I sure wouldn't mind trying me a piece."

Dean's words set my teeth on edge, and I uncross my arms from my chest and turn to look him in the eye.

Automatically, his hands go up in front of his face. Whether it's to warn me off or protect himself I can't tell.

"Whoa man, easy Prongs. I was just trying to give you a heads up. I didn't mean nothing personal by it."

"I recommend you start looking at her like you'd look at your baby sister. Or, better yet, like you'd look at *my* baby sister."

Dean starts stepping away from me, hands still raised in that annoyingly placating manner.

"I got ya, I got ya. Here you've had me thinking you didn't do the whole girl thing." He smirks at me, eyes bouncing between Hermione and me. "I'll spread the word man. Herman's off the market. Good luck with that."

With a fake salute that makes me want to break his fingers, he turns and swaggers away. He's right, I don't do the *girl* thing. But that's not why I'm here. I'm here to talk to her about her safety, and the fact that there's probably a hit out on her from the Scottish mob.

Besides, it's too late to back out now. Hermione, disguised as a tornado, is storming my way.

She doesn't bother with a hello. Simply goes straight for the jugular. My type of girl.

"Did you follow me here?"

Her tone is accusatory, her eyebrows raised. She crosses her arms in front of her chest, and I'm sure any reasonable man would be put off from the *fuck you* vibe she's throwing my way. Instead, I admire the way her anger pushes her breasts out just a tad further.

No. That's not what I meant.

Her curves are driving me to distraction. What did she accuse me of?

"Would it bother you if I had?" I ask playfully.

Her posture softens microscopically and her eyes flare in challenge. It's refreshingly intoxicating. Still, I wasn't in the special forces for so long without being able to sense when my life was in danger. For my own well-being I better stop toying with the storm.

"Why do you hate me so much?" I ask instead.

So much for that.

"Why do you insist on pushing my buttons?" she snaps without missing a beat.

*That* is an excellent question.

"Why do you make it so easy?"

I bite the inside of my lip to stop from smiling, and I swear she does the same.

I raise my arms in a playcatting manner, then run my fingers through my hair.

"Yes, I followed you." I concede. "Not how you're assuming I did though. I went to the hospital to talk to you and ran into your friend Angelina. She told me you'd be here. I happen to know the owner, so I thought I'd drop by and say hi."

Her face tightens in skepticism and irritation.

"Angelina told you where I'd be?"

"She did. I'd talk to her about that if I were you. Otherwise, this could become a habit."

Her eyes glaze over and I imagine she's picturing a hundred different ways to maim her friend. I almost feel sorry for Angelina. I'm a trained killer, and even *I* wouldn't want to be on the other side of that expression.

"Oh, don't you worry about that," she practically growls. "We'll have words, I promise."

Her face clears, and she gives herself a gentle shake, purging herself of whatever visions were plaguing her. She bites her lip, eyes flicking me up and down.

"So, stalker. What did you want from me?"

Oh, poor word choice. I can think of a dozen different things I want from her right now. She worked hard tonight in class, and sweat is still cooling against her body. I *want* to make her all sweaty again, then lick the sweat from her skin.

She's lost the hostility in her posture and is smirking at me instead. I have some innate sense that she's reading my mind as quickly as the thoughts appear there. This isn't going how I wanted it to. How the fuck has this girl gotten under my skin already? I need to get laid. It's been too long. And not from the sassy gorgeous creature in front of me. I make a mental note to call one of my standbys as soon as I'm out of her sight.

What *did* I want?

I need to warn her she's in danger. But not yet.

"Nothing, I guess. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

She rolls her eyes at me and grins a little wider.

"You've never heard of a phone, huh? It's this really nifty invention that allows people to communicate without having to leave the comfort of your couch. Or in your case, probably your office chair. Somehow, I can't picture you lounging away at home. Hell, I can't even picture you in a home. Harry Potter: all business, all the time."

"I have a couch. I have a nice couch. Big. Comfortable. You'd like it."

Jesus Christ, Harry. You're a hardened Marine for God's sake, and you're talking to this girl about your couch. I'm ridiculous. This can never, *ever* get back to Ron.

"It would have to be big for it to be comfortable for you. You're practically a giant."

"Part of me is, that's for sure."

Her face crimsons so fast it looks like someone painted it on, and I can tell she's trying desperately not to take a peek down my body. I'm tempted to flex my hips out once or twice but remember that I'm not interested in this woman.

Or, in actuality, I'm incredibly interested in this woman, which is why I should be keeping my distance.

Not chasing her all over town.

"Dean is a friend of mine; he lets me use his place to train sometimes. It's really the only reason I followed after Angelina told me where you were. Promise."

I put my hands nice and wide, then try to offer an olive branch.

"You looked good in class today by the way, nice form. But kicking a punching bag in a controlled setting is a lot different when applying those techniques to a real person. I can show you a few moves. If you want?"

"A few moves?"

Her tone is full of skepticism, and I guess I can't blame her. I was talking about my cock thirty seconds ago.

"Self defence moves. If you're going to be walking home alone in the middle of the night, you should at least know how to protect yourself."

Something I can't read flashes in her eyes, and she drops her workout bag to the floor.

"Yes! Oh please, yes. That. Sounds. Awesome."

Every warning bell I have is blazing in my head at top speeds and sounds. She agreed to that too quickly, too enthusiastically. The smart thing for me to do would be to turn tail and run, then get my arse back out on the streets. That's where I belong, chasing criminals. Not chasing tail. It's too late to back out now, however.

Hermione gives her bag a swift kick and watches it slide away from us to the other side of the practice mat, then removes her hoodie and tosses it in the direction of her bag.

"I've taken a few women's self-defence classes before of course, taught by my campus safety patrol and another offered through my gym, but none of that ever made much sense to me. Maybe you can help it click." The word click is over enunciated and hard, and I feel the K sound reverberate all the way down to my dick.

I've taught a few women's self-defence classes before, so I know what type of crap is taught in those things. That's another great scenario where you want to pause and ask your attacker if you can get in position before they proceed to try to rape you.

"Okay then. Show me what they've already taught you, and we'll go from there."

"How do you want to set it up?"

This is what I hate about women's self-defence. It's so staged and preplanned. A woman being attacked isn't going to be manhandled in the same gentle way some pretend fitness guys are showing her on the mat. It's going to be fast and painful, and she needs to have her wits about her to get herself out of that situation.

"I don't believe in prearranged scenarios. I'll lunge, you parry, and we'll see what we need to work on afterwards."

With that, I make a grab for her. She jerks in surprise, obviously not expecting my attack. I get one hand on the front of her top, painfully aware that with the material of her top my fingers are millimetres away from her breasts, and one hand on the middle of her back when suddenly she slips her foot in between mine. With a hand on each of my own, she pivots in my grip, throwing her arse into my pelvis, then flips me over her shoulder and onto the mat.

"Whumpf!"

In a heartbeat the oxygen is shoved from my lungs as she straddles me across my chest and lets her weight drop squarely into the middle of my breastbone. Before I have time to register what the fuck just happened, she's flung herself to the side, taking my arm with her, and curves her legs across my chest, straightening my arm between her knees and across her abdomen until I feel the muscles in my shoulder and elbow start to give.

Stunned more from the unexpectedness of the situation rather than the physical exertion of my person, we lay like that for a moment and she gives my arm a tug every few heartbeats, just to remind me who's currently in charge.

"Did I forget to mention that besides the measly self-defence classes I took with my friends, my parents have had me in martial arts since I was six? My parents—they were afraid of

what my swotty bookishness combined with a loud mouth would do to my safety in school, so they went out of their way to ensure I could take care of myself. I'm a black belt in three different practices. Maybe I could show you some moves, huh big boy?"

Bloody Hell.

In the universal signal for let me the fuck up, I tap her foot three times, and take my first clean breath of air since I thought of this fucked up idea in the first place. She scrambles to the other side of the mat and I push myself to a sitting position, arms on my knees, watching her pop to her feet like a jack-o-lantern, bobbing and weaving on the tips of her toes.

"Come on big man! Is that all you got?"

I watch her bounce around the mat with something like awe.

"You're not afraid of me at all, are you?"

There's a strange feeling settling in my chest, and it's not left over from her sitting on it.

"Not in the slightest," she drawls, giving me *The Matrix* motion for *bring it on mother fucker*.

My smile breaks my face before I have a chance to rein it in. Hell yeah, baby. If she wants to play, we can play.

Leaning back with my hands behind my head I kick up from the ground, landing in a squat then raising to my feet. I'm right, my uncles would be thoroughly impressed with her. In the meantime, I have something to prove.

"Okay, little girl. Bring it on."

She gives me a mocking bow, and away we go.

~\*\*~

While I have experience in a little bit of everything, most of my training has been to take the enemy down as quickly and efficiently as possible. That won't work here. I want to show her who's boss, but I don't want to break her back while I'm doing it.

I'm still debating about how to best take her down when she makes the first attack, stepping forward and landing a kick across my middle. I decide to let her get a few hits in: that way I can better assess what sort of skills she's working with.

Lull her into a false sense of security.

I let her grab my arm and yank me close, giving her the impression that she'll be able to pull me down again, then slip under her arm and twist out of her grip, smacking her on the arse in the process.

A full-throated laugh erupts from her lips, and I freeze in admiration, to better appreciate the glow it brings to her face. Then I know I've fucked up.

*Again .*

Taking advantage of my lapse in attention, she leaps to get her arms around my neck then wrenches me down to her height, dragging me across the mat with her arm around my throat.

Straining to listen over the blood rushing in my ears, I hear giggles escaping between her heaves for oxygen. Giggles! The woman is fucking laughing at me.

Enough of this shit.

I wrap my left arm around her back and my right between her legs until they touch in the middle. Swiftly as I can, I rise with her in my arms then slam us to the ground, making sure to take most of the impact upon myself.

“Who’s the big man now, baby?”

I rise to my hands and knees on top of her, intending to mouth off some more when she kicks out with her leg, knocking me off balance. Whipping herself around with years of lightning precision, she climbs my back like a monkey, shoving her elbows into my shoulder blades and riding me with a knee in the small of my back while I crash to the floor.

I have strength and size on my side, but she has the talent to back up her trash talk. I'll bet money that Judo is one of those practices she's got her black belt in. Her knees are locked tight against my ribcage and her elbows are digging into my back in just the right position to limit my range of motion. After a second or two of trying to bring my hands underneath me, I use my hands and knees together to push myself off of the floor.

Her grip on me is supernatural, and we roll several times across the room, each of us grappling for position until we come to a stop with me on top. Using the momentum of our rolling, she switches angles on me, leaning up with her hands at the base of my neck before pulling us back and over again, rolling me over her head.

This time she follows me over so that she again lands in the position of power. I'm pinned with my head between her knees, her ankles pressed to my biceps holding my arms to the ground. She stops her momentum with both hands placed firmly on the ground in front of her, and shoots me a cheeky grin as she rises to a sitting position on my chest.

“Now this, I could get used to. You, between my legs, flat on your back underneath me” She mocks. “How’s it look from the spot down there?”

Without bothering with a response, I lift my legs to wrap around her body, crossing them at the ankles and pressing into her chest. She lets out a satisfying, “oooft,” while she fights the reversal of our positions. This is where strength comes into play. She may be fast, but she can't out muscle me.

I thought she'd surrender when I gained the upper hand. Instead, she tightens her thighs around my throat and crosses her feet at the ankle in a classic choke manoeuvre. We're twisted up like pretzels, legs and arms wrapped and trapped against each other and faces squished between knees and feet.

With no one willing to admit defeat, she tightens her muscles again, and we tip to the side like Humpty Dumpty, both still thrusting and wiggling in our grips. When she thrusts again trying to loosen my grip I have to close my eyes and pretend that it's Neville's crotch pressed up against my chin and not the most gorgeous woman I've ever met.

Unwilling to surrender, but unable to take the torture of her body so close to my face, I cheat, and tickle the inside of her thigh. The blood rushes to my brain as her knees immediately slacken their grip, and I open my limbs to allow her the opportunity to scramble free.

"Don't tickle, don't tickle, I'll pee," she says, then skitters like a dog on tile trying to get her footing before I get to mine. Smaller and faster as she is, she beats me to position and climbs up my back as I'm rising to my feet, wrapping her arms around my neck in a move meant to render your attacker unconscious. I have size on my side, and before she can tighten her hold enough to make me tap out, I rise to my full height, grasping her tightened arm in both of my hands, and flip her over my shoulder to land with a smack against the mat.

I won't deny it's not a heady feeling watching her go arse over end as she hits the ground. Her arms and legs are screwed in different directions, and her chest is heaving as she gulps oxygen into her lungs.

I lick my lips and look at her hot and sweaty below me, getting my breath back enough to snark, "For future reference, I prefer being on top. No offense, but it's a man thing, ya know."

Still panting, she shoots me a dirty look, then crooks her finger in my direction, leaving her hand up to grasp. I reach down to help her back to her feet, and am blindsided by a sweep of her legs. With a crash and a groan, I lay prone next to her on the mat, chest heaving just as fast as hers is.

"You—" *Heave* . "Don't know what you're missing." Her breathing slows, merging into deep puffs. "My thigh muscles are amazing."

Fuuuuuck.

The image of my face pinned between her legs is going to haunt me until the day I die. On my tombstone, it'll read 'Here lies Harry, the man who dreamt about Hermione's thighs until the end of time.' She's absolutely ruined me for the rest of my miserable life.

There's nothing I can do about it now other than go with it.

"Want to go get a cuppa?" I ask, still staring at the ceiling, heartbeat finally returning to normal.

"Sounds great. I could use a drink after this."



I still haven't told her about the recording.

# What Are You Doing To Me?

## Chapter Summary

"Tell me honestly, why did you follow me tonight?"

We've got a table at the back of the tea shope, and the quiet buzz of chatter around the building makes for a perfect environment to talk without too much pressure. He made fun of me for my sugar-laced coffee order at nine o'clock at night, and I had to remind him that I'm still a hospital resident. I'd hook myself up to an I.V. of the stuff if I could. Harry ordered a cup of Earl Grey tea, and while it killed me to do it, I resisted the urge to point out that his beverage has just as much caffeine as mine does.

His eyes darken, a cloud passing through them before they brighten again, and he clears his throat in a soft bark.



Hermione

"Tell me honestly, why did you follow me tonight?"

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His eyes darken, a cloud passing through them before they brighten again, and he clears his throat in a soft bark.

"Honestly? You intrigue me. It's been a long time since anything outside of murder and mayhem caught my attention." He roughly clears his throat. "I *am* sorry for following you. I didn't mean to come off all stalkery. I don't normally do this."

Prongs apologizes. I should call Neville and find out when the last time that happened. I bite the inside of my lip to keep my smile contained, and wiggle my finger between us.

"This, meaning getting a cuppa with a friend? Or, this, as in stalk unsuspecting females around the city?"

He opens his mouth to refute me, but then gets a better look at my face. I try to hide my grin behind my coffee cup but I'm sure it's sticking out on either side of my face.

I bet he doesn't get teased a lot.

The look of surprise on his expression tells me all that plus more. I'd wager he can't even remember the last time someone tried to pick on him. Or flirted with him to have fun rather than try to get immediately down his pants. Not that I can blame them; look at the man. Butterflies explode in my belly every time I think about him, which basically means my stomach has transformed into a butterfly reserve since we met. But still—Harry probably takes one glance in their direction, and most women would wither away on the spot, losing their knickers as they go.

No wonder he's so fucking awkward. Because now that I've spent a little bit of time with him, that's what it is. Harry Potter, biggest buck on the force, used to mere mortals dropping at his feet, is nervous around women.

Or if not women, at least around me.

I almost feel bad for thinking he's an asshole.

Almost.

Something about him, though, is begging me to take him down a peg or two. Maybe *because* he doesn't get this sort of back and forth play very often.

“This,” he replies, finally finding his voice, “as in interacting with humans on a social level. It’s been said, more than once, that I am not the easiest person to get to know. I have a bit of a one-track mind, and anything that poses the risk of distracting me from work and the responsibilities that come with it tends to get pushed to the back burner. Besides, between you and me, I don’t like people much.”

I nod my head in total agreement as he explains his aversion to coffee dates. I’m sure he was expecting to put me off with it. Workaholics are not what your average thirty-something females are looking for. Luckily for him, I’m not looking for anything at all.

Besides, I can totally relate to setting your sights on a goal and not letting go until you reach it.

“Nope. I get it. I’ve wanted to be a doctor since I was twelve years old. While the rest of my friends were going to parties and sneaking liquor, I was studying for AP courses and doing community service for extra credit. I double-majored in university, Pre-Med and Peace and Conflict Studies. After uni was med school, which left absolutely zero time for anything more than the most basic of friendships. Then your internship and residency demand all of your time plus some until they release you into the wild.

“Which of course means you have zero time to do anything other than suck up to your new superiors and study. To prove to them that you deserve the title of Doctor. Not to mention, that I work in A&E medicine. Which means I treat colds and stomach flus, but I also treat victims of violent crimes and trauma. Seeing what people are capable of really squishes the desire to leave my house and interact with them.”

He’s watching me ramble, and when he doesn’t make any attempt to respond, my mouth simply keeps moving.

“I haven’t had a date in over a year. Slept with someone, even longer than that. I’m just not in a place in my life where I feel like I can. Casual sex isn’t my thing. Angelina is the party girl in this duo. Pinning you to that mat was the most action I’ve had in ages.”

He raises his eyebrow at that, and I power on to try to cover up my embarrassment.

“What about you? The guys on your squad shut Angelina down hard when she asked about you. Made you sound like some sort of monk.”

He lifts one shoulder in a devil may care motion.

“They were right. I don’t date. I don’t do relationships. I will, occasionally, go home with a woman. Biological urges will out and all that. But those are few and far between.”

I’m in the process of lifting my cup to my lips and stop, freezing it halfway to my mouth.

"Biological urges will out? Really, Harry? Wow."

Harry graces me with an unapologetic shrug, and the cool confidence in his shoulders makes something tight inside my gut clench with need. Let's call it a biological urge, shall we? I

blame it on the fact that he was recently on his back between my knees. That would make any girl's biological urges kick in.

He's lucky I didn't strip and ride him right there on the mat.

"I'm actually at a loss for words," I say, "and my parents could tell you that that is few and far between."

When he scoffs at me in amusement, I raise my cup in a mock toast.

We study each other for a few moments. His posture is relaxed, his right foot on his left knee. He's still in his workout clothes: joggers that end below his knee, an HPD SWAT Team shirt, and a blue ball cap placed backwards on his head. Even in slightly ratty sweats he looks good enough to eat. Harry oozes confidence and sex appeal. It really makes it difficult to picture him living his life like a monk.

"What did she do to you?"

He gives me this quizzical look, one eyebrow raised higher than the others. Lifting his tea to his lips he reminds me of John Black from *Days of Our Lives*. It occurs to me that maybe I *should* go out with Angelina more often.

More dancing, less soap operas. Or perhaps I should take my Mum's suggestion to read a romance novel or two. Medical journals and biographies are starting to rot my brain.

"What did the girl do to you that broke your heart so completely? She must have been a real piece of work to limit a man like you to the occasional biological need."

He stares at me contemplatively, never taking his eyes from my face. About the time I think he isn't going to answer, he takes another swig of his tea and places the paper cup on the table.

"It's not what some woman did to me. It's what I would do to her."

His voice is soft, laced with some emotion I can't put my finger on. Instantly I regret asking the question.

"I'm a soldier, Hermione."

He must sense me getting ready to interject, and he raises his voice a smidge as he powers on. He presses forward, as if desperate to make his point. To me, or to himself I'm not yet sure.

"I may wear a different uniform now, but I'll always be a soldier. It is my job to put my body between good and evil. But soldiers leave as much damage as they prevent sometimes. I've seen too many women barely out of childhood now wearing the title of widow. Too many orphans crying at their mothers' breasts."

He hesitates for a heartbeat and I have an uncontrollable desire to reach out and take his hand. He picks up his mostly empty cup and shakes it, wearing an expression that looks like he's wishing it were a nice iced scotch rather than lukewarm tea dregs.

"Those are the ones who got lucky. Others see their loved ones return, but come back to them in pieces. Broken bodies carrying broken minds.

"My partner, Ron, has been married to his boarding school sweetheart for over twenty years. Together they share six children ranging in age from nineteen to six. Their love is something to behold. But every day when he puts on the badge and walks out the door he risks leaving her with nothing but a folded flag and a widow's pension. I'm not strong enough to do that to someone I care about. I can't picture myself ever taking that kind of risk, especially with another person's heart. Ron is—Ron is twice the man I'll ever be."

I feel like the ground has dropped out from underneath me. That oh so serious look is back on his face, and I want to squirm under its intensity. When my heart decides to beat again it does so at twice its normal speed.

"Wow, Harry. That's—wow."

His scoff is so self-deprecating it breaks a piece of my heart for him.

"Lookie there, speechless twice in under twenty minutes. You'll have to ask your parents if that's some sort of record."

I can't help the blush that colours my cheeks.

"I'm not speechless."

"Hmmm," he intones, lifting that eyebrow again.

"Alright. I am, sorta, but that's just so—"

"Pathetic? Weak? Lame? Yeah, I know. I have no idea why I just admitted that out loud either. I don't know what you're doing to me, Hermione."

His poker face is firmly in place, but I think I'm starting to understand him a little more. The tougher he looks, the more his emotions must be rumbling under the surface.

"I was going to say romantic. Definitely romantic. Selfless, *selfish*, and incredibly, horribly, heartbreaking."

He leans forward in his chair, lowering his voice to a growl. "I swore that I would never put another person through what I've seen my friends suffer. What I've seen their wives and their husbands suffer. Their children, when they are left alone in the world! How the fuck is that selfish?"

He's angry. His cheeks are flushed, and I cringe at the hostility that radiates from around him. I don't shy away though. I wonder if he even realizes what he's said. That he's never let himself love. How depressing. How terribly sad.

I've never been in love. Not really. That doesn't mean I'm not open to it if it happens to fall into my lap. Harry, though, has himself held so tightly together, he doesn't even know what he's missing.

I give him a gentle smile, raising my hands to my shoulders. What do I know?

“It seems to me, and I am by no means an expert on relationships mind you, but it seems to me you’re protecting *yourself* more than you’re protecting some poor weak woman. I understand your fear about dying. We all have that to some extent. However, you’ve spent your whole life so worried about what your death would do to those around you that you haven’t really lived.”

Harry huffs, and I can see the weight he carries on his shoulders as his chest heaves in annoyance.

“Lived?” he snarks self-deprecatingly. “I’m The Boy Who Lived, remember?”

I lick my lips and look him in the eye.

“Yet, what do you have to show for it?” I ask him gently. “I think you’re afraid of getting hurt. As much as you’re afraid of hurting someone else. Besides, you’ll be dead, remember? Why do you care what happens afterward? At least you’d be loved until then.”

He stares at me for a few seconds longer before picking up his cup and tossing it into the bin several tables away from us. Of course, he makes it without even a bounce off the rim.

“What the hell am I doing sitting here with you?”

I lift my shoulders in a shrug and bring my coffee to my lips.

“I don’t know. I really couldn’t tell you.”

“I don’t understand it either.”

He stretches his legs out in front of him and sticks his hands behind his head, but makes no move to leave, so neither do I.

I can only handle silence for so long though.

“Are you ever going to tell me how you got that nickname?”

He smiles at me, small, soft and genuine.

“I think so, yeah. But not tonight.”

Well, okay then. I can wait till he's ready.

# Somebody Ring The Doorbell

## Chapter Summary

I'm on my perch in the front of the room, tossing the non-submissive stress ball into the air over and over as the team files into the conference area.

It's our regular end of the week rundown, and while we've managed to close two cases this week, Pettigrew's file is still sitting open and unanswered on my desk.

It's been almost three weeks. We're running out of time.

## Chapter Notes

I just thought this would be a good time to remind everyone that I am neither a cop, a lawyer, or a doctor. I did a decent amount of research before I wrote this (American research. Not much Brit lol) but any mistakes are my own, and we'll call it writers license, shall we lol.





## Harry

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It's been almost three weeks. We're running out of time.

Our captain makes his way through the door, lifting his hand in a silent hello, before skirting the outside of the room and taking a seat at the back. The eyes of my team follow his progress with respect on their faces, but as soon as he sits down, they return to their conversation.

It's not unusual for an upper brass man to grace us with their presence every now and then. Normally I get a heads-up first, though.

When everyone is here, I bring the meeting to order.

"Okay. Tell me what we've learned."

"Ballistics is back on the bullets that shot Pettigrew. The gun isn't on file, but the same weapon was used in an unsolved liquor store robbery about nine months ago on the other side of the lake."

That gets my attention, and my eyebrows rise in curiosity.

"Prints?"

"Partial, not on file."

"Tell me about that robbery."

My tech girl speaks up first.

"We've been through so much surveillance video the last week my eyes are going to bleed."

That doesn't surprise me. Everybody and their dog has a video stream on that side of the lake. It's one of the reasons their crime is so low. It's hard to get away with robbing your neighbour when said neighbour has a camera on every window.

"Perp was wearing a mask and gloves. Middle weight, middle height, slight Shetland accent. The car used was reported stolen a few hours before and found abandoned a few hours later. We grabbed as much footage from around the time the car was estimated to be ditched as we could find, but if they got into a different vehicle, it wasn't caught on camera."

“What about the video from the night Pettigrew was shot?” I ask, already knowing the answer. But we don’t have these meetings to keep me up to date. We share information in the hopes an officer working one case has insight into others.

“We followed it on traffic cams as far as we could, but lost sight of it around Hogwarts Ave and Gringotts Lane.”

Ron speaks up from his throne.

“Plates were registered stolen, again from a house over the bridge.”

“Did we get a chance to check the car for prints or anything at least?” Tonks asks. She’s not been on the Pettigrew case, and it’s a shame, because her mind sees breadcrumbs that most overlook.

“Nope. Burned to a crisp. About the time we were reporting to the scene of Pettigrew’s homicide, the fire brigade was responding to reports of a vehicle fire. By the time they got it controlled...” and Ron makes an explosion gesture with his hands, mouthing the word boom in exaggerated silence. “It took us almost two weeks to connect the two crimes together.”

“Are we dealing with a pro, then?” Tonks perks up. “I was leaning towards a murder of convenience.”

“And there’s the problem,” I growl, rising from the table's edge. “What was Pettigrew doing in that neighbourhood? Who knew he was there? What have your CI’s said? Somebody’s gotta know something.”

Neville looks around a little nervously, before sitting up straighter in his chair.

“I did hear something, but it was a while ago, and I took it with a grain of salt.”

“Please,” I say, sarcasm dripping from my voice, “share it with the class.”

He scratches at the back of his neck, a sure tell that he’s feeling the pressure.

“I heard a rumour that Pettigrew was looking to go legit. Don’t ask me what they meant by that, I don’t know, and they didn’t either. It’s just what my CI said. It was something he’d heard a while ago, and only once, and I promptly forgot about it once Pettigrew got popped.”

“And you’re just telling us this now?” I growl at him, the effort to control my anger taking all of my resolve.

He places his hands in front of him palms out, a pleading expression on his face.

“Honestly, I just remembered it. Like I said, it was a while ago. You saw Riddle when we told him Pettigrew was dead. I don’t think he did it, boss,” Neville says, and his voice gains confidence as he speaks.

“Agreed,” our captain, Kingsley Shacklebolt says, speaking up from the back. “The gang squad has been breaking up scrimmages all week. The Death Eaters have put the word out.

They're offering cash to anyone who can bring them the person who killed Pettigrew, dead or alive. We need to close this, and fast."

Kings meets my eye, and I read what he doesn't say through the heavy set of his shoulders. The locals are getting restless. Even if we were to arrest someone today, it might not be enough to settle the natives back into their tribes.

"Take a man with you, Potter, and remind them that it's the police's job to punish the guilty."

I nod my head in agreement, and he rises from his seat in the back, settling his suit jacket across his shoulders.

"Finish this, Detective. Our city won't survive a gang war."

With that ominous message, he leaves us to the rest of our meeting.

Nev was good for the first meet, when I wanted to suss out information. For intimidation, I need Ron. As covered in scars as I am, red hair, six three and eighteen stone of mass and muscle. People often mistake him for being dim witted because he's slow to react. But that's just because somewhere around our third hostage situation we finally learned to keep our mouths closed and our eyes open.

He looks like a teddy bear most days, but with a temper to rival my own, deep down Ron is scary as fuck.

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## **Hermione**

Coffee. Sweet glorious coffee. The fruit of life. The nectar of the Gods. Or, at least, a major food group when you work seventy-hour weeks.

I drove fifteen minutes out of my way this morning to sit in a Starbucks drive-thru and ordered the coffee so scalding, it's still warm almost an hour later. The Blonde Cocoa Cloud Macchiato with an extra espresso shot rests in my right hand while I chew on my pen with my left.

10:58. I have twelve hours left of a thirteen-hour shift, and I'm flipping through applications for Attending A&E Room Physicians for next year while I wait on the labs confirming that bed four has a UTI.

The gong sound that indicates an ambulance is pulling into the ambulance bay echoes throughout the nurse's stations, and I perk my ears up at the sound, looking around the department.

Terry Boot, our charge nurse, gives me a frown and a shake of his head, and I turn my attention back to the papers in front of me. We get prior notification when an ambulance is on its way. An ETA and what sort of emergency, or lack thereof, we can expect to find when it gets here.

When the gong sounds without warning, it's usually a patient driving up where they aren't allowed. The security stationed by the double sliding doors will send them in the right direction. Or help them inside if it's an urgent enough case.

I look up at the sound of running footfalls, as Rubeus Hagrid, today's mountain of a man security guard, comes huffing through the doors.

"We have a drive-by," he hollers, before pivoting on his heel and jogging back out.

Occasionally, though, the gong sounds when someone drives up, drops a half-dead patient on our doorstep, then takes off again without bothering to say hello.

"We need a gurney," Terry yells, grabbing gloves from the box on the wall. "Herman, you're up."

I abandon my pen onto my papers, pushing up from my chair and following them out the door. My gloves are halfway on when I freeze in my tracks.

There's a man on the sidewalk bleeding heavily from a wound in his abdomen. The blood is soaking through his white t-shirt, and he's whimpering on the ground. His body is wiggling and arching in pain. Like if he could move away, he could leave the pain behind on the sidewalk.

Terry drops to his knees, examining the patient, while three more nurses come barreling after me, pushing a gurney with a backboard on top.

"Single GSW through the upper left flank," Terry calls out, then looks me in the eye.

I can feel my heart in my throat, the meat tangy with a sickly-sweet taste to it. Rancour builds in my stomach, and I swallow down the rising panic, letting it mix with the acid already brewing. Terry blinks as I suck in air, and I feel my lungs expand with life, the oxygen molecules surging through my bloodstream.

Life that Pettigrew no longer has.

"On my count," Angelina says, and I snap back into focus, my mind sliding into action like the frantic twist of a Rubik's Cube.

They tip him to the side, and I drop to a squat beside them, pulling up his shirt and looking for an exit wound while they push the board under his back.

One, through and through.

His whimpering fades as his body stills. His breathing turns tight and wheezy, as he fights to stay alive.

Like hell, I'm going to let him die.

I bring my stethoscope to his chest, listening to his airway.

"He's tachycardic, with weak breath sounds on the left. Probably dropped his lung. Let's get him inside. Get me prepped with an intubation kit, needle aspiration, trauma panel, type and crossmatch, and call up to surgery. Let them know we have a GSW for them."

We wheel him into the trauma room, Nurse Spinnet is already ahead of us yanking out supplies. Angelina rolls his bed to a halt, jamming the brake and pulling down the sides, giving me space to work. We move around the room with practised precision. It's like a dance, well-choreographed and memorized into instinct.

The stickies of the monitors are slapped on his chest, and his heartbeat fills the empty air.

The beep, beep, beeping is a comforting sound, even if it's not as regular as it's supposed to be.

"We need to release the pressure building in his chest."

Angelina steps up to my right-hand side, ripping open an aspiration kit. I listen to the patient's heart and lungs again, then jab the needle into his left lung. The buildup of pressure escapes his chest in a hiss, and vitals immediately start to improve.

"BP 90/60, heart rate 122. Saturation is 88."

But not enough.

"Intubation tray," I say, and without looking a scope is placed into my hands. Etomidate and Succinylcholine are administered to numb his throat and to ensure he doesn't move during the procedure.

I tip his chin towards the ceiling, using the scope to clear a path. I give my palm to the room, and the tube is smacked against the centre, in just the position to curl my fingers around it.

"Two lines ported," says Nurse Spinnet.

"Push a liter of fluids and hang the blood."

"Pain meds?"

"Don't bother. He's already out. By the time he comes to, he'll be out of surgery. Give me something to plug that hole."

Gauze magically appears on his chest, and I grab it by the fist full, using the absorptive material to cover his wound as best we can.

“Bring me the portable ultrasound. I want to give the surgeon a better idea of what they’re in for.”

A peace falls over me, as the nurses scatter to and fro. To the untrained eye, we probably look like an ant hill that’s been stepped on. Too many people going in too many different directions. But this is what trauma looks like. A thousand moving parts working in tandem with one goal in mind. To save the life of the person on our table.

I take the scissors offered to me in silence, and cut up the middle of our patient’s shirt, exposing his chest and belly.

Ultrasound gel is squirted onto his abdomen, and I use the wand of the hand-held machine to spread the goo around, bringing an unfocused picture onto the screen. It isn’t as reliable as a CT or an MRI, but when you’re under a ticking clock, an ultrasound will have to do.

“There’s blood in the belly. It looks like the bullet nicked his liver.”

“I didn’t want to meet my wife for lunch today anyway,” the surgeon says, strolling into the room. The snap of his gloves is loud as he leans into my side to get a peek at the ultrasound screen. “She’s been on this health kick, and it’s driving me up the wall. All I want is a cheeseburger. The greasier, the better.”

He’s already poked and prodded our patient, taking a quick glance at the vitals now stabilized on the monitor. The nurse squeezing the ambo bag laughs good naturedly.

“You’d better not let cardiology hear you say that. They’ll strap you to a bed and give you an echo.”

They’re already on move by the time the surgeon opens his mouth to respond.

“Worth it.”

There’s an orderly holding an internal use only lift, and they slide to a practiced halt, four grown adults and a hospital bed squished into a six by six metal box. The things that can go wrong on the thirty second trip from our floor to theirs never fails to make me shiver.

I watch as the doors glide shut, the conversation still on cheeseburgers while the nurse breathes for our patient every other second.

One two three, squeeze. One two three, squeeze.

If I’d had an ambu bag, could I have kept Pettigrew alive?

Terry and Angelina high five each other, stepping over the pile of trash that never fails to accumulate on the trauma room floors. When a person is a breath away from living or dying, you can’t really take the time to reach for the rubbish bin.

“That was awesome,” Terry says, riding the high from our save.

“It wouldn’t hurt them to ring the doorbell, though,” Angelina gripes, taking her hair out of her clip before twisting it at the base of her neck again.

“They kind of do though, right? I mean, isn’t that what the gong is for?”

They walk together towards the nurse’s station, resuming half-finished tasks that were dropped when our gunshot victim suddenly appeared.

I’m still wearing my gloves, coated dark in thick sullen blood.

I glance at the clock, as I peel them from my fingers. I ball them inside out, then lift the trash bin and drop them inside.

11:03.

We saved that man in less than five minutes.

I lost Pettigrew in less than two.

# Nightmares and Needed Information

## Chapter Summary

Blood.

Blood is everywhere.

She can sense it in the air. The tangy smell invades her nose, the coppery taste of it lies heavy on her tongue. She swallows, trying to rid her mouth of the flavour, only for her spit to spread the bitterness down her throat.

Her hands are covered in it. Thicker than water, it coats her skin scarlet. The syrupy substance congeals as it mixes with the oxygen in the night sky, leaving a tacky flaky layer of artificial flesh covering her own.

## Chapter Notes

Just want to remind everyone again, I'm not a doctor lol





## Hermione

*Blood.*

*Blood is everywhere.*

*She can sense it in the air. The tangy smell invades her nose, the coppery taste of it lies heavy on her tongue. She swallows, trying to rid her mouth of the flavour, only for her spit to spread the bitterness down her throat.*

*Her hands are covered in it. Thicker than water, it coats her skin scarlet. The syrupy substance congeals as it mixes with the oxygen in the night sky, leaving a tacky flaky layer of artificial flesh covering her own.*

*A pair of brown eyes stare at her from a blank face. He meets her eyes but doesn't see. He appears to stare through her, an accusation, or incrimination, while his lifeblood flows between her fingers.*

*With his last exhale of air, his lips form the words, but the sound never reaches her ears. All she hears are her own cries for help. All she sees besides the blood seeping into her pants, and the tears dropping from her chin, is a man pleading for his life, and her unable to give it to him.*

*The echo of the gunshots still reverberates through the air. It's bouncing off the buildings—tunneling through the alleyways. Rather than fading into the distance, the sound seems to gain strength with every pass through her ears. She lies flat against the man underneath her, shielding him from what's to come. She couldn't save him from the ruin that already took place upon his body. But she'll die before she lets another wound pass through his person.*

I don't jerk awake. Nothing so noticeable as that. It's more like falling asleep, only the opposite. One minute I'm on the sidewalk, the next, I realize I'm not.

It's the dark I notice first. In my dream, there were lights in every direction. Just out of reach. People around me, but unable to hear me scream. Shadows that plunged us into darkness but allowed the city around me to shine.

My eyes dart around the gloom of my bedroom, taking in the familiar shapes of the giant teddy bear Mum gave me when I had my appendix out and the antique dresser that takes up half my room.

My fingers are cramping, and when I try to move them, pain shoots up my wrist. I realize that they're fisted so tight in my blankets, I've lost all circulation. I suck in a gasp of pain, as joints too long tensed try to resume their natural form.

My throat burns when the air hits my windpipe, and I wonder, have I been yelling in my sleep?

I push myself to a sitting position, letting my back and head rest against the padded headboard on the wall. Moisture slips down my neck and over my shoulders, and it's then I realize I was crying in my sleep.

Already the edges of the dream are slipping from me. What once was whole a heartbeat ago is now in fragments. A few minutes more, and I won't remember it at all.

That doesn't mean I don't know what it was about. It doesn't take a degree in Psychology to understand what caused my nightmare.

Without leaving my spot, I reach for my mobile sitting on my bedside table. The screen's harshness is unexpected in the dimness of my room, and I have to avert my head until the automatic brightness adjusts to fit my melancholy mood.

2:43 a.m. I have three and a half hours until my alarm goes off. Five until I have to be at the hospital.

I flick my thumb across the screen, tapping on my messages icon. A plop of liquid hits the white backdrop, and with it comes the first wave of emotion since I woke up. Anguish tightens my chest, causing my breathing to hitch in my throat. With my mobile still in my grip, I bring my hands to my face, using the collar of my nightshirt to wipe away the tears, somehow still slipping down my cheeks.

How did I not realize I was still crying?

I type my message in a daze, motions habitual and automatic, and it isn't until I've hit the arrow, and it's too late to take it back, that I realize who I just texted at three in the morning.

My mobile rings before I even have the opportunity to panic.

There's something to be said about the numbing qualities of shock.

I hit the accept button without thought.

"Hi."

I'm not exactly sure what to say. I don't know why, of all the people I know, I chose to text him. I don't know why he called me in return.

"Hermione."

But when he says my name into the line, his voice deep and soothing, with just a thread of sleep in his tone, I realize I knew what I was doing after all.

I don't reply right away, and he doesn't either. The silence isn't thick or heavy. It doesn't feel like a pause between two practical strangers, brought together by horrible circumstances in the middle of the night.

It feels like the type of silence long earned between friends, where nothing more than the knowledge that they *could* speak, if you needed them to, is required to soothe your soul.

I hear a rustling on his side of the line as if maybe he's sitting up in bed. Or perhaps, settling back down against his pillows. I picture him like that, lying on his back, one arm under his pillow, the other holding the mobile to his ear. He doesn't seem like a heavy sleeper. Certainly not a cold one. There's most likely a sheet covering his hips. Harry would sleep in shorts, or perhaps nothing at all.

"I had a gunshot victim today. We don't get them too often, but at least a couple of times a year. This was the first one I've treated, though, since—since..."

My words are hesitant, halting. I sound weak, and I hate that I can't force more conviction into my voice.

Why can't I say, *since Pettigrew died in my arms* ? Everything that I've learned since that night has told me that Pettigrew wasn't going to win an award for citizen of the year. He wasn't a good person, by any definition of the word. But he was still a man, and he died while in my care. He died a violent death, and I was the only one there to watch his passing.

I didn't realize how much that bothered me until just this moment.

"I froze. Not for long. Not for more than a heartbeat. A second on the clock is all it took to push me into motion again. But when a man is bleeding out on your table, sometimes a

moment is all it takes. I swear I heard the smacking of the second hand mocking me in my momentary suspension."

Harry clears his throat, and I can tell he's choosing his words carefully before he breaks his silence.

"I'm of the mind that everybody has a trigger. Every human in the world, no matter their race, or age, has something that sets them off. Maybe there's a phrase that rubs them the wrong way. Every time they hear it, their eye twitches and their hand spasms. Or maybe it's a smell that causes them to gag and turn their face away in repulsion. Flashing lights trigger me."

I scoff quietly, but not gently enough. Harry's amusement at my disbelief flows clearly through the line between us. I don't know him well, but I imagine that tiny half-smile is gracing his face. The one he wore when we were talking at the coffee house.

Or maybe, right in this moment, I know him better than anyone in the world.

The rustle is louder this time, and I'm sure he's sitting up in bed. His covers are probably pooling around his legs. I pull my own blanket up and over my chest, letting it rest across my shoulders. Now that the sweat is cooling against my skin, the fan has given me a chill.

"Irony, I know, since my chosen profession keeps me near them on an almost daily basis. It's not the lights, though, per se. It's the," and Harry pauses as if searching for the correct description. "You know, I'm sure, how some people have an aura before they have a seizure."

"Of course."

"I was in the Special Forces, Royal Marines. That means I went to places and did things that maybe your regular soldier didn't do. One night, we were crawling over mountains and ran into insurgents that, well, weren't supposed to be there. How they got to that specific crevasse in the ground without us knowing about it is still a mystery to me. There's a special kind of darkness in the desert. The only light is from the moon, and the stars. The flash of a gun is blinding in that kind of dark, especially when you're not expecting it.

"The flashing of the police cruiser blending with the brightness of the floodlights, the night sky trying its best to blanket it all out, never fails to give me an aura. It transports me, if only for a second, from the pavement of Hogsmeade, England, to those mountains in the desert.

"It might be that, from now on, you have a new trigger."

His voice is hypnotic. Methodical and melodious, the story he tells plays out in my imagination. I can picture him clear as day, fatigues covering his massive form, while he belly crawls through the ragged desert vegetation.

The unexpected guests to their party wouldn't frighten Detective Harry Potter. I doubt anything could.

But I can imagine his heart speeding up in his chest. His breathing coming in just a smidgen more rapid. And, despite his best efforts, the experience left a mark on him, even if we can't

see it.

I feel the muscles in my back unclench. Once knotted and sick, my stomach relaxes and lets out a growl reminding me I ate very little in the way of dinner the night before. If a man as strong and proud as Harry has a trigger, what hope do I have to avoid one?

I want to thank him for telling me something so deeply personal. I may not know him well, but I know enough to understand that Harry is a man who doesn't admit weakness. Simply doesn't acknowledge it exists. Certainly not his own. Telling me something that intimate, and that private, couldn't have come easy for him.

But to thank him for the kindness would be to confess out loud, something deeper is happening here than two acquaintances talking on the phone. I'm not sure either one of us is ready for that yet.

"What do you do about it? When that feeling has you in its grip?"

His sigh is audible, and suddenly I wish I could see his face. I want to see the emotions play across his features. I want to look him in the eye, at the life flaring behind them, and push away the dead ones from my nightmare.

"I let it. Then I move on. Like Dory once said, you've got to keep swimming."

I accidentally snort through my nose and bring my free hand to my face to cover up my mouth. As if Harry could see the blush that's blooming over my cheeks.

"Dory? As in *Finding Nemo* ? Did you quote a Disney movie to me?"

He chuckles through the line, and his obvious delight at my response tips my mouth up into a smile.

"I have a nephew."

Another piece of the puzzle falls into place.

~\*\*~

Once again, it's the light that I notice first.

Only this time, it's the way it's creeping into my bedroom via the crack in my curtains when the sun rises over the horizon.

I pull my mobile away from my ear to look at the time, and my stomach swoops to between my knees when I realize my alarms have been silently going off for forty-five minutes, and it's rounding seven o'clock.

"Bugger," I mumble, feeling a surge of *something* pulse through my body. Regret, or perhaps anticipation? "I'm going to need coffee."

His answering laugh is all-male, and it rumbles over my skin.

"I thought you mainlined that stuff anyway," he says, without any sign of the exhaustion, I suddenly feel heavy on my shoulders.

"I do. I will. Trust me. But when you get out of the habit of pulling all-nighters like this, you feel it deeper than you used to."

"All-nighters?" he asks, and I hear movement on his side, then the sound of metal scraping against metal. "Well, all be damned. I have blackout curtains and don't bother with an alarm clock in my bedroom anymore. I had no idea we'd been talking for most of the night."

"Neither did I."

There's a break in our conversation. The first one for hours, apparently. I leave my bed, heading towards the kitchen and my coffee pot. The minute I open the door, the aroma of fresh-brewed java hits my nose. It's only the warming pot that's kept it ready for me. It's set to go off an hour ago. I should have smelled it through the bedroom door, but I suppose my mind was elsewhere at the time.

"Feel better?" comes softly over the connection, and I smile to myself, quietly pleased he felt the need to ask. I felt better, on some level at least, the minute I saw his name on the caller ID. Strange, that. He's still the most annoying man I've ever met.

Somehow four hours on the phone only reinforced that impression, rather than softening him up. But at the same time, as annoying as he is, I almost feel like I understand him on a cellular level. I like it.

I like him.

"Yes," I reply, hoping he can hear my sincerity, and thanks, through my voice. "I do. The next time I—trigger," and points to me for only slightly tripping over the word, "I'll pause, and then simply keep swimming."

"I'd expect nothing less of you."

My stomach swoops again for an entirely different reason.

"I'd better go. I've got to be at work in less than an hour, and it's a long walk."

I can feel his expression harden through the phone line. I fail to swallow my laughter.

"Joking, joking. Paula is working great. Thank you for that, by the way. Though, I still don't appreciate you kidnapping her."

"Kidnap?" Harry parrots. He's not even trying to hide the fact that he's laughing at me. "When are you going to get over that?" He's moving around wherever he is, and the distinct sound of a shower starts up in the background.

That's my cue to leave. I can't be imagining Harry in the shower. Though now I totally am. Darn it.

"Thanks for the conversation," I say.

I reach for my travel mug, my mind already rushing forward to my shortened schedule in order to make it to work on time.

"Anytime."

When I hit the disconnect button, there's only a small wisp of regret.

My mobile beeps suddenly, and I twist it in my palm, pulling my lip between my teeth when I realize it's a message from Harry.

My heart squeezes when I see the text that started it all.

***Me: Do you ever have nightmares?***

There, four hours after I sent the original text, is his response.

***DCI Potter: Yes***

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## **Hermione**

"We're all set up for you in room four," Terry calls to me, and I push out of my terminal, leaving my white coat behind.

The patient came in last shift, and so I haven't seen her personally yet, but she's got a third degree burn blistering all over her arm.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Herman," I announce as I enter the room. I bypass the bed and head towards the sink, giving my hands a quick scrub before- drying them with paper towels.

I turn towards the patient with a smile, but feel it slip from my face when I take in the scared expression she's watching me with.

My gaze flicks over her body, taking in her pained and rigid posture, her arm pulled against her chest in a protective manner. Her eyes are wide in fear and wonder, and her jaw is sitting on her chest.

"It's you," she breathes, in a fantastical little voice. I turn and look behind me, checking to see if someone followed me into the room I didn't realize. Terry should be in shortly, but as of now, it's just me and her.

"Have-have we met before?" I ask her and she shakes her head in rapid jerks, hissing when the motion upends her arm.

“You tried to save Peter,” she whispers, so softly I barely catch it.

My stomach drops out through the floor, and my knees are suddenly quacking in my scrubs. My head jerks back to look at the curtain, but it’s still just me and her.

“How do you know that?” I ask, my pulse thudding out of my chest. To the best of my knowledge, the only people who are aware of that fact are the police. My work knows that I witnessed a murder, but not of who it was. His name wouldn’t mean anything to them if they did.

No, the only people who know I was involved that night were people that were there. I’d bet my Paula that this woman isn’t a cop. She’s dressed well enough, with department store clearance clothes and bargain-basement shoes. But she isn’t in law enforcement; of that I can almost guarantee.

I take in her trembling form for a moment, then pull my walkie from my waistband.

“Hey, Terry?”

I wait for him to reply in the affirmative.

“We’re not going to need you in four after all. She says she feels uncomfortable with a man in the room.”

“Sure thing, Herman,” he relays into the walkie, and I drop it on the counter next to the sink.

I pull the rolling chair up to the bed, and take her arm in my hands, examining the burn.

I think about how Harry would handle this.

He’d try to intimidate her into submission.

But no, not at first. He can be soft when he needs to be. I’ve seen it. I’ve felt it. Harry would have Neville talk to the girl. Neville would comfort her, offer her his shoulder and his handkerchief. Convince her that he alone can make everything all better.

Then, if that failed, Harry would scare her into submission.

Sweet talking first then.

“I was there, yes. I tried to save Mr. Pettigrew. How did you recognize me?” I ask, before rolling the wheelee table up to the bed and lowering her arm onto the absorbent pad that’s been laid out.

She studies me for a while, as I study her arm, prepping the supplies I’ll need to clean and dress the wound.

“They said you did this with hot water?” I prod her, and she nods her head, swallowing before finding her voice.



Caring for her as a patient has settled my nerves, even if I'm desperate to hear how she recognizes me from that night. And how she knows Pettigrew.

"I was carrying a pot of boiling water to the sink to drain and tripped over my cat. I spilled the whole container onto my arm."

"Oh, sweetie," I say, as her eyes well up with tears. "It'll be okay."

There's not much I can do for her at the moment, except cover it and teach her how to keep it from getting infected as it heals.

"Peter," she whispers, so quiet I hold my breath to catch the rest. She sniffles once or twice, before starting again. "He was there to see me. I watched it from my window."

"Oh, sweetie," I say again with feeling, rising from my seat to take her into my arms. She loses herself for a moment, her tears soaking the top of my shirt. She buries her head in my shoulder and allows me to hold her, her shoulders quaking with her sobs.

I wonder if this is the first time she's let it out? If this is the first time, she's allowed herself to feel all the emotions building up inside of her?

When the crying stops and her heaving subsides, I offer her the box of tissues, helping her clean her face.

"Why don't you tell me about him?" I prompt her, and she gives me a sorry smile, nodding her head in agreement.

"I met him through my boss. It was a big no-no to date any of her clients, but there was just something about him I couldn't resist. I couldn't visit him, without people finding out we were seeing each other, so he came to see me, once or twice a week."

Sniffle, sniffle.

I settle myself back onto the chair, draping her injured arm across the pad again.

"I'm going to clean the wound, then cover it with an antibiotic cream," I tell her, waiting for her acknowledgement of my words. "You took the pain meds we gave you, correct?" She nods again.

I begin to clean the wound with a saline solution, and she grits her teeth in pain.

"You must be very special," I tell her, hoping to distract her from the discomfort of my actions, "for Pettigrew to come all that way to visit you. From what I understand, he was quite a way from home."

She gives me a tremulous smile, before staring off over my shoulder.

"I know I wasn't his only woman. Peter wasn't that type of man. But he kept telling me about this big deal he was working. One more, he'd say, and then he could get off the street. Then, maybe, we could be together for real.

“I have a corner flat. There’s a window seat that gives a great view down Hogwarts Avenue. I can see for almost a mile, if the weather is clear. I know it’s stupid, but I liked to watch him leave. Like some lovesick little puppy and not a woman almost past her prime.”

Her voice trails off into tears again, and I give her knee a squeeze.

I give her a few minutes of silence while I finish with the cleaning solution. She watched him leave every time he left. Which means she was sitting at that window, watching him get shot. But if she was close enough to recognize me, she lives in the building directly at the corner.

I pass her flat every single day.

I start with the antibiotic cream.

“I’m so sorry for your loss. It sounds like he was excited though, to make a better life for you. Do you know what kind of deal it was? It must have been pretty amazing.”

The woman takes her bottom lip between her teeth and gnaws on it so hard I’m afraid she may draw blood.

“No,” she whispers, and while there’s truth to her words, there’s obviously more she’s not telling. She may not know the project Pettigrew was working on, but she knows more than she’s comfortable telling a local doctor.

“Have you told the police this?” I gently prod her as I wrap her arm in a protective covering.

Her eyes bulge out in fear, and I realize I said the exact wrong thing. She attempts to pull her arm out of my grasp, but the pain in causes freezes her in place.

“I can’t,” she whispers harshly, the panic evident on her face. “They’ll kill me if I do.”

Whoever *they* are; it’s obvious she believes this to the bottom of her soul.

“Maybe the police could protect you,” I tell her, and her whole-body jerks in the motion of her denial.

“Nobody can protect me,” she claims, and the tears have started down her face again. “You won’t tell, will you?” she pleads with me, and the urgency in her voice sends a spike of fear down my spine.

My oath to do no harm wars with my mandated reporter status. She’s not the victim of a crime. She’s not indicating a crime she’s going to commit. The only crime she’s talking about, that I can physically report, is the shooting of Peter Pettigrew, and I already reported that myself.

“Doctor Patient privilege,” I tell her, and push her hair behind her ears. “Everything you tell me stays between us. Even if it doesn’t relate to your treatment. Any communication between a physician and a patient must stay confidential.”

Her sniffles start again, and I hand her the box of tissues once more.

“Let’s get your paperwork, and get you out of here, okay?”

“Thank you,” she whispers into the space between us.

“You’re welcome.”

~\*\*~

I’ve been stewing over it for hours, running my conversation with the woman over and over in my mind. I made a note of her patient number, but didn’t copy her name or address, so I couldn’t be tempted to call Harry and let him know.

Because that’s all I’ve been thinking about since she walked out of my exam room. I *need* to talk to Harry about everything I’ve learned here. It's like a physical ache.

But I can’t.

So, I do the next best thing.

***Me: I already kicked your arse on a practice mat. Should we see who’s faster when we run? Diagon Park, 7am, Saturday***

His reply comes less than a minute later.

***Harry: Loser buys breakfast. I like waffles. Bring your wallet. I eat a lot.***

# You're Going To Need Our Help

## Chapter Summary

“No. Nonononono. I thought we were past the whole stalking me thing.”

I look up at the sound of Hermione’s voice, and the thump of her door closing behind her. She’s got her hands on her hips, looking at me in exasperation, before she turns her attention back to her door. She twists the key in the deadbolt, giving the knob a little shimmy to ensure it’s locked.

“Hmmm,” I mumble, at the extra precautions she takes when she leaves her home. She really needs to live in a better building.

## Chapter Notes

Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Harry

“No. Nonononono. I thought we were past the whole stalking me thing.”

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“Hmmm,” I mumble, at the extra precautions she takes when she leaves her home. She really needs to live in a better building.

“I thought we were over that,” I say, stuffing my mobile into the pocket of my pants. “You’re going to give me a complex if every time we see each other in public you accuse me of stalking you. Besides, *you* called *me* this time, so I’m not sure how that can be considered stalking.”

She starts off down the hallway, and I let her pass me slightly before falling into step behind her. My eyes take in her form, and how very much of it is on display. That unquantifiable rumbling starts in my gut again, wrapping around the base of my spine.

She steps into the lift, and I hit the button for the ground floor.

“I don’t remember telling you to loiter outside my front door. That’s kind of stalkerish, in case you were wondering. You could have knocked, Harry.”

I lean against the lift wall, watching as she pulls each arm in front of her, stretching out her muscles.

“After what happened last time I went into your flat? No thanks. Hell, you were threatening to tase me just a few weeks ago.”

She scoffs at me.

“So, you think lurking outside my door is a better option. I thought you were supposed to be intelligent. That move screams restraining order. How’d you even know I was home? I could have slept over at a beau’s house,” she says conversationally as we make our way to the front of her building.

“Paula is in her spot. If you lived in a more secure building,” I say with a little gruff in my voice, “I wouldn’t be able to tell that. And you don’t have a beau. I am a detective, remember. I know things. Besides, if you slept in some man’s bed last night, the hell he’d let you out of it to go running with me.”

If she were in *my* bed I'd probably handcuff her to the bedposts. The rumbling in my gut turns into a clawed fist, twisting inside my stomach.

“Not to mention we were on the phone until midnight,” I add. Like we have been every night since her nightmare, excluding the times she's been on shift.

She pauses when she sees my Firebolt parked in front of the building, but when I keep walking over to it, she gives no other complaint other than a long-suffering sigh. Without prompting she takes her hair out of its knot, shaking the tendrils loose around her shoulders.

The sight of her there, propped up against my cycle, knocks the breath from my lungs. Neon yellow running shoes. Black wick away leggings, high enough that they cover her belly button, but leave nothing to the imagination. A purple sports top that still leaves inches of tanned bare skin across her torso. And a black long sleeve covering thingy that hugs her shoulders and covers her arms but doesn’t dip any lower than her collarbones.

With her hair, clean and shiny, tumbling loose around her shoulders, she looks ethereal, and I can’t keep my comments to myself anymore.

I have to clear my throat before the words will come out unbidden.

“Is that what you normally wear to go running?”

She gives me a confused look before glancing down at herself.

“Yes?” she asks, like she doesn’t understand the question. “It’s cold out but running makes me hot. Or my core, at least. I cover my arms and my legs, but make sure my skin is able to breathe.”

“Hmmm,” is all I can bring myself to say again. When women’s exercise clothing became so attractive to me, I have no idea.

“Besides,” she adds, boldly trailing her eyes up and down my body. “Like you’re one to talk. If your shirt were any tighter it would burst at the seams. Do you even own a hairbrush?” She steps forward and rises on her tiptoes to roughly run her fingers over my head.

I’m not blushing. I’m not. I haven’t blushed since I was four. At least. It’s not my fault the only time I see her is in the middle of the night or when we’re prepping for exercise. There’s no need to style my hair if it’s just going to get messy again.

My joggers are low on my hips, over top a pair of exercise shorts. My shirt is blue and long sleeved, and it *is* tight, but it’s wick away, so it’s supposed to be.

“Enjoying the view?” I ask her in a cocky tone, twirling in a slow circle with my hands out at my sides.

“Yes,” she says unabashedly, even as a small blush climbs up her cheeks, “but you already know you’re good looking, and the fact that it makes you cocky, is an automatic turn off in my book.”

I give her a bemused look, laughter trying to escape my throat.

“Let me get this straight. The fact that you find me attractive, makes me *un* attractive. Is that it?”

She throws her hands up in triumph.

“Finally,” she cheers, “we’re on the same page about something. Besides, aren’t you cold? It’s in the teens out here. And is that—” I stand perfectly still as she closes the space between us, watching with amusement as she does a circle around me. “Is that a gun at the small of your back? Honestly, Harry. You couldn’t leave it at home for just one day?”

I reach behind my back for my weapon, pulling the slim fit holster out from between my skin and the waistband of the shorts holding it in place.

I watch her, watching me, as I pull it from its holster, checking the chamber and popping the magazine.

“Take it,” I tell her, handing it to her butt first. She looks at me skeptically, before reaching for it like you would a snake. Not sure if it will bite her.

She turns it over in her hands, careful to keep her finger from the trigger, and I shove the mag and holster into my pocket before wrapping my hand around hers.

“It won’t hurt you. Have you ever shot one?”

The look she gives me drips with disgust.

“I’m a doctor, Harry. My job is to save lives. Not take them. No. I’ve never shot a gun.”

I nod my head, agreeing with everything she’s saying. But still...

“I’ve taken lives before. You’re absolutely right. I’ll probably take more, before my time on this earth is done. But I don’t aim my weapon with the intention to take a life. I aim my weapon with the sole desire to save lives. Every time I shot a man in combat, it was to save my brother beside me. When I pull that gun from its holster on my hip, it’s to protect the same men and women you protect in your exam rooms.

“My weapon is an extension of me. No different from my hands or my feet. Guns don’t kill people, Hermione. People kill people. In a perfect world, I wouldn’t need my weapon. War would be a concept only in abstract. Something they taught in schools as a lesson about the inferiority of our ancestors. But so long as there are bad men who walk our streets, set on mayhem and destruction, then I’ll be there to stop them, and my gun will always be with me.”

I fix her grip on the weapon, so it’s situated snugly in the palm of her hand. It’s too big for her, but she mimics my move from moments ago, checking the chamber and pressing the mag release. She hefts it in her hand, testing the weight before staring at it intensely.

“That’s harder than it looks,” she mumbles, pointing the gun at the ground. Then she pulls the trigger, the gun clicking empty in her hand. She flinches, but her hand stays steady.

When she finally meets my eye, her stare is heavy. There’s a knowledge there, or an acknowledgement, of the point I’m trying to make. The breath I didn’t realize I was holding eases in my chest and she gives me a little nod of agreement.

Or maybe acceptance. Acceptance I didn’t know I needed until she graced me with it.

“Teach me how, one day?” she asks me.

“It would be an honour,” I tell her, meaning every word. Hermione is already a bit of a badass, though you couldn’t tell it just from looking at her. She kinda reminds me of me, to be honest.

She hands me back the weapon, butt first, and I pop the mag back in before walking to the other side of my bike and placing the holstered weapon in the case I keep inside the bag for just this purpose.

She moves to the other saddlebag as if she’s been doing it for years, instead of only once before. She pulls the spare helmet from the side, the one I switched out this morning for the one my sisters use. It’s designed for a woman and therefore smaller and tighter on her head, and I can tell by her expression that she feels the difference. There’s a windbreaker in my bag as well, and she doesn’t ask before she pulls it out and shoves her arms through the sleeves.

She lifts her eyebrow at me, mocking me as I watch her, and I throw my leg over the bike, situating myself while she lowers the side pegs for her feet. There's no hesitation this time as she swings her leg over the seat and drops down behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist. The engine purrs to life underneath us, and I give her arms a squeeze before slipping my helmet over my head.

Hermione with a gun on her hip, I muse, as I pull into the early morning traffic. The woman would be an unstoppable force.

~\*\*~

"I still think it's bullshit," she exclaims at me, using her fork as an added exclamation. Her silverware had a bite of egg on it, that goes flying off at the enthusiasm of her gesture, and I pick it up off the table and pop it into my mouth before going back to cutting my waffles.

"I won fair and square. Stop whinging and eat."

She's already got a mouth full, and she's rushing through her chewing before rising to the bait.

"You cheated. I'm faster than you and we both know it."

"Agreed," I tell her, taking a moment to shove a bite of waffle into my mouth. I moan as the butter and syrup burst on my tongue, and Hermione *hmpfs* in disgust, before reaching over and taking a bite off my plate. "But this wasn't really about speed. I'm twice as big as you are. You take two steps for every one of mine. It wasn't a fair race. If we timed who could get off the mat faster, you'd probably win every time."

Her scowl slips from her face, to be replaced with surprised ecstasy as she chews the bite she stole from me.

"Okay," she says after she finishes swallowing. "That's good."

"I told you this place was brilliant," I tell her, reaching onto her plate and stealing another bite of eggs, "The owners are Ron's parents. I spent half my childhood running around these tables with Mrs. Weasley constantly trying to feed me. They make me waffles, even if I come in at closing time instead of breakfast."

"No wonder you're both so big," she says through a mouthful of food.

"It's because you deserve it, Harry dear," comes from Mrs. Weasley, as she makes her way over to the secluded booth Hermione and I are sitting at. She rubs her nails over my back like she would one of her sons, and I'm suddenly hit with the need to close my eyes and lean into her ministrations. Which makes me want to drop to the ground and do pushups instead. "We know how hard you work. I'm just glad you come to us for your waffle fix, and not that awful shop down the road."

Her nose squishes up when she talks about the American chain diner down the street, and Hermione hides her mouth when she chuckles.



“You’ve never brought a girlfriend to us before, Harry,” Mrs. Weasley pretends to whisper, not taking her eyes off Hermione. “Won’t you introduce me?”

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley have six sons, one daughter, and more grandchildren than I can count. She knows exactly what she’s doing by intruding into our breakfast. I start to choke on the world girlfriend, and the women caging me in give me identical exasperated expressions before Hermione reaches out her hand.

“Hi,” she says, to the twinkle in Mrs. Weasley's eye. “I’m Hermione. Nice to meet you.”

They shake hands slowly, each sizing up the other, and I realize what a colossal mistake it was to bring her here. I take a slug of orange juice to clear my throat.

“I don’t like what’s going on here at all,” I say.

I’m ignored. Completely.

“Nice to meet you too, dearie. You know, my second oldest son is single. You’d like him, I bet, if you ever get tired of this one,” and she points her thumb in my direction like I can’t hear every word they’re saying.

“He is rather exhausting; I’ve got to admit. But I think I’ll tough it out a little longer, thanks. I’ll take your son’s number just in case though, if you promise me he can make waffles as good as these.”

Mrs. Weasley titters in pleasure.

“I’ll see to it personally,” she laughs, before flittering away back towards the kitchen.

“You enjoyed that too much,” I tell her, scowling as she pops a whole piece of bacon in her mouth.

“I make no apologies,” she mouths off at me, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

I am in so much trouble with this girl.

## **Harry**

“Why is my team here again?”

My team is split into three groups, interspersed with officers from the Narcotics Squad. It's in the middle of the afternoon, and instead of handling our own cases, we're baking in the sun assisting on a narcotics bust.

To say I'm out of sorts would be an understatement.

Narcotics has been on my shit list for a while, long before Pettigrew got popped. Half of our job in the Investigations Unit is to pick up after them. Their lack of information since the shooting isn't winning them any points. Their sergeant, McLaggen, promised today would be worth my while. Or, at least, that I could sweat any punk they dragged back to the station to make up for my time.

Which is a nice way of asking me to do their job for them.

"Because your team is the Boogey Man of the Hogsmeade PD."

I give McLaggen my blandest glare from the passenger seat, and he smirks at me with a devil may care attitude. Neville makes a choking sound through the coms trying to swallow back his laughter, and even Ron averts his face to hide a smile in the back seat.

Traitors.

I look at Ron in the van beside me, communicating my annoyance through years of practised expressions, and he lifts one shoulder in a 'what are you going to do about it' sort of way.

I turn to McLaggen again.

"Please tell me it's more than just that."

"You sent notification up the flagpole to keep an eye out for new players in town. This guy is new. They haven't been on our radar, and nobody seems to know who's pushing the new product. They put out feelers looking for interested buyers, and my man answered the call. Here we are."

"Here we are."

This is why Narcotics is the red-headed stepchild of the police department.

The undercover and the criminal informant are shooting the shit, waiting for the sellers to show up, and something about his voice pulls at my memory. I'm sure I haven't worked with him before, but maybe I've arrested him once or twice.

"Tell me about your man."

I don't recognize McLaggen's CI, but Hogsmeade is a decent sized town. I'm not on a first name basis with every thug there is.

Just most of them.

McLaggen leans back in his seat, scratching at his chest like a gorilla in the zoo. It's a testament to my training in the military that I resist rolling my eyes.

"Vincent Crabbe. Low-level gangster, mid-level middleman. To the best of my knowledge, makes his living as a professional CI. I know for a fact that we're not the only agency he's reporting to."

Agency? Interesting word choice.

"The seller?"

"Word on the street is they have major product to move, and their original buyer fell through."

"Who *are* they?"

McLaggen shrugs. "Your guess is as good as mine."

My guess is the MacCoinnich Mafia.

Silence falls inside the 4X4, and the chatter from the undercover wire seems to double in the small space. We're still waiting for the seller to show up, and McLaggen's agent and his CI are in the warehouse talking about their favourite BBQ Sauce.

"McLaggen," I growl, losing my patience with the slovenliness in which Narcotics runs their department. He puts his hands up in front of him in a placating manner, and swivels in his seat, turning from the audio equipment and laptop.

"What do you want me to do, Harry? The seller isn't here yet."

"They were supposed to be here fifteen minutes ago."

"If he were on time, I'd be nervous. He's selling coke, Harry. He runs on his own schedule."

I don't like this. I don't like this one iota.

I don't know this narcotics cop. I don't know how he reacts under pressure. I don't know how well he pivots when things don't go as planned.

I don't know this CI. I want to be able to look into his face. I need to be able to read his intentions in his eyes. Is he on our team, or is he only looking out for himself? A good informant needs to be both a criminal and undercover cop rolled into one.

"Incoming," comes from over the speaker, and I sit up straighter in my seat.

There are three undercover cars parked around the warehouse, holding 2-3 guys each. We shouldn't need more than that. But the op is on the books, and backup is only a click away if shit starts to go sideways.

A shiny black Land Rover glides past us, pulling into the warehouse parking lot. I know they can't see into our windows. We're in a broken arse UC van, run down to match the neighbourhood, but the windows are black as night from the outside.

"Heads up guys. They're here."

"Copy," comes from over the com unit. The video from the Narcotics detective shifts, and it looks like he rose from a sitting position.

"About damn time," Crabbe says to the undercover, and I swallow back a laugh that even the professional criminal was tired of waiting.

A second car follows the first, and three men in suits get out of the vehicles. If they were parked on Flourish Avenue instead of an Industrial Park, it would look like they'd just left the office for lunch. They check their weapons on their hip, one flinging a suit jacket to cover the gun at the small of his back, but no one grabs any bags from the back.

"What is this, McLaggen? I thought it was a buy."

"Meet and greet," he says, typing into his mobile. "Setting the terms for the exchange."

"Meet and greet," I repeat, irritation melting into unease. "What in the hell did you need us for?"

"Jesus, Harry," McLaggen huffs in exasperation. "Next time I won't bother to invite you to the party."

"What took you so long?" Crabbe says before they'd even entered the room.

The video isn't exactly HD, but I'd swear the leader is smirking.

Apprehension latches onto the base of my spine and entwines itself into my nervous system.

"Is that any way to great new friends?" he asks, holding out his hands in supplication.

"I have plenty of friends," Crabbe grumbles, smoothing back his hair. The undercover makes a disparaging sound, and Crabbe shoots him a glance. "But I suppose I could always use another."

"I don't even know your name, *friend*. Only what Crabbe here has told me, and to be honest, that's precious little. You know I'm Ernie. What can I call you?"

The Narc cop sounds louder than the rest, since he's wearing the mic. I imagine his face looks half irritated, half coaxing. Trying to push the seller in the direction he wants him to go.

"Caillen," the seller replies, and there's a burr to his voice as he says it.

I glance back at Ron, and he raises his eyebrow in response.

"Are we going to do business?" the undercover asks, and again, I wish I could see his face.

“Tell me, why are you looking for new suppliers? From what we understand, there’s quality product in town already.”

If they’re so new, why do they know so much about the drug supply in Hogsmeade? I wonder if McLaggen has made that connection?

More and more, I’m sure this is the group we’re looking for.

The Narc doesn’t miss a beat.

“It’s not right to have a monopoly on that sort of thing. There’s plenty of untapped resources on the other side of the lake just itching for a taste. Spoiled rich mummy’s boys who want to try the dark side before going home to daddy. I’m just a businessman, looking for a new opportunity.”

The undercover does a good job sounding affronted that he’s not getting a bigger piece of the pie.

The seller looks at his posse around him, before nodding in the direction of his second. The guy pulls a container from his pocket and hands it up to Caillen.

Caillen pops the top on the metal cylinder and dips his finger inside. When he pulls it out, he displays the power coating the tip.

“Do you want a taste?”

“Do I need a taste?” the Narc asks. “I don’t normally play with my own product. Bad for business, you know.”

“Well, I’ll take a taste,” Crabbe says, then dips his pinky into the small container, quickly rubbing the powdery substance across his gums.

“He knows he’s not supposed to do that,” McLaggen mumbles from the driver seat, and I grunt out my antipathy.

“What sort of weight are we talking about here?” the narcotics cop asks.

“And what’s my cut for facilitating this merger?” Crabbe cuts in, before the seller has a chance to respond.

That answers that question then. Only out for himself. He’s trying to play both sides. Get paid from the seller, and then again from us when we seize the product.

Caillen is silent for a moment, measuring the men before him, before facing the undercover officer.

“Three bricks to start, thirty-five thou a pop. We can go from there *after* you’ve established yourself reliable.” He turns his head to look at Crabbe. “And ten per cent for your *facilitation*, as you so eloquently put it. Plus, the additional fee we discussed for locating my friend.”

The camera moves to face towards Crabbe, and every cell in my body fires to full tilt. The hair on the back of my neck stands at attention. I hear Ron shift in the back seat, and suddenly his hand is on my shoulder, offering me a calming reassurance.

It doesn't help.

My fingers twist on my vest, calluses pulling against the rough fabric. I try to pull oxygen into my lungs and can't. Suddenly my chest is weighed down with a thousand stone of fear.

A stack of cash flies through the air, and Crabbe catches it with both hands, pulling it tight to his chest. He runs his thumb across the top, letting the bills fan him in the process, before looking at the sellers in front of him.

"Speaking of your *friend*, I have an update on that point. I don't think you're looking for a friend. Maybe an ex-girlfriend? I have it on good authority that Herman is short for *Hermione*. She works at Saint Mungo's Hospital."

I'm up and out of the vehicle before the CI even finishes saying her name.

They know about Hermione.

I hear McLaggen trying to stop me, then swearing me to hell.

"All units, all units. Move-in."

I ignore the chatter from my walkie.

Ron is right at my side.

*They know about Hermione.*

It's my new mantra, coursing through my bloodstream. It burns through my heart, into my brain, and through my heart again, until it's seared into my DNA.

They know about Hermione.

Tires squeal on the pavement, and I know that McLaggen's team is in play.

Ron places his hand on my shoulder as he falls into step behind me, while the other grabs at his radio.

"60-72 Henry, requesting backup and ambulances at my location."

It's not a good sign that he's ordering medical attention before we even breach the building.

I block out his call into dispatch and concentrate on quieting my footfalls as we approach the building. Neville and Tonks suddenly appear on my left, and I lock eyes with each of them. Their guns are in their hands, and they give me knowing looks with a jerk of their chins. They know what to do.

At my signal, we enter the warehouse.

We're at the far end of the building, and the meet was in the middle. Which means we have a way to go. We move in silence down the rows, guns raised to our chests.

It takes twenty seconds to reach the meeting spot, and I swear it takes twenty years off of my life. What if he's already called it in to his boss?

"Hogsmeade PD! Put your hands in the air!"

My eyes scan the cavernous space, taking in the rows of half stacked boxes and the conveyor belts in the middle. The dock doors are closed, and a heartbeat after we announce ourselves, McLaggen and his team swarm in the back door.

"Hogsmeade PD! Drop your weapons!"

Crabbe, with the survival instincts of a cockroach, immediately drops to the ground, crawling away to safety.

"Ye feartie clipe!" the seller yells, before whipping a pistol from his waist. I don't have time to do more than brace before the bullets are whizzing through the air and embedding themselves into my vest.

The pain is instantaneous. Fireworks explode in my chest, and a moan is ripped from my throat.

My air is forced from my lungs like a banana in a vice grip, and my back hits the cement floor, knocking loose whatever oxygen I had left. I hear the screaming and the fighting going on around me, like fairy lights on the verge of my consciousness.

My vision swims in black, the scope of my view narrowing as I fight through the initial impact. Then my diaphragm seizes, and oxygen floods into my bloodstream, forcing another wave of pain to wrack my body.

There's no time to wallow, however, and as Caillen closes the distance between himself and Neville, who's currently got his back plastered to a pillar. I lean on my elbow and fire, hitting him square in the chest.

He crumbles to the floor like a paper doll. Blood is already coating his designer shirt.

Neville peeks his head out to watch as he falls, then pivots to the other side, his gun aiming for the rest of the men still shooting.

There were seven of us, and three of them. You'd think that would make it an easy fight. But never underestimate an animal's desire to live free.

The gunshots sound like explosions in the warehouse.

I'm barely on my feet again before someone has me around the waist, slamming me up against the shelving. It teeters and groans under the impact but manages to stay upright.

Thank God for adrenaline. I barely feel a thing.

I ram my elbow into his back, feeling his vertebra rebound against my funny bone, and ignore the shock waves it sends up my arm. With a push of my foot and a thrust of my knee, I slip his grip to the side. I jam my heel into his leg and fling him over my shoulder, ending on my back again. We rise together, but my knee finds his face before he can get his footing underneath him.

The sound of his nose crunching seems to echo in my ears, and I smell the iron in his blood as it gushes down his chin.

He lands on his back but fights me like a cat. His nails scratch down my arms as his fingers dig for purchase. His feet flail like fish out of water, trying to rise to a position of power. I can hear someone calling my name, but it's faint, like a shadow, as I bring my fist down against his face.

Then again.

And again.

The fourth time my arm rises back, it's caught in a vise-like grip. I turn to strike my attacker, cold adrenalin making my vision sharper, when Ron's worried face comes into view.

"Harry, it's done," he whispers so only I can hear, and I give him a jerky agreement, letting my shoulders slump in relief.

Until the motion sends pain blasting down my nervous system, and I square my shoulders to take the pressure off my mangled ribs.

He takes a step back, surveying the wreckage.

I take a breath, shallow and tight, testing the damage to my chest.

Bruised, I'd bet, but not broken. Sometimes that hurts even worse.

My head prickles, now that I've stopped moving. I bring my hand to my scalp and come away covered in blood.

"He's dead," Ron says flatly, standing from where he was squatting over the man I shot. He crosses himself out of habit, then says a prayer for the dead man's soul.

I reach for the unconscious man at my feet, my fingers searching out a pulse while the ambulance sirens scream into existence.

There.

Weak, but there.

"He's not."



McLaggen's men have two in custody, one screaming at the top of his lungs for a lawyer. The other is Crabbe, sitting on the floor, resigned, his wrists zip-tied behind his back. He occasionally throws out an insult. But you can tell his heart isn't really in it. He's the only one without a scratch on him.

He was the one on the recording.

"What the fuck was that?" McLaggen demands, storming over to where my team is gathering around me.

I'm finally on my feet again, and I lock my knees to ensure I stay that way.

They bristle at him, taking positions at my back. Neville's hand strays to his gun before a soft touch from Ron makes him pull away again.

I swallow back the roiling in my stomach. Ignore the desperation to call the hospital to check on Hermione. I stand at my full height, disregarding the lightning shooting through my body, and try to pretend I didn't just fuck everything up.

"I think I know who your new players are. You're going to need our help."

## Chapter End Notes

I did two chapters at once again, to make it a little bit fatter.

# Like They Say You-Know-Who

## Chapter Summary

"Incoming. Two minutes out. Three ambulances with an officer-involved shooting. Look alive, people. I need three trauma teams upfront."

I shove up from my computer station, pushing my jacket from my shoulders as I go. I hate whenever we have an officer-involved conflict. Everything is messier than when it's a typical fistfight on the corner.

## Chapter Notes

One more time lol. I am NOT a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer, or british. All mistakes are my own, and anything else, let's call creative license lol.

Sorry I forgot to post it earlier. I'll post two chapters to make up for it. Let's all take a moment to thank Happily for reminding me, and thank him again for reading it until his eyes bleed to make sure it is as pretty as possible.

Doccbm, I'm terrified of you reading this lol. Be kind to me lmao.



## **Hermione**

"Incoming. Two minutes out. Three ambulances with an officer-involved shooting. Look alive, people. I need three trauma teams upfront."

I shove up from my computer station, pushing my jacket from my shoulders as I go. I hate whenever we have an officer-involved conflict. Everything is messier than when it's a typical fistfight on the corner.

I walk to the box of gloves on the wall and pull a handful from the pack. I pick two from the pile, then shove the rest into my pockets. If I'm going to be flittering between multiple patients, I need to be able to have clean hands without searching out a fresh pair every few seconds. In a mass casualty event, I'll wear multiple pairs at a time, so I can rip a set off and not waste time yanking on another.

The gong echoes around the department, and a bevy of nurses, techs, and doctors line up, ready to jump into the fray.

I let the calm fall over my senses as I prep for what's to come. My fingers flex in their gloves, and I bounce on the balls of my feet.

They didn't give us a run-down of the injuries. Nor did they tell us who was injured. We wouldn't treat an officer any differently from any other patient off the street, but when an

officer is involved, our work's scrutiny is ten times as high. And if an officer caused the injury, then the scrutiny is ten times higher than that.

See? Messy.

The sirens turn off as they pull into the drive, and I watch with anticipation as they pull to a stop in front of us.

The back doors part in synchronicity and the lead ambulance spews its paramedics onto the driveway.

"John Doe of unknown age. Single GSW. No vitals at the scene. All resuscitation attempts failed. We just need him pronounced."

I step forward to meet the paramedics as they unload the victim.

I can tell he's dead just by looking at him. When the heart stops pumping, the body immediately starts to change. The skin loses its colour, turning waxy and pale. It cools to the touch, leaving a pasty feeling under your fingertips.

The gunshot wound is apparent, straight at centre mass, and I sense the *aura*, as Harry called it, sliding over my body. My lungs seize, and I close my eyes to gain control over my heartbeat.

Then the crash of the second gurney hitting the pavement hits my ears, and it's over as quickly as that. I place my fingers on the patient's carotid artery. Nothing. Which makes sense since it doesn't appear like he has any blood left to pump.

"Asystole on the monitors," one of the paramedics says, "but we shocked him a few times anyway."

"He's dangerous. There's no way in hell I'm uncuffing him. I don't give a shite if he's unconscious."

My body whips around automatically at the sound of Harry's voice.

He's climbing out of the back of the second ambulance, arguing with the doctor assigned to that rig. My feet feel rooted to the pavement. A tingling sensation starts at my toes and works its way up my limbs.

He's wearing his usual outfit: jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, and ballistics vest. Only, his vest is riddled with bullet holes, and there's blood covering the whole right side of his face. He's holding himself straight as a ramrod. Before, I would have thought it was because he had a stick up his arse. But years of practising medicine and the weeks of getting to know Harry tells me his back is that straight because it hurts too bad to relax his shoulders.

Not that he'd ever admit that out loud.

I check my watch, then place my fingers on the first ambulance's patient again.

"Time of death, 17:32. Take him inside."

I rip off my gloves, dropping them to the ground and pulling another set from my back pocket.

The gurney with the handcuffed man whizzes by me, and I get a glance at the dude on the stretcher. Broken nose for sure. Busted face. Busted knuckles. He got in a fight with someone. And lost.

Harry?

He glances at me as they walk through the ambulance bay doors, and his gaze causes butterflies to erupt in my belly. Time seems to slow as he reaches his hand out and skims his fingers across my own.

Then the rubber band snaps, and suddenly I'm staring at their backs as they hustle into the building.

Tires squeal as the third ambo is unloaded, and a plethora of police cars slam to a stop around the ambulances, with officers pouring from their doors.

Neville hits the sidewalk in front of me, and I grab him by the wrist, yanking him to a stop. There's blood splatter on his clothes, but nothing that indicates the blood is from him.

I lay my hands on him, anyway, grasping his head and turning it this way and that. He's pliable under my touch, letting me adjust him as I see fit. "What happened?" I ask, patting down his arms, looking for bruises or abrasions. His face squishes into a grimace, but not from what I'm doing to him.

"Something unexpected. You'd better ask Harry."

Don't you worry. I will.

"Pain, headache? Your vest looks clean. Are you wounded in any way?"

He looks down at me, and there's something gentle in his eyes.

"No, ma'am. I'm fine. I need to follow those two, though." He points to the last ambulance, where two men are being helped out of the back. Neither is on a gurney, and both are cuffed with their hands behind their backs. Neither one looks injured.

One looks resigned, with his eyes closed in a half prayer. The other is screaming at the top of his lungs. The hoarse quality of his voice tells me he's been at that a while. Maybe thug one is praying for thug two to shut up.

"You got this?" I ask the third-year resident, who looks less than confident at the men being led her way. But she swallows back her fear and gives me a sharp nod before stepping towards the paramedics for the rundown.

"Where's Ron?" I ask, looking around at the mass of cops filling our ambulance bay. "Does he need to be checked out?"

"No, ma'am. He went back to the station. Only Harry was hurt."

I look at him, then at the chaos around me, before looking over my shoulder where Harry and the other patient disappeared through the doors.

"Go," Neville says, and it's all the encouragement I need to rip the second pair of gloves from my hands and follow Harry's group on a run.

I catch up as they're moving the patient to the exam bed.

"What do you need?" I ask, yanking another pair of gloves from the box on the wall and striding to the foot of the bed.

Dr. Binns is at the patient's head, pulling back his eyelids and checking his pupil dilation.

"We need a full neuro workup, but the patient's airway is clear, and there doesn't seem to be any active bleeding. I've got this if you want to check on the other ambo."

I remove one of the patient's shoes, shoving it into the bag the nurse is holding out.

"Ambo one was DOA, I already pronounced him." Harry's eyes close painfully at that, but he doesn't seem surprised. He's standing in the corner, with his hands shoved into the armpits of his now ruined vest.

"Both patients in ambo three were ambulatory. It seems they were brought for precautionary reasons."

Harry speaks up but doesn't move from his spot in the corner.

"They both surrendered their weapons after their comrades were disarmed. As soon as they're cleared medically, they'll be out of your hair and into lock up."

"I see," says Dr. Binns, not looking all that impressed at the actions that were taken to *disarm* their comrades. But then he looks up, and I watch as his gaze wanders over the three tiny explosions across the front of Harry's chest, and he breathes, "I see," again.

This time there's a depth to his words as if maybe he really does see.

I see too. I see that if things had played out differently, I would have been pronouncing Harry instead of the man who tried to kill him.

"Detective Potter." I whip off yet another pair of gloves, dropping them into the trash as I make my way around the team working on Harry's suspect. "Why don't you follow me into another room. We'll get you cleared while they're working in here. He's not going anywhere."

Harry barely spares me a glance, and I harden my voice just a little.

"You need to be checked out," I insist.

This time he doesn't bother to look in my direction.

"I'm fine, Dr. Granger. Thank you."

I close my eyes and take a deep breath, praying for an extra bout of patience.

"Harry," I growl out and see from the corner of my eye as Dr. Binns looks our way before turning back to his patient.

Harry doesn't even flinch.

No help for it then. I close the distance between us, grabbing Harry's vest, so my hands rub against his bruised knuckles and yank him until his face is level with mine.

I would never have been able to do that if he'd been in fighting shape, and the hiss of pain he releases causes my gut to clench and twist in sympathy. But if the only way Harry will allow himself to be treated is if I force him into it. So be it.

I can be just as scary as him.

"Harry!" I snap, and I don't bother to temper my tone of voice. "You've been shot multiple times, and you have an actively bleeding head wound. You either go by yourself, like a grown-up. Or, I call your entire team in here, and we carry you like a fucking toddler. But so, help me God, Harry, you will let me examine you, or I'll shoot you my fucking self. Do I make myself clear?"

He meets me glare for glare, and his green eyes glimmer behind his dark expression. I swear he's laughing at me, on the inside, at least.

I'll take that as a win.

He clears his throat, and it's then I realize that silence has fallen around us. The only sound is the beeping of the machines and the sound of my heart thundering in my ears.

He pulls his hands out of his vest and wraps his fingers around my wrists, gently releasing my grip. Harry pulls himself to an upright position again, and the agony it causes him is plain across his face. Then he tilts the edges of his lips up, in that almost maybe smile he has.

"Crystal, Dr. Granger."

"Good."

I try to pull myself together before turning around and heading out of the claustrophobic trauma room. I see that we've gathered an audience. Besides the medical personnel, half the police who arrived in the caravan are standing in the doorway and spread out into the hall.

They part as I get closer, allowing me a clear path through the throng. Neville is grinning ear to ear, but most of the horde avert their gaze. Maybe they're afraid of anybody stupid enough

to yell at Harry Potter.

Or afraid of being caught up in his wrath.

"Terry," I shout out, and he immediately appears in front of me. Terry isn't bothering to hide his amusement, and why should he? He's on team me. But it makes me wonder how loud I was yelling if Terry is looking at me like that.

"What room am I going to?"

He takes a look at the tablet in his hand.

"Six."

"I need a portable ultrasound. Head, neck, and chest x-rays. Trauma panel, type, and cross match." I pause for a moment, looking back at Harry. "What's your blood type?"

"I don't need blood, Hermione."

I narrow my eyes at him at warning.

"AB negative," he tells me with his voice laced with pain and amusement.

"Of course, you are."

The rarest blood type there is. I'm O negative, a universal donor. I have a feeling that'll come in handy in the future.

I look back at Terry.

"Scratch that. Order a litre of AB negative from the blood bank and get a bag of fluids hung. 25 mg of Zofran, 800 mg of Ibuprofen, and 4 mg of morphine."

Terry scatters off to do my bidding, and Harry, with most of his entourage, follows me down the hallway.

"I don't need pain meds," Harry says as if I asked his opinion on the matter.

"Shut up and strip," I say as we enter the room, and I pull the curtain to the side. His team tries to follow us in, but I give them a head shake to stop them in their tracks.

"Go hang out with the criminals, guys. I've got this from here."

A man I've never seen before steps in front of me, offering me his hand.

"Hi, I'm Cormac McLaggen. Narcotics Sergeant. You are my new idol. You should join the police force. I've never seen him submit so quickly."

I snort in entertainment at the look of awe on his face. Harry snorts too, then groans in pain.

I reach out to shake his hand.



"Dr. Herman Granger. A pleasure to meet you."

His jaw drops to his chest, and clouds cover his eyes before he shakes his head to clear it of the cobwebs. His fingers tighten around mine until it's just this side of painful.

"Holy shit," he whispers, so quietly, I almost don't hear him. He mouths my name in silence before giving me an appraising once over. He's still got a grip on my hand, though now it's loose and noodly. He looks over his shoulder at Neville, who gives him a solemn expression.

I have no idea what's happening here, but since Harry is still right behind me, glaring daggers at anyone who glances in his direction, I don't really care to learn at the moment.

"Neville," Harry says, and that's all it takes. As one, his team turns and heads off back down the hallway. Cormac is still attached to my hand, and I have to forcibly remove it before he comes to himself and heads back the way we came.

"What was all that about?" I ask Harry, sliding the door shut and pulling the curtain in front of it.

"I'll tell you some other time," he promises, and I watch in sympathy as his shoulders droop in exhaustion.

"You need to take the vest off," I tell him gently, stepping back to give him room. "I'm surprised you haven't already. That's gotta hurt tremendously."

He clears his throat and tightens his fingers into fists at his side before releasing a depleted breath. Some of the grip on his emotion slips from his control, and I see the pain clear on his face for the first time.

"I don't think I can, to be honest. Not by myself, at least."

Oh, Harry.

I wonder when the last time he asked for help was.

I don't bother to waste my words and silently step in front of him, reaching for the Velcro of the vest. I loosen it as gently as I can, fully aware that his ribs are bruised to high hell under there, if not broken altogether.

He scrunches his face up in a scowl but doesn't let out a sound. I can't imagine how tight he must be holding himself to keep his reaction this contained.

"Don't throw that away. It's evidence," he says, and I nod my head in affirmation before pulling a belongings bag from under the counter and place the vest inside.

"Any wounds on your legs?" I ask him, and he shakes his head in the negative before tightening with a grunt.

I lower the bed as far as it will go, then walk him up against it.

"Sit," I say gently, holding his hands as he eases himself onto the flimsy mattress. "I'm going to send Terry in to help cut off your shirt. I don't want you to have to lift your arms above your head."

He gives me a flat look.

"Is it essential to take my shirt off? Or are you just trying to get me naked?"

"Were you not just shot three times in the chest?"

He gives me that little, not smile, smile. Maybe a bit bigger than before.

"I'm not sure how many times he fired, to be honest. After the first shot, they sort of blend together."

His face holds that bland expression, but his eyes twinkle in amusement.

"You bastard," I say, without any heat to my voice. I close the distance between us so that I'm standing between his knees. He's still taller than me, sitting on the hospital bed, but at least we're much closer in height like this, and I give in to the temptation and run my fingers through his hair. The side that isn't matted down with blood. "You think you're just so cute, don't you? Well, I hate to break it to you, but you're not."

His tongue darts out to wet his lips, and my chest tightens at the motion.

"I've never really considered myself cute before," he finally replies, his voice soft and playful. "I've always landed more on the ruggedly handsome side of things."

"Ugh," I say, not ready to come up with a retort to that. "Let me go get Terry to help you into a gown. My mobile has beeped twice already. He's probably standing outside waiting for me to let him in."

His hands leave the bed and end up on my hips, fingers digging into the meat there.

"I'm not wearing a gown, Hermione. You can take the x-rays with my clothes on."

"I need to look at your chest, Harry. You could be bleeding out internally right at this moment, and then where would I be? I'd lose my employee of the month parking spot: laughingstock of the A&E."

"You know you can call me Prongs."

I think that was meant to be a peace offering, but I have to bite my lip to keep from laughing at him.

"Only if you call me Herman."

This time his smile is unmistakable.

"Fine, Hermione. But I'm not taking off my pants. And no pain meds."

"I didn't realize this was a negotiation. Okay. No narcotics, yes to the anti-inflammatory. And the nausea meds. And the fluids."

"No I.V., Hermione. No drugs, but yes to a hit of Toradol."

My eyes roll in exasperation.

"Why are you fighting me on this? Look at you! You can barely breathe." It's true. His breaths are tight and shallow, trying to move his ribcage as little as possible.

"Fine. Yes, to the fluids, but *only* contingent on my blood work, which I'm gallantly allowing you to run. But you better make it quick. As soon as my suspect is ready to go, I'm leaving with him."

"Harry," I say, trying to keep the incredulity out of my voice. "If you're talking about the man you beat half to death, he's not going anywhere. At least not tonight. Concussion, at the very least. Broken nose. Who knows when he'll even wake up? Is he the one who shot you?"

Harry tilts his head from side to side, and I hear his joints crack painfully. It makes my stomach roil in sympathy.

"No. He's dead. The other one tried to finish the job with his fists."

I'm not sure what to say, so I keep running my fingers through his hair. I'm a doctor. It's my job to heal the sick and injured. But I can't rustle up much sympathy for the man who tried to kill Harry. Or the one in the morgue who would have succeeded.

There's a knock on the glass, and I startle in Harry's arms. I take a step back, and he lets me, his hands falling to rest on his legs.

"Give us two minutes," I raise my voice to say.

"Sure thing, sweetie," comes Angelina's voice from the other side, and I jerk my wrist to my face to see my Fitbit tell me it's already six o'clock.

"I'll go get Terry."

Harry shakes his head no, then reaches for his hem.

"That's not necessary. Here, come, help me. I'm not walking out of here with some lost and found shirt on."

I step forward immediately, swatting his hands away from his shirt. I take the sleeve of one arm and stretch it out until his hand is inside the fabric. He immediately gets the idea and pulls his arm inside and through the sleeve until I see his fingers out the bottom of his shirt. We repeat the process on the other side. When both of his arms are free, I ruck it up to his chest and pull it over his head.

Years of practice is the only thing that keeps my gasp internal. His chest and arms are covered in wounds and scars. Like an artist used his pale skin as a canvas for a piece of

abstract art. In the spot of honour are the bruises, blooming before my eyes in a spectacular showing of black and blue.

It's like someone dipped a paint brush in ink and splattered it against his chest.

I'm not talking about the tattoos that pop up here and there either. There's a stag with antlers across his left pec, and a golden ball with wings that could almost be fluttering low on his hip.

Low, *low* , on his hip. I swallow roughly and yank my eyes away from his waistband.

His head has stopped bleeding. In actuality, it wasn't bleeding when he came in. But the way the blood trails start heavy at his scalp and filter into droplets at the top of his chest only adds to its transcendental feel. This is a man who has known pain.

He's known it, met it as an enemy, and walked away as friends.

I can't imagine the grip he must keep on himself, to keep all that pain inside.

I fold his shirt and place it on the chair, then walk to the back of the bed and adjust it so it's sitting up at an angle.

It's quiet between us. I'm able to block out the hospital noises and concentrate on the slow shallow breaths easing in and out of Harry's lungs. The way his hand reaches towards me, then stops. I see the battle going on in his head and his body. The comfort he craves but can't bring himself to ask for.

I lean over the side of the bed, cupping his face in my hands and drop a kiss onto his forehead.

“Why don't you call me Mia.”

## **Hermione**

The sound of the x-ray machine taking its last shot clicks in the air, and I pull the protective covering off my chest, putting it back onto the portable x-ray machine to be carried to the next patient who needs it.

Harry resolutely refused the hospital gown, so I watch how the bruises are growing and merging into one large Rorschach painting on his chest every time I look at him.

How he's not a blubbering whining mass on the bed is beyond me. I want to cry just looking at it.

"Your blood work looks good," I tell him and swallow back a smart retort at the cocky look he gives me. Though, maybe it doesn't look all that cocky. It's the same bland expression that's always on his face. Perhaps I'm just projecting.

Then he mouths the words *told ya* when Angelina turns her back.

Now I wish he were bleeding internally.

"Get that shit-eating smirk off your face, Harry. Half a dozen bruised ribs and eight stitches in your scalp does *not* warrant that look, in my opinion."

"I don't think it'll be eight," he replies, still trying to negotiate with me. "Five at the most."

"Ugh."

Angelina comes in with a towel and ice packs, and we cover his chest with the cloth before placing the four cold packs across his chest.

"Nothing broken then?" he asks through tight lips.

"No. You're going to hurt for a while, but I'm sure you already knew that. Ice them at home. I don't want you alone tonight."

I look into the corner of the room.

"Neville."

His head pops up from his mobile.

"Yes, ma'am."

Angelina places a suture kit on Harry's lap, and I whisper, "here comes the shots," before administering the lidocaine into his scalp.

"You're to stay with him tonight. His place, your place, or most likely the precinct because I doubt Mr. Likes To Pretend He's Bulletproof and Probably Never Sleeps would be willing to go home and take a nap. But you do not leave him alone. Do you understand me? I don't think he has a concussion, but we're not taking any chances, are we?"

"No, ma'am. I mean, yes, ma'am. I mean, I'll stay with him, ma'am."

"Good."

"Do I get any say in this?" Harry asks, his eyes flickering between the two of us.

"Nope. Doctor's orders."

Cormac snickers from his spot behind the hospital bed.

There's a commotion out in the hallway, and I look up to stare out of the glass wall that makes up the door.

"You stupid son of a bitch."

The yelling starts from the hallway, then a man in a cheap suit storms into my already cramped exam room, bringing half a dozen people with him.

"I told you to stay out of it. I told you to leave well enough alone. So, what do you do? You kill my fucking informant. Two years, Potter! Two fucking years of investigation down the drain because you had to stick your fucking nose where it didn't belong."

The man is raging like a storm, and Harry's team responds in kind. Neville rises to his full height, looking all the world like he's a heartbeat from beating the newcomer himself.

I lower the needle still threaded with the nylon stitches to the sterile draping on Harry's lap, then stand from the stool I'm perched on by his head.

The man might be a hurricane, but he's crashing against a mountain. All his screaming is accomplishing is pissing me off.

Neville takes a step forward.

Add Neville to the pissed off list. He throws his hands out accusingly, railing against the newcomer.

"You've got no one to blame but yourself, John. We had no idea what we were walking into today. None. You're lucky we weren't all killed! If you'd have told us who was on the fucking tape, none of this would have happened."

"Bullshite. *Bull-fucking-shite*. I have a dead CI in the morgue that proves you fucked up."

Harry speaks from the bed, his voice calm and collected. For all the world like a King talking to his subjects.

"Speaking of dead CIs, his ID came back invalid. Care to fill us in on who your little friend was?"

Doucheface crams deeper into the room, shoving the foot of Harry's bed.

"You fucking piece of shit."

"ENOUGH!" I yell, stepping into rage man's personal space. He doesn't take a step back, but he does snap his mouth shut, glaring at me in anger. I wedge myself between Harry's stretcher and the man in front of me. We're touching chest to chest. Or would be, if I wasn't so short.

"You're not doing this in my hospital. DCI Potter is my patient. He's hurt, he needs treatment, and I need you to leave. Now."

He whips a badge in front of my face, and my eyes cross in the attempt to read it; it's so close.

"Special Agent John Longbottom, ma'am, MI5. I need the room."

Longbottom? I look over my shoulder at Neville, and I feel his scoff of disgust to my toes. Gives his brother (brother? I look between them again. Yes, definitely his brother,) the v's, before crossing his arms against his chest.

"It's *doctor*, Agent Longbottom. Dr. Herman Granger. And I don't give a shit what you need. You're in *my* hospital. Here, we play by my rules. And I'm telling you that, unless you have a warrant that says you have jurisdiction over this matter, you need to get out of this room. Now. Before I call security."

He takes a step back as if I've burnt him, and his eyes flash around the room, taking in the scene with new eyes.

"Dr. Herman Granger," he echoes, and I realize I'm missing something profound. It's the second time somebody has said my name like that tonight. Like it's a key that answers all the questions.

"Now it all makes sense," the brother sneers, running his hand down his tie.

"Here, I thought you were throwing your career away to avenge some hopped up drug dealer. Stupid, of course, but at least it showed a dedication to your job. A perverse sense of honour. Now, I see that you've ruined your life for a tight piece of arse."

Harry jumps to his feet, the impact so intense the bed rattles in its frame. I cringe at what the movement must be doing to his ribs.

"Well done, Potter. I didn't know you had it in you."

Harry moves behind me, placing his hand on my waist to push me out of the way. For the first time in my career, I'm thankful for the minuscule exam rooms. It means that unless he wants to move me physically, I can keep him where he's at.

I turn to face him, placing my hand squarely on his chest.

"Get your arse back on that bed," I whisper hiss at him. Hurt as he is, he could shove past me if he chose. I won't hurt him in some perverse attempt to keep him from getting hurt. But whatever he sees in my eyes convinces him to sit back on the mattress, even if he's only perched on the edge.

I turn and face the brothers, who are arguing in harsh whispers by the door.

"Does anyone care to tell me what the hell is going on?" I ask the room at large.

Nobody answers.

Surprise, surprise.

"Well then, I want everybody out of this room," I demand. Harry moves as if to stand and I shove my finger in his face. He wears what I realize is his trying not to smile, expression. "Except you. You need stitches. I'm not done with you yet." I turn back to the MI5 cluster.

"You can speak to him when I'm done. *IF* , and only if, you keep your voices at a tolerable level. There are sick people here that need peace and quiet to heal."

The brother stares at me, his eyes boring into my soul. I feel like he's trying to divine the future, or maybe how things have gone so wrong.

He tips his head in the direction of the hallway, and his team starts to move out, going to who knows where. I don't care, so long as it's far away from here.

He stops, however, at the edge of the room and faces me again.

"Is Herman your real name?"

Harry and Neville both speak up before I have a chance to answer.

"Yes," they say simultaneously.

I pray my surprise doesn't show on my face and keep my eyes level with Neville's whomever he is.

What the fuck is going on?

It's going to take him less than a second to know that's not the truth. Which he knows, by the incredulous look on his face and the way he's already pulling his mobile from his pocket.

When his back is turned I close my eyes and take a deep breath, pushing the oxygen into my bloodstream. My fingers tingle, which tells me I'm more stressed than I care to admit.

"You too, guys," I say to Neville and Cormac, who leave without any of the indignations MI5 carried out with them.

Cormac stops next to me.

"Are you married? Seeing anyone? Because I'm 100 per cent convinced, I want you to have my babies."

Neville grabs him by the collar and hauls him bodily from the room. Angelina, who's been standing next to the bed watching this all with delight written all over her face, quietly sets me up another suture kit, then leaves without being asked, shutting the curtain and glass door behind her.

"Are you going to tell me what that was all about?" I ask Harry as he leans against the raised back of the bed again.

"Nope," he says, closing his eyes as I bring the needle back to his scalp. It's an inch-long laceration. Deep enough to see the fatty tissue below, but not so deep that I feel like we need a CT or an MRI. His x-ray was clear, and I doubt he has a concussion. "Not today."

"Well enough," I say, pulling the first stitch through his skin. I'm sure he can feel it. The lidocaine doesn't last too long, and it's been a while since the shot. He doesn't even flinch



though. Just a slight tugging of his lips.

"Care to tell me why people are hissing out my name the way they say *You-Know-Who* in those books?"

"Huh?" he asks and tries to turn his head to look at me before I take his chin in my hand and put it back in place.

"Never mind."

I release a frustrated breath, lose some of the tension in my shoulders, and finish my patient's stitching.

~\*\*~

It has been a long arse day.

Half of the police department ended up in A&E this evening. I thought at first it was because one of their own was hurt. It became apparent pretty quickly that wasn't the case. Or, at least, not the only reason they were there.

Something bad happened with Harry's team this afternoon. Bad enough to bring their captain into A&E to yell at Harry face to face.

At one point in time, I had to break up a fight between the captain Kingsley, MI5, and Harry. I was afraid that he'd hurt himself if I didn't. Or that he'd hurt one of them, judging by the way his hands were flexing at his side.

Much to my surprise, and the surprise of everyone in the room, Harry seemed to calm down as soon as I placed my hand on his shoulder. He didn't try to pick a fight again.

I'm pulling into my building's parking garage when my mobile alerts that I got a new text. I wait until I pull into my spot, then grab my mobile from my bookbag. It alerts a second time as I open the app.

***Neville: He ditched me. Sorry.***

***Neville: 1625 Godric's Hollow. He won't ditch you.***

I let my car idle for a moment, thinking of the consequences, then throw my car in reverse, heading back the way I came.

# Watch it Burn

## Chapter Summary

The doorbell rings just as I'm running the towel through my hair one last time. I clench my teeth to stop the moan from slipping from my lips

Damn Neville. I told him I'd be fine. It's my own fault for letting Hermione talk to him at the hospital. He would never have questioned if I needed supervision before that. Ron even threatened to call my Uncles. Or Luna. I'm not sure which would be worse. Remus's hovering or Luna trying to heal me with voodoo magic.

Hermione Granger is messing with my mojo.

## Chapter Notes

One more time lol. I am NOT a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer, or british. All mistakes are my own, and anything else, let's call creative license lol. Let me also add, I'm well aware what Hermione does in this chapter is not accurate and probably highly illegal. Just go it with. It makes it more fun lol.

SECOND CHAPTER OF THE DAY. If you haven't read the one before this yet, do that first! Let's all take a moment to thank Happily for reminding me, and thank him again for reading it until his eyes bleed to make sure it is as pretty as possible.

Doccbm, I'm terrified of you reading this lol. Be kind to me lmao.



## Harry

The doorbell rings just as I'm running the towel through my hair one last time. I clench my teeth to stop the moan from slipping from my lips

Damn Neville. I told him I'd be fine. It's my own fault for letting Hermione talk to him at the hospital. He would never have questioned if I needed supervision before that. Ron even threatened to call my Uncles. Or Luna. I'm not sure which would be worse. Remus's hovering or Luna trying to heal me with voodoo magic.

Hermione Granger is messing with my mojo.

My chest is fucking killing me. I keep getting light-headed from not getting enough oxygen. It's a delicate balance the first few hours, relearning to breathe without setting my chest on fire. But it's a dance I've danced before.

The doorbell rings again.

"Hold on to your knickers, I'm coming."

I live in a good neighbourhood, but my profession has made me paranoid by nature. Besides the lock on the door handle, I have a deadbolt, a slide chain, and security cameras around my property. Not to mention a state of the art alarm system. Now I wish I wasn't quite so hyper-

vigilant. The Royal Marines taught me how to fight with both arms and shoot with both hands, but somehow that didn't translate into twisting the too tight deadbolt with ribs that feel like matchsticks.

"Nev. I appreciate it but—" I stop mid-sentence when I realize that it's not Neville on the other side of the door.

"Hermione."

Like an angel sent from above, she's standing on my front porch. She has a paper sack tucked close to her chest. Her trusty backpack is slung across one shoulder, bulging slightly at the sides. Her eyes sparkle at me in the light but her facial expression is a mix of concern and exasperation.

Whether it's from me being alone after she told me to stay with someone tonight or worrying about my reaction to her being on my doorstep, I don't know.

"You wear glasses!" she says in a shocked voice, and I lift my hand to my face, feeling the metal frames before smiling sheepishly.

"My eyesight is horrible, but I wear contacts for work."

I start to lean against my door frame but come to an abrupt halt when the motion makes the pain flare like fire in my chest. Swallowing the grimace that wants to escape its hold, I plaster a neutral expression on instead.

She squints her eyes in suspicion—when did she learn to read me so well? Time to change the subject.

"Now who's stalking whom? Did you follow me here?"

A gorgeous blush slips up her throat and blossoms on her cheeks. She takes her bottom lip between her teeth, trying to swallow her smile.

Then her eyes harden in displeasure.

"Neville called me. Told me you ditched him."

My face falls at her words. I should have known the little wanker would sell me out.

"I don't need a babysitter, Hermione."

"I vehemently disagree with that sentiment."

"It's a good thing you're not my boss then."

"No, but I am your doctor. And if I have to sleep on your couch to make sure you don't kill yourself doing whatever incredibly stupid thing I'm sure you'd do, well then that's a price we'll both have to suffer through."

With every snark of her tongue, we inch a little bit closer, until we're practically growling nose to nose.

"Did you just come over to fight with me on my porch?"

"Move out of my way, and I'll fight with you in the house."

I immediately step aside, holding the door open wide for her. She saunters in like she owns the place, and the smell of her perfume mixes with the food in her hands to make my mouth water.

I watch her with fascination until she disappears into the house, then I remember that I'm still standing here with the door open.

She bellows from the kitchen, like I'm a world away instead of fifteen feet down the hallway.

"Neville said you like Chinese, but he didn't tell me what, so I got a little bit of everything."

I don't reply until I've reached the kitchen.

"I'm a Bootneck. I'll eat just about anything."

She startles at my closeness, shooting me a dirty look.

She's wearing a pair of tight grey yoga pants and an oversized purple sweater, giving me a fantastic view of her muscular thighs but hiding her arse just out of sight. Her hair is pulled up and out of her face and is trailing down her back in a braid. Realizing she's barefoot, I spy her shoes slipped off at the entrance of the kitchen.

She's opening all the cupboards and drawers like she owns the place.

"Enjoying the view?" she asks in a snappy tone.

I'm not wearing more than a pair of sleep pants. My chest, and its collection of bruises and scars, is bare for her viewing pleasure. As is just how much I'm enjoying watching her make herself at home.

"Yes," I reply honestly, and grin as another blush rushes up her cheeks.

"Well, don't get used to it. I'm horrible in the kitchen. My parents once told me that instead of a husband I should look for a wife, otherwise I'll starve, or die from heart disease from eating a lifetime of take out."

"I'm an excellent cook," I tell her, unsure why I'm sharing that information.

She looks over her shoulder, raising her eyebrows at me.

"Really?"

“Don’t sound so surprised. It’s all that time in the Middle East. When we were on base, there was very little to do until more orders came through. I had a hot plate, and a wok, and a shit load of recipes. That, and I grew up with the Weasley’s. Molly ensured I could cook for myself. It came in handy for the nights my Uncles had evening classes.”

“What kind of classes?” she asks distractedly.

I chuckle, then moan in pain.

“Personal defence,” I admit sheepishly. “Marauder Defence Academy. The DA for short.”

She puts her hands on her hips, squaring her shoulders like she’s gearing up for battle. My warning system lights up like a Christmas tree, and I mimic her pose, ready to fight to the death.

When her posture softens, her shoulders slacking into a relaxed pose, it only makes me more nervous.

“How are you feeling?” she asks, giving me a penetrating gaze.

“I’m fine,” I answer warily, uneasy about where this is going.

"Nuh-uh. Don't pull the 'I 'm a Royal Marine, and so, therefore, I'm bulletproof and don't feel any pain' bullshite with me. I'm not playing that game with you anymore tonight."

Hermione tries to butch up her voice in what I can only assume is a mocking interpretation of me. It's fucking adorable.

"Fine, yes, of course, it hurts. Look at me. By this time tomorrow, I'll be twenty shades of blue, purple, and black. It's nothing I can't handle, though. I've dealt with worse."

She raises on her toes, cupping my face in her hand. It makes me feel weak, and somehow invincible at the same time. "I know you have. I can't even imagine the sort of pain you've endured, but you shouldn't have to. Not tonight, at least. Let me see your head."

I bend slightly at the waist, lowering my head enough that she can see the wound she stitched up. I took off the plaster after my shower and haven't put on another one. For as much as it bled this afternoon, it barely hurts tonight.

“It’s high enough in your hairline that I doubt it’ll leave a scar. Not like the other one.”

The one I still haven’t told her about.

She gives my cheek a rub with her thumb, then leaves me to go to her bookbag and carries it over to the dining room table.

“Over here, please,” she says.

Despite having zero intentions of doing as she bid, I find myself in the dining room, lowering into a chair.

What is she doing to me?

Foreboding washes over me as I watch her pull things from her bag.

I observe in silence as she makes her way around the dining table, hands laden with medical supplies. Without saying a word, she lifts a map of the world off the wall and sets it on the floor. She gives the nail holding it up a good pull before she sets an I.V. drip on it to dangle. When she opens up a baggie and pulls out a pair of gloves, I decide I've seen enough.

"Um, Mia? Not to pry baby, but what the fuck do you think you're doing?"

She snaps the gloves on and starts prepping the rest of her materials, never even bothering to look in my direction. She rips open a pre-packaged bag, and I see I.V. supplies ready to go. There are several vials of medicine lined up behind the I.V. kit. Next to her bag of gloves is another container filled with syringes and what looks like line flushes. There's an open first aid kit filled with the usual gauze and alcohol wipes and such, and I recognize it from the one sitting at her feet the night of the shooting.

"I'm officially your personal physician. As such, it is my job to ensure you get the best treatment available. I gave you my professional opinion that you should stay in hospital tonight, and you left. I gave you strict instructions to stay with someone who can watch out for you. I found you alone. You should be in hospital bed, hooked up to morphine and a blood transfusion, but your stubborn arse declined."

"You said I didn't need the blood transfusion."

"I was being generous," she snaps back.

Her voice never rises, never changes in pitch, but the words have a sharpness to them, nonetheless. Her anger is barely contained. I can hear it simmering beneath the surface, kept in check by professionalism alone.

"I've brought the hospital to you. Now, we can do this one of two ways. One, you give me your arm willingly. I'll give you a litre or two of fluids and electrolytes, a muscle relaxant and maybe some pain meds to ensure you start to heal properly."

I open my mouth to object, but she powers on, determined not to let me speak.

"Yes, I know you can tough it out, but that's only going to add weeks to your recovery time. We're not in the Middle East, Harry. We're in the middle of England, and a doctor is standing in the centre of your dining room offering to help you heal.

"Option number two I call your captain. We met tonight. Remember? Nice man. I'll inform him that you are refusing medical treatment and ensure that no doctor in the county will release you to so much as blink in the direction of the police station, let alone sit on desk duty for two weeks. Or is it administrative leave? Suddenly I can't remember."

She's facing me directly, and the height difference between my sitting and her standing means that I'm looking up at her. Her hands are out in front of her, and there's an extra-long

tourniquet dangling from her left palm. Her mobile is resting in the other.

I let the silence stretch between us before speaking.

" *Doctor* Granger." I make sure to emphasize her title hard. "Are you trying to blackmail me?"

"No. Absolutely not. I have too much respect for you to try something like that. But you happen to be the most stubborn man I've ever met. I figured you'd appreciate a little stubbornness in return."

Nobody, and I mean *nobody*, has pushed my buttons like this woman does in all of my adult life. Here's this tiny 5'4 creature with the power to ruin me with nothing more than the press of a button, flirting with insubordination in my dining room. I can't even remember the last time someone told me no.

She's not scared of me in the least.

"You know I'll just pull the port out the minute you leave. "

It's hard to keep my wits about me when she looks so damn determined.

"Joke's on you, big man. I'm not leaving. I already talked to Neville, so I know you're not supposed to show up at work tomorrow. I've got a change of clothes, a bag of fluids for you in the morning, and from what you've told me, a big and comfortable couch with my name on it."

I'm losing the fight to keep my scowl on my face. It's been so long since anyone stood up to me, I'd forgotten how much fun a challenge can be.

"You little—"

"I'd be careful how you finish that if I were you. I'm the one holding the needle."

She grins at me ear to ear, and I give up the battle to keep the smile off my face.

"Negotiation, then."

"Set the terms."

"No fluids. No narcotics, muscle relaxers only."

"One bag of fluids, yes to narcotics, but I'll give you morphine instead of hydro."

My eyes bug out at that.

"You brought Dilaudid with you to my house?"

"I brought a little bit of everything."



Hermione shrugs, like it's no big deal that she's probably got a grand worth of street value flopping around loose in her book bag. She reaches over on the table, checks the label on a vial, and sticks it back in her bag, pulling out another in its place.

My mind is firing in brisk succession, flipping through the last few weeks and how rapidly my life has exploded around me. A month ago, I was at the top of my game.

Untouchable.

Now I'm on administrative leave, looking at a sanction and possibly charges if the MI5 gets their way. I'm bruised and bloody and can barely breathe, and there's the most beautiful woman I've ever met, standing in front of me trying to offer me comfort.

I've lived an eventful life.

I can't think of anything that compares to this moment. Right now.

The question is, do I regret it?

"Fine, but I want something else in payment."

She laughs openly at that.

"*I* have to pay *you* to treat your busted chest?"

"Hey," I say, enjoying the play by play more than I should. "This is your party bus. I'm just along for the ride."

"Fine. What do you want?"

"I'll submit to your terms, if you give me a kiss."

She snorts at that, laughter bubbling up through her chest.

"A kiss, Harry? Really? Do you need me to kiss it all better? I would assume that kissing goes against those rules you told me about. Or is this a biological urge that can't be ignored?"

"Kissing *you* is certainly against the rules. But if I'm going to set my life on fire, I might as well play in the flame."

She gives me a curious glance, her expression unreadable.

"Is that what you're doing? Setting your life on fire?"

"It kind of feels like it, if my ribs are any indication."

I try to take in a deep breath of air and end up hacking in pain instead.

"Oh, Harry. Why do you torture yourself like this?" she whispers as she steps in between my knees and takes my face between her hands. Her palms are cool against my cheeks, and she supports my head as I attempt to get my hacking under control.

They never tell you when you fuck up your ribs that it makes you cough like a bitch. Something about trying not to move your lungs too much makes you hack like a 90-year-old smoker. She rubs a hand soothingly over my bare back, and I wrap my arms around her waist, using her torso for support.

“Setting your life on fire, huh?” she prods again.

“And all I’m asking for is a kiss. I think you’re getting the better end of this bargain.”

“Hmph,” she grunts, running her fingers through my hair. “That’s because you don’t have to deal with you.”

Hermione frames my face in her hands, sliding her nails through my beard. It’s a phenomenon I’ve never felt before, and I have to resist the urge to purr like a kitten and arch into her caress. She smooths her thumbs across my cheekbones, and my eyes close automatically, savoring the gentleness of her touch.

I’m not prepared for when her mouth presses against mine, and it parts at the unexpected sensation. She peppers butterfly light kisses against my lips, first my lower, and then my upper. I catch her bottom lip between my own and flick my tongue across its ridge before pulling it tight with my teeth.

She lets out a moan that sets my blood on fire.

I tighten my grip around her waist, but let go of her mouth, before I’m tempted to take it further. I’m only a fraction of a man tonight. I wouldn’t offer her less than everything I could give.

"Will that suffice all-mighty master?"

Grinning ear to ear, I reply, "I like that—all-mighty master. I'm glad we're finally understanding each other. Yes, that'll do just fine. I want it on the record, however, that I'm still doing this under duress."

Quickly, she leans forward and drops another kiss on my face. I can't help that my eyes close as she does so.

"Duly noted. Let the record show that the all mighty and powerful Oz is a pain in my arse. Now give me your bad arm. I'll put the I.V. in there."

**Harry**

She steps into my personal space again, ensuring that my next inhale is filled with the smell of her perfume and the hints of what her skin would taste like. I have to clench my fist to keep from reaching my hand up under her sweater. My eyes close in self-preservation. Her breasts are a hair's breadth away from my face. It's the sweetest type of torture imaginable.

"I have a bad arm?" I smart off at her, trying to ignore her closeness. It doesn't help.

"Yes. The left. It took more of your impact."

She's right, of course. I'm not quite sure how she knows that though.

Forget waterboarding. Place a gorgeous woman in front of a desperate man and tell him he's not allowed to touch her. He'll be spilling state secrets before the day is over.

When I feel like I can open my eyes again without shaming myself, I watch her work. She's beautiful. Breathtaking. But it's more than that.

Her hands run over my chest, checking the feel of my ribcage under the spectacular showing of bruises blooming across my pecs and eight pack. With the ease of years of practice, she lifts up the corner of the bandage taped to my scalp. Pulling it aside she examines her work from earlier.

With a new piece of tape to hold it in place she allows her fingers to run down my bicep. There's nothing sexual about it. It's obvious she's looking for a place to put the I.V. That doesn't stop me from placing my good hand over my lap to hide my growing response to her hands on my body.

"I'm checking your arm for a good vein."

It's perfunctory when she speaks. Hermione's not seeing me anymore. She's simply seeing a patient. She reminds me of me, to be honest.

Me when I'm on a case.

When she's found what she's looking for she snaps on another pair of gloves. Like I've seen medics in the field, she yanks the tip off of her right index finger, then runs her hands and fingers over my forearm one more time.

"Quick poke."

She cleans my skin with the alcohol wipe, grasping my forearm in her left palm and piercing my skin with the needle. Within moments I'm taped and situated and she's setting the line up to run the liquid into my veins.

"I'm using a solution called hsd, or hypertonic saline dextran. It's recommended for patients that have suffered a traumatic injury with copious blood loss. I'd have preferred to give you a transfusion to bring your blood volume back up, but the saline will help."

"Whatever you think is best, doctor."

Her scoff of indignation is severe enough she probably hurt her throat.

"Are you an addict?"

Startled out of my admiration of her, I respond without thinking

"What? No! Why would you ask me that?" I don't mean to sound as offended as I do. I know as well as any physician that addiction is a disease.

"No, it's just—a lot of recovered addicts would rather cut their own arms off without anesthesia than risk addiction again. The way you're so insistent I not give you any pain meds raised a flag for me, that's all."

"Oh. Well, no. It's not because I'm an addict. Narcotics weaken my defences. Slows my reaction times. I only need pain medication when I'm hurt, and I'm only hurt in situations where I need my wits about me the most."

I pause, trying to gather my thoughts about me. It's hard to explain to a civilian.

"To other people, pain is a distraction. They lose concentration of everything but the pain consuming them. To me, it's a focuser. With every pump of my heart, the ache reminds me, stay alive."

She steps between my legs again, twisting her gloves into a ball and tossing them into her waste pile. This time I don't try to resist the urge to reach up and touch her.

I adapt quickly. A month ago, I never would have imagined myself craving another person. Tonight, I'm having a difficult time imagining myself without her.

Things change.

You either change with them or suffer the consequences. I think I'm suffering enough.

When she cups my face in her palms I lean into the feeling, enjoying the sensation of her fingers running through my beard. My eyes close instinctively, and I feel like rolling over and lettering her rub my belly like a good boy.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm?"

The feeling of her nails against my skin is sending sparks of electricity and contentment shooting down my body. I don't have the energy to do more than tip my head higher in her direction.

"Are we likely to be attacked here in the middle of your house?"

She's openly laughing at me now, and I smile in return.

I tighten my grip around her waist, but concede, "No, probably not."

“I promise to protect you if we are.”

There’s still laughter in her voice, but a fierceness too. I open my eyes to an aura of power and determination emitting from her.

“You mean that, don’t you?”

“I do. You can trust me to take care of you. I’ll protect your weak side.”

I’m a violent man. I lead a violent life. Yet here’s this woman, promising to protect my life with her own. I’ve never felt so humbled. The silence stretches between us, warm and comfortable.

I slip my hand under her sweater, like I’ve been dying to do since she walked in my house.

Her skin is warm against my hand. Her presence is so large, I forget how small she really is. I could wrap both my hands around her waist with little to no room to spare.

“You are so profoundly beautiful,” I whisper, and watch as the blush creeps up her throat.

Hermione’s nails trail from my face to my neck and shoulders. The sensation is exquisite. I’m desperate to know what it’ll feel like with force, while I’m buried hilt deep inside of her.

“I need your consent before I give you the rest of the meds.”

I only hesitate for a heartbeat before I whisper, “Granted.”

Disappointment washes over me when she steps out of my touch and again resumes her physician persona.

“First is a muscle relaxer.”

She shakes the vile before using one of the preloaded syringes to mix it up. It takes a few moments after she inserts the tip into the I.V. port before my breathing becomes considerably easier. The bands that have been wrapped around my chest since the first bullet hit the vest relax a notch or two.

“Next is Zofran, to eliminate any nausea the meds themselves may cause.” That one must come pre-mixed, because she loads an empty syringe to transfer the medicine from the vial to me.

“Last I’m giving you morphine. For most people, it makes them drowsy. Some, myself included, it gives a small energy boost too, *then* makes you drowsy. Call it a hunch, but I bet it does the same to you. This does not mean that you can do jumping jacks or run laps.”

This one I feel immediately. It’s like chasing a wave as my heart pumps it to all my nerve endings. She’s right, of course. Narcotics have always given me the boost before the crash. It’s another reason I avoid them. The feeling of invincibility can lead a guy to bad choices. The fact that she’s here at all proves my decision making is already off the rails.

I take in a deep breath and exhale, enjoying the sensations sailing through my system and the tiny bursts the extra oxygen causes all throughout my body.

She's cleaning up the mess she made, adjusting the drip so that it flows unimpeded.

When she comes back in, I have the strangest sense of déjà vu. It's like the last thirty minutes never happened.

She leaves me in the dining room, moving back into the kitchen. I hesitate for a second, then push up from the chair and follow her in. I grab the fluids from the nail and hold it as high as I can without feeling a strain in my chest. It's a lot higher than it would have been five minutes ago without those pain meds. I wrap the tab onto a knob in the kitchen.

Hermione starts opening up my cupboards at random, closing, and opening another when she doesn't find what she's looking for. I'm not sure whether I'm irritated with the invasion of privacy or impressed with her brazenly walking into my home and doing whatever she wants with it.

Leaning my arse against the counter, I watch as she pulls two plates out of the cupboard and starts loading them with food. Chicken and beef, rice, noodles, and egg rolls; she looks like she bought the whole menu.

She turns to face me, silverware in her hands.

"Chopsticks, or silverware?"

She lifts each hand in turn displaying wrapped packets of each.

Giving her my best offended scowl, I grumble, "What do you take me for? A savage? Chopsticks, of course," and swipe a pair from her hand.

"He lives to die another day," she laughs. Tucking the other pack of sticks between her bra strap and her shoulder, she grabs both plates off my counter and walks the few feet to the table.

"I was surprised you live in the suburbs. The house is sweet."

I give her a look that comment deserves. Nothing about me is sweet. Rugged, handsome, intimidating, but certainly not sweet. I'm rewarded with the most adorable eye roll this side of adulthood. I still can't get over the fact that I don't seem to intimidate this woman one iota. It's refreshing.

"Sweet? I'll take your word for it. I'll tell my sisters you appreciate it. They bought just about everything in the place."

Her face lights up at the mention of my sisters as she settles into the chair next to mine. She's sitting cross-legged in the seat, and it's utterly bizarre to see someone sit like that at a kitchen table. Hell, it's odd to see someone sit like that over the age of ten.

“I’ve heard stories about your time in the military, and about what an *ignoramus* you think Neville is, though secretly I think you kind of adore him. But I haven’t heard anything about your family. Tell me?

It's hard to pop the chopsticks apart with the pain in my chest, and I feel like a toddler when she leans over and takes them from me, snapping them open before handing them back without saying a word.

It wounds the pride.

I feel an inescapable need to drop to the floor and do push-ups.

She’s paused with her chopsticks over her plate of food, waiting for me to say something.

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”

This is it. It’s now or never.

“I was raised by my uncles, with the three daughters they adopted when I demanded siblings. They wouldn’t adopt a boy. I was...a handful. To say the least. They were afraid of what more testosterone would do to the house." I can't help the grin that takes over my face. "Joke was on them. Issa is a monster. But I didn’t really need any brothers anyway. Ron and I have been best friends for as long as I can remember, and he has five brothers. Plenty enough to go around."

Hermione smiles at me, and the light in her eyes mirrors in the fire burning in my chest.

“Uncles?” she prompts, “and how old are your sisters?”

“The youngest is in 6th Form, the oldest is your age. And yes, my uncles...” I take a steadying breath. “I was raised by my uncles; Sirius and Remus. They’re my parents, I call them dad, and I couldn't love them any more. But my birth parents were killed when I was eighteen months old.” I rub my pointer finger over the old scar on my forehead. “That's how I got this. Ironically enough, the tale involves Peter Pettigrew, and a little boy who would not die."

~\*\*~

Hermione is cleaning off the table, carrying our plates and drinks back into the kitchen. She’s already unhooked me from the empty I.V. and closed up my port, to use it again tomorrow. I didn’t include a second bag into my negotiations, and therefore automatically lost the right to reject it.

Or so says the woman making up the rules.

I’m full, and exhausted, and pleasantly muddled from the pain meds, and don’t have it in me to fight the point at the moment. I’ll wait until I have my wits about me tomorrow.

My mobile goes off every so often. Ron went home a few hours ago, but Neville is still at the precinct. Tying up loose ends and following up leads. The guy from the bust today is booked

and sitting in a cell.

But we still have no way of knowing who else knows about Hermione.

Which means now that she's safe and in front of me, I'm not sure I can let her go again.

I didn't even have to hunt her down.

This time she came to me.

"Tired?" she asks, stepping between my knees and digging her fingers into my scalp. I don't bother to mask my moans of appreciation. Instead, I close my eyes and spread my legs further, pulling her as close as she can get without sitting on my lap.

"Yes, bossy. I am. I'll admit—just this once—that I'm utterly depleted."

I can sense her grin through my closed eyelids.

"Come on," she says, "I'll tuck you in."

"Good. You can sleep with me," I declare, too knackered to care about niceties.

"I'm not having sex with you, Harry," she laughs. "Do you have any extra blankets for the couch?"

There's no way I'm having her in my house and she's not sleeping beside me. With the way things are going, the Mob will kick down my front door and scoop her right out from under my nose.

I lace her fingers with mine and pull her behind me as I make my way to the alarm system.

"Grab your bag," I tell her as we walk through the kitchen, and she hooks her hand around the strap as we stroll past it.

"6824. I'll get you your own code, but for now, that's mine. I'll write it down in the morning."

She sighs in exasperation.

"I'm not moving in. I don't think that'll be necessary."

I wait for the beep to let me know it's been armed, then drag her behind me into my bedroom. I let go of her hand by the doorway, then walk to the bedside table, flipping on the lamp.

"What side do you want?" I ask her, letting go of her hand and walking to my dresser. I pull out a shirt for her and lift my arm to throw it, until an electric pulse of pain shoots over my shoulder and down through my rib cage.

On second thought, I walk the few feet and drop it into her hands.

She's giving me a bemused expression.



“You take the side that doesn’t have the lamp. The drawer with the lamp has my gun in it.”

One of my guns, at least.

She follows me into the bathroom.

“I’m not having sex with you, Harry,” she reiterates, her eyebrows scrunched up in an adorable little face.

“Nobody said anything about sex, Hermione. I don’t think I’m quite up to the task, though it pains me to say it. But I want you next to me. I need to know you’re safe. Besides, you promised to guard my weak side, after all. How can you do that when you’re a hallway away from me?”

I offer her my toothbrush, giving her my best shit eating grin.

She rolls her eyes in exasperation, but kicks me out of my bathroom, shutting the door behind me.

It hurts when I get into bed, but, admittedly, not as bad as it would have if Hermione hadn’t showed up tonight. I push the pillows behind my back, so I’m sitting in a half prone position. It’s about as good as it’s going to get until I can try laying down again. I can’t imagine what it would feel like without the pain meds. I’m debating whether to admit it to her or not when my mobile goes off in my hand.

“Potter.”

“Hey, Boss. I just wanted to let you know that we’ve got Crabbe lined up for a one on one tomorrow at eight a.m. McLaggen tried to give me push back about it, but I let him listen to the tape, and he set it up after that.”

McLaggen, the mother fucker. His CI was the one hired to find Hermione. He’s lucky I didn’t shoot him. Then McLaggen hitting on Hermione at the fucking hospital? He’s lucky I didn’t shoot them both.

Neville sounds bone weary, and no wonder. He’s got to be back in The Lair in just a few hours from now.

“Good. Pick me up on the way.”

He hesitates, and I feel the reluctance in his breathing.

“I don’t know, boss. You know I would, but wouldn’t that get you into even more hot water? I don’t want to push your luck.”

The toilet flushes from the bathroom, and the water in the sink comes on.

“I expect you here by six.”

“Are you sure?”

“Neville,” I growl, low and dangerous.

“I’m not going in that early. Even for your arse. I’ll be there at 6:30. See you then.”

He drops the line before I have a chance to reply.

The bathroom door opens as I plug my mobile into my charger, and my body reacts as if it’s been electrified when she walks out the bathroom wearing a Hogwarts Academy shirt that hangs to her knees. My breathing sticks in my lungs, and I have to brace out a hack or two before it’s flowing easily again.

She walks to the other side of the bed, and it’s much too high for her. She’s got to crawl up it on her hands and knees, before settling back against the headboard.

“When are you on shift again?” I ask.

She gives me a sleepy smile.

“I’m off tomorrow.”

That gives me tomorrow then to get my ducks in a row.

“I warn you,” I play, even though there’s no way I’ll be able to physically lay down tonight.

“I really like to cuddle.”

She pulls the covers over her legs, settling down against the pillows. She scoots to the middle of the bed, so that her back is against my legs. I bury my hand in her mass of curly hair, thankful the motion doesn’t cause me any pain.

“Somehow, Harry, that doesn’t surprise me at all.”

# Reckoning

## Chapter Summary

My alarm goes off precisely at 4:45. The mobile vibrates noiselessly in my hand, after my having turned off the alert tone hours ago.

It's always been hard to sleep the first few nights after an injury, even with the pain meds flowing through my system. With this one, I managed to eke out an hour or two. I've been too aware of the woman at my side to do more than doze in and out.

## Chapter Notes

I'm sitting at the park, in beautiful 60 degree weather, ignoring my children while I'm SUPPOSED to be writing. Instead I'm hanging out on A03. ☹️☹️

## Harry

My alarm goes off precisely at 4:45. The mobile vibrates noiselessly in my hand, after my having turned off the alert tone hours ago.

It's always been hard to sleep the first few nights after an injury, even with the pain meds flowing through my system. With this one, I managed to eke out an hour or two. I've been too aware of the woman at my side to do more than doze in and out.

It dawned on me, sometime around three a.m., that I've never had a woman in my bed to sleep. Maybe we've slept *afterwards*. Hard work requires rest, after all. But I've never had a woman just sleep beside me.

I don't even get to hold her. I'm still sitting propped against the pillows and headboard.

She's snuggled up at my side, using my hip and thigh for a pillow. She's thrown her arm over my legs, and I can feel the steady pulse of her heartbeat through the thin material of the shirt she's wearing.

I fell asleep with my fingers buried in her hair and woke up with my hand shoved down the back of her shirt, sporting a dick hard as steel.

This woman is trying to kill me.

But in those few hours of dozing, a piece of the puzzle finally fell into place. Or, if not into place, at least made its way into the playing field.

How? *How* did they get her name? I didn't think much of it when I heard the tape. Too worried about *her*, to see the whole picture. My blindness could have gotten us both killed.

I see the forest and the trees now.

I'd assumed, at the time, that they must have seen her at the crime scene. But that doesn't make sense. For that scenario to play out, someone would have to have recognized her at the shooting. If they already knew who she was, they wouldn't have hit the streets to find her.

Which leaves only one explanation left.

They found out about Hermione from us. But even that doesn't fly. Because if I have someone on my team giving out information, then they'd already know she's a woman. And where they could find her.

So, I'm back to the original set of questions. Who killed Pettigrew, and how do they know about Hermione? What do they want with her?

Can I find them before they find her?

~\*\*~

When the time on my mobile zooms past five o'clock, I ease myself out from underneath Hermione. It's a slow process, because it both hurts like hell to move and because I don't want to wake the sleeping woman curled into my side.

"Where you goin'?" she mumbles in her sleep, lifting her head and squinting her eyes in a dazed resemblance to waking up.

"Go back to sleep," I whisper, pushing her hair behind her ears and shoving a pillow in my place. "I'll be back."

I don't bother to mention when.

She nods her head yes before pulling the pillow into her chest, rolling so she's lying on top of it. I bend at the waist and drop a kiss on her head, ignoring the fire that spreads over my ribcage. Then I head into the bathroom to shower.

The list of questions in the case just keeps getting bigger, and I don't have any answers. Pettigrew would have been positively giddy if he'd known his death was going to cause so many problems.

The heat from the shower feels magnificent coursing down my body, the power of the jets giving me an aching sort of pleasure as it pounds on my muscles. But it still hurts to raise my arms above my head to wash my hair, and I know from experience that it'll be weeks still before I can move around without any sort of residual pain.

I don't bother with my contacts and slip my glasses back over my eyes. With my luck, I'd end up poking my eye out.

I reach for a black Henley from my closet, then stop as I imagine struggling to get it over my head. I grab a button-up instead, rolling the cuffs once or twice so that my I.V. port doesn't show, and I don't have to button my cuffs.

I've never been more thankful I switched to boots with zippers, and it only takes me a minute longer than usual to shove my feet into them and yank the zipper up over my ankle.

I start to leave a note for Hermione and then stop when I look at her keys sitting on the kitchen counter.

I don't want her to leave before I have a chance to talk to her. She needs to know the truth.

All of it.

Just as soon as I have more information to give her.

But I can't take the risk that something will happen to her before that time comes.

She's going to be narked. Like, castrating me in my kitchen kind of angry. Hermione has a temper that seems to rival my own.

But it's something that has to be done.

I crumble up the note I'd already started and bring the pen to a fresh piece of paper. I grab Hermione's keys off the counter and stick them in my pocket. Then I grab an old shopping bag from under the counter and head back into my bedroom. She's in the same position I left her in.

Her folded clothes are on the nightstand. Yesterdays, and the set she brought over for today.

Whispering a silent, "sorry, luv," I take her clothes from the table and drop them into the bag before taping the note to the bathroom table.

Then I head out to wait for Neville.

~\*\*~

Instead of Nev, Ron pulls up to the driveway at 6:29. I take my time ensuring that the locks and alarms are set on the house before I make my way over to his car.

This is better anyway. Nev would ask too many questions I don't want to answer.

I say a silent thank you that my team was assigned the larger end of the vehicle pool as I pass Hermione's dinky little Impala. The thought of having to fold myself up to fit into an American import saloon that size has the band around my rib cage giving a particularly violent squeeze.

Ron is staring at Hermione's car and doesn't even let me finish shutting the door before he starts in on the inquisition.

So much for Ron being the lesser of two evils.

"That looks an awful lot like Herman's precious Paula sitting in your driveway."

I shut the door with a little more *oomph* than strictly necessary.

"Since you guys are the ones who gave her my address, I'm not sure why you sound all that surprised."

His eyes bug out of his head, and he sounds like he's choking on his tongue while he pulls away from the curb and takes off slowly down the street.

"Maybe I dropped a little hint to Nev. But I didn't expect her to take it and run with it. I certainly didn't expect you to let her in your house. Or have her spend the night. I figured she'd scream at you a little more, and you'd tell her to get lost."

I chuckle a little at that—Ron's right on one count.

"She did throw quite the strop. As to letting her in my house, I didn't have much of a choice. She told me to get the bloody hell out of her way, and without any conscious decision to do so, I did. That's how I ended up with the I.V. in my arm too."

Ron doesn't bother to hide his chuckles.

"I knew I liked her." His smile takes on an evil glint. "You need a strong willed woman to put up with your stubbornness. Tell me, is she in the guest bedroom?"

I don't bother to answer his question, and his tiny smirk grows into a shit-eating grin.

"Well, well, well. The plot thickens. What's in the bag?"

"Don't you need to pay attention to the road?" I snark at him. Ignoring me completely, he leans into the back as soon as he hits a stop sign and peeks into the sack I dropped onto the rear seat.

"Is that Herman's clothing?" he asks me, smiling ear to ear.

"Shut it, Ron," I growl, but that only makes him grin wider. "It's not what you think," I say. "I don't want Mia leaving my house."

He gives me a slow salacious nod, and I realize I only made it worse.

"It's Mia now, huh?"

"It's not like that, you wanker. And for fucks sake, stop calling her Herman. It kills something inside me every time I hear it. I kept her at my house for her protection. It's not safe for her

out there by herself. Not until we find these gits. She's protected at my place. No one knows she's there. I've locked her inside the safest building I can think of outside of The Lair."

His smirk is almost luminescent.

"Isn't that called kidnapping?" he asks me with mockery in his voice. It takes all my willpower not to punch him in the face.

He's taking advantage of me in my weakened state. He'll pay for this; of that, I can promise.

The light finally turns green, and he faces back towards the road. The silence in the car says it all. I don't bother to reply, because really, what can I say?

Yes, I kidnapped Hermione.

Kinda.

More like being held hostage. Technically she came to me willingly.

"It's for her own good."

"Hmmm," he says, letting it hang in the air between us.

"So, did you tell her yet?" he asks as his tone takes on a more deliberate quality.

You mean that the mob has a hit on her?

I lean my head against the rest, slowly taking in oxygen.

"No, I haven't. I can't seem to figure out how. I waited too long. This whole thing—" and I pause, not knowing what to say. I twist my neck back and forward, trying to work out the kinks building in my muscles. "I wasn't expecting this. Any of this."

He knows, and I know, that we're not talking about Pettigrew and the fallout from that night anymore.

"No one ever is, mate," Ron replies companionably, and I release the breath I was holding in my lungs. He's probably the only person in the world I could talk to about this.

I'm still not sure how Hermione got under my skin so deep.

We're quiet for the rest of the drive, both of us lost to our thoughts. He pulls into the car park, it's half empty at this hour, and turns to me after shutting off the ignition.

"Ron," I say, and my voice is gruff and rough. "Our bosses know about Hermione now. But they don't know about—" and my voice skids to a stop, unable to put voice to whatever it is that's happening between us. "I know the upper brass has started asking questions. Why didn't we include it in the reports when we heard the tape? Why didn't we immediately provide her Protected Persons Service? Push it all onto me. I'm your superior. I made that decision. They don't need to know—" And my voice falters again. "I *will* keep her safe."

"They won't hear it from me," he says, and I believe the sincere glint to his eye.

"Thanks," I say, reaching for the door handle.

"I just have one more question, and then I'll let the subject drop."

I scratch at my beard, already regretting agreeing to this.

"Yeah, okay. What is it?"

He makes a choking sound, then clears his throat. There's a battle waging for his expression on his face. His lips are twitching up and down, and his eyes keep fluttering away from mine.

"If you have Hermione's clothes, then what, pray tell, was she wearing when you left?"

Before I have a chance to punch him in his face, he's out of the car and hauling arse across the car park. I can still hear his laughter when he disappears around the corner.

## **Harry**

He's long gone by the time I make it into the building. Hiding somewhere in a corner, like a puppy that knows it's done something wrong.

I let my eyes skim the crowd, but I can't actually sucker punch him in the middle of The Lair anyhow.

What I do find is my captain, leaning back in my chair with his feet on my desk. There's a telly on in the corner, and I hear the local morning news anchor talking about the left-over questions from yesterday's officer-involved shooting.

Fantastic.

My captain takes in my straight back, and my hands fisted at my sides.

"You just lost me forty quid, Potter."

He gives me a stiff smile, leaning back until the chair won't tilt any farther.

"Had the pleasure of speaking with MI5 until almost midnight last night. Long past my bedtime. I'm old, Potter. I need my sleep. Thanks for that, by the way. I'm keeping them looped in our investigation, like the good little soldier I am.



"Special Agent John Longbottom, cousin of our esteemed Neville here, told me to let him know when you showed up today. I said, 'No way! Potter is on administrative leave, pending an investigation. No way he'd show his face when he was given explicit orders to keep his arse at home.'" The fake smile falls from his face, to be replaced with a glower that's made weaker men cry. "Wanna bet, he says? 'Absolutely, I say. Potter *was* my best Detective. He always follows orders.' Forty quid, Potter. You owe me forty quid!"

He pushes out of my chair, and the force causes it to shoot backward into the desk behind me. His tongue is in his cheek, and the effort he's exuding to keep his temper in check is palpable. I reach into my back pocket and pull out my wallet, digging forty pounds out of the money clip attached to it. It leaves me with about three quid.

I hand him the money without a word, and he scoffs at me in disgust, ripping the cash from my hand.

"Come with me," he orders as he stomps in the direction of his office.

I keep my face as blank as possible, and all eyes glide away from me as I follow my boss at a more leisurely pace. I give them my hardest stare, not letting their trepidation affect my cool.

"Shut the door," he growls needlessly, as I push it closed and assume a position in front of his desk. I shove my hands into my pockets and try not to radiate the hostility I'm feeling.

"Where's the girl? I sent constables to her building last night; they told me she never showed up."

I swallow back my irritation at not being informed first and reply as calmly as I can.

"She's safe," I say, not wanting to devolve any more details than I must.

"Cut the shite, Harry. You're lucky I don't fire your arse. Why wasn't the fact that she was on an MI5 recording in any of the files? I don't appreciate my arse being handed to me by the Security Service without knowing why I'm bending over and spreading it first."

I hesitate a moment, debating over how much to tell, but the situation has already gotten away from me. They know who she is now. I can't unring that bell.

"MI5 can stick it up their arse and rotate. They don't give a shit about Dr. Granger, only about their case. Besides, *she* wasn't on the tape. Only her alias was. Did you listen to it?"

He gives a sharp nod.

"No one knew she was a woman. Not even they realized it. Nobody bothered to investigate the fact that they had a probable hit on tape. Probable deniability. What's one more dead body, so long as it doesn't fuck up their precious case? I had to keep her out of the files. It was the only protection we could offer her. I figured the fewer people who knew about her, the better. We didn't even tell Ron. Only Neville and I knew about the recording."

My captain grunts out his acknowledgement, then slumps into his chair, running his hands roughly over his face.

I go in for the kill. For the question that's been on repeat on my mind for the last eighteen hours.

"What you should be asking is how did they get her name in the first place?"

His eyes flare at the insinuation before giving me a sharp nod. How they got her information is next on our list.

"You really screwed the pooch on this one, Harry. What the fuck were you thinking?"

I lower myself into the chair in front of his desk, careful of my bruised chest. My exhale sounds loud in my ears, and I'm fighting a level of exhaustion I don't usually allow myself to feel.

I'm seriously regretting getting out of bed this morning.

"I was thinking that I'd do whatever it took to protect this woman. Then they said her name at that meet yesterday, and yeah. Maybe I snapped. You didn't see her the night of that shooting, Kingley. Braver than you and I combined. How the fuck do the people looking for her even know she was there that night? It's not like it was the middle of a sink estate with a thugs watching from every corner. There's something going on here that we can't see."

He glares at me, elbows on his desk. I can see his mind whirring a mile a minute.

"Are you shagging her?"

I swallow down the way my heart speeds up in my chest and ignore the desire to clench my fists.

"No. Frankly, it pisses me off that you think so little of me."

I'm not. That's God's honest truth. I've barely laid a hand on her. He doesn't need to know she's started to haunt my dreams.

He swats his hand in front of him, waving away my anger.

"Don't bullshite a bullshitter. I saw the way she handled you at the hospital last night. She's got your number good."

I don't bother to respond, keeping my face as impassive as possible.

"Fine. Whatever. Just don't fuck up this case. MI5 will be here any minute. They want to watch the interview of McLaggen's CI since they lost their own in yesterday's incident. John Longbottom thinks that maybe the snitch can be of use to them."

He sits there for a moment, and I see the calculations going on behind his eyes.

"Investigation complete. You're cleared of all charges. The shooting was justifiable, and you didn't knowingly impede in an NCA investigation. I'll handle MI5."

"Just like that?"

He points at the door. "Just like that. You can go home."

"Excuse me?" I demand, shoving out of the chair and ignoring the fire it sends shooting through my body. "I'm not going anywhere until I have some answers. I have to be in that room, Kingsley."

"No," he says, standing up as well, "You *want* to be in that room. There's a big difference. Let's forget that MI5 wants your head on a platter. Let's forget you were thinking with your dick yesterday instead of your brain and could have gotten everybody killed. You were shot three times, Harry. You're on medical leave."

I hesitate for a moment, my need to wrap my hands around McLaggen's informant warring with my instinct to keep things close to the vest. I try to walk the tightrope down the middle.

"My physician said she'd clear me, if I submitted for treatment." I lift the sleeve of my shirt, revealing the I.V. port still taped to my forearm. "I've been treated. I've been cleared by the disciplinary board. I will be in that interrogation room."

He laughs dark and short, giving me a thoughtful stare.

"*Your physician*," he grumbles under his breath shaking his head. "Where's the doc, Harry?"

I don't even hesitate this time.

"Asleep. In my bed. All things considered, I figured it was the safest place for her."

He closes his eyes in prayer, digging his fingers hard into his temples.

"Well, I can't say you're wrong there." He puts his hands up in front of his chest. "I don't want to know anymore. Not unless the information is going to end with you unemployed and arrested or one of us dead. Plausible deniability indeed, if this shite ever gets to trial."

I don't give a shite about a trial anymore. As far as I'm concerned, whoever is behind this isn't going to live long after I find them.

The tension between us sits heavy on the surface. "Fine. You can watch. But McLaggen is doing the talking. It's his CI."

"Hell no," I exclaim, ignoring the twinge it sends down my arms. "McLaggen is a moron of epic proportions. Give me five minutes, and I'll have all I need to know."

"I can't let you break the man Harry, simply because you want to."

"Then let Neville handle the questioning." His eyebrows raise in surprise at that. "He's good, Kingsley. He can charm the fleas off a cat. Besides, it'll piss off his cousin."

He barks out another laugh.

"Yeah. Okay. Neville can lead. McLaggen stays in the room. You either watch from the window, or go home. Your choice."

I step back, so I'm no longer directly in front of him and motion towards the door, indicating that he should lead the way.

# Interrogations

## Chapter Summary

I stand outside the double paned glass with my arms over my chest, staring through the window. McLaggen and Crabbe are shooting the shite on the other side, talking about the football match last night and what the chances of the Cannons making it into the playoffs are.

Neville walks over to join me, his cousin trailing behind him with a frown. I shake Neville's hand when he offers it, keeping my face bland. I squeeze his fingers, however, until I feel the bones grind together in my grip.

## Chapter Notes

Sorry I missed yesterday's posting. Happily tried to remind me, but my laptop was dead lol. I'll release a couple today to make up for it.

## Harry

I stand outside the double paned glass with my arms over my chest, staring through the window. McLaggen and Crabbe are shooting the shite on the other side, talking about the football match last night and what the chances of the Cannons making it into the playoffs are.

Neville walks over to join me, his cousin trailing behind him with a frown. I shake Neville's hand when he offers it, keeping my face bland. I squeeze his fingers, however, until I feel the bones grind together in my grip.

He knows what he did, even if I'm rather thankful for it.

I'm proud of him when he only grimaces but doesn't try to pull away.

I tip my chin to John, who doesn't so much as glance in my direction.

Good. I don't want to have to deal with the wanker anyway.

"You know what you're doing?" I ask Neville, who has a nervous sort of energy making his hands jerk at his sides.

We discussed his plan of attack with McLaggen before John got here, letting Crabbe cool his heels alone in the interview room.

“Yeah, boss,” he confirms, nodding his head, just a tad over-exuberantly. Then he looks at me, and I can see the worry behind his eyes. “But if I need you?” he asks, trailing off at the end.

I pat him on the back.

“You won’t, but I’ll be out here the whole time anyway.”

I give him a reassuring smile before he opens the door and joins the others in the room.

My mobile vibrates in my pocket, and I pull it out to see that it's Hermione calling me. I hit the ignore button, trying to keep the cringe off my face when I imagine the rage going on inside my house.

My eyes close as I release a slow exhale. So, it begins.

I shove it back in my pocket when it starts to ring the second time.

Neville is all smiles, laying his mobile and his paperwork onto the table before reaching out and taking their hands. He shakes Crabbe’s, then does the handshake chest bump thing with McLaggen, asking why Neville didn’t see him at the bar last night.

It’s bullshit.

We never hang out with Narcotics, but Neville succeeds with what he set out for, and Crabbe visibly relaxes at the geniality between his handler and Neville’s unknown quantity. After all, the last time Crabbe saw Neville was when we busted into the warehouse and tossed a pair of cuffs around his wrists.

I’d be a little nervous too if I were in his shoes.

“So, we haven’t officially been introduced yet. I’m Neville Longbottom, a detective with the Investigative Unit. I want to thank you for being here today. I know it’s early, especially for a Saturday. You didn’t have to do this for us, and I wanted to let you know it means a lot to the team, that you’d go out of your way like this. So, thanks, thanks so much.”

The more Neville rambles, the looser Crabbe becomes. He leans forward slightly in his seat, nodding along with Neville’s words. He preens a little under Neville’s compliments, like he’s doing his civic duty, instead of being compelled here this morning with the threat of jail time if he didn’t show.

“Do you want anything?” Neville asks. “Fizzy drink, cuppa, water?”

“Nah, I’m good,” Crabbe replies, leaning back in his chair.

“I need coffee,” McLaggen says, standing up from his chair. “My girl kept me up all night, mate.”

Neville gives a genuine laugh. "Seems to be going around. Bring me my usual, would ya?"

I feel my cheeks heat despite my best efforts.

McLaggen gives him a nod in acknowledgement, before walking out and closing the door behind him.

"Two creamers, six sugars," I tell McLaggen when he opens his mouth to ask the order, and he huffs in amusement and makes his way out to the break room.

I turn my attention back to the interview room.

"Are you sure about this?" John speaks up from behind me.

"You should have more faith in your cousin," I tell him, without taking my eyes off the room.

"Sure," is all he says in return.

"While McLaggen is gone, let me just get the technicalities out of the way. This is just an interview. I know you've been through this before, but I should remind you of your right to silence."

Neville's voice is light and genial. This is just formalities between two friends, he seems to say.

"Yeah, yeah," Crabbe goads, slumping down in his chair. He's trying to give off an air that none of this bothers him, but his knee is bouncing in rapid succession.

"I don't want any confusion between us. You're not under arrest here, mate. You're not a person of interest. Anytime you feel like you want to leave, there's no one on the other side blocking the door."

"Yeah, okay," Crabbe sighs, looking Neville in the eye for the first time.

"First, you do not have to say anything. But, it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence. But you're here as a friend, Crabbe. We need you today."

Crabbe perks up again at the reminder that he holds the cards.

"If at any time you want to speak to your solicitor, you're welcome to do so. If you want to call them now, and have them with you for this interview, we're more than happy to wait. I want you to feel comfortable while we chat this morning. If you don't have a solicitor but still want to talk with one, just let me know, and we'll arrange a duty solicitor for you before we continue."

McLaggen comes back in, carrying a coffee and tea then pulling a water bottle out of his pocket and placing it in front of Crabbe.

“Nah, mate,” Crabbe says, pulling a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and dropping them on the table. “I’m good. Let’s just get on with it.”

“Okay, great.”

Neville takes a sip of his coffee, his look almost beatific as the crappy beverage hits his tongue.

“Perfect. Just remember, even if we go forward now without an attorney present, you have the right to stop and ask for one at any time.”

“Yup,” Crabbe says, already bored with the technicalities.

“Fantastic,” Neville says, shuffling his papers in front of him.

“What do you do, anyway? Do you have a job?” Neville asks, moving the conversation in a relaxing direction. “Do you need a work excuse before we leave today?”

“Nah. You know how it is. I do a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I get by, without having to report to the queen five days a week.”

Neville smiles and laughs.

“You’re a lucky bloke. I’m on call seven days a week. I bet you make more than me, too,” he jokes, and Crabbe sniggers at that, probably picturing the dinky little flat Neville lives in on a government salary.

Jokes on him. Neville’s Gram is loaded. Nev is here because he wants to be, just like me.

“What did you do last night, anything fun?”

John throws his hands into the air, scoffing so loud I wonder if it hurt his throat.

“Where’s he going with all this bullshite?”

I don’t answer for a moment, watching the ease at which Crabbe answers Neville’s question about his version of the failed meet yesterday. Then I give my full attention to John.

“Look at him. Fifteen minutes ago, that man was bouncing off the walls. His leg was twitching so bad the whole table was shaking. Now he’s ready to buy Neville a pint. It may take an extra amount of time”—painfully extra, sometimes—“but your cousin is good at his job. Maybe if you shut your mouth, you’d learn something.”

His jaw snaps with an audible click and seeing the smirk on Kingsley’s face, I turn back to the interview.

“How did you contact the men you were meeting? Did they reach out to you, or the other way around?”



“You know how it is,” Crabbe says, scratching at his arms. “A friend of a friend of a friend. They have product that needed moved and I knew people who wanted to move it for them. When McLaggen mentioned to me that you guys were looking for a new player in town, I thought maybe these were the mates you were looking for and reached out.”

Neville bobs his head in encouragement.

Neville jumps on that, pulling a page from his pile. Crabbe, sensing an opportunity to make himself more important than he really is, preens under Neville’s prodding.

“I’m what you call a middleman. I don’t buy or sell myself. I simply like to help my mates. If I hear someone I know is looking for work, maybe I point them in the direction of a man looking to hire. You know what I mean?”

“Well, I mean, you do have quite the record though, don’t you, Crabbe? Couple of intent to distribute. Couple of possession charges. I see no less than three petty theft lockups. You’ve been clean for a while, but I think we can both agree that’s because McLaggen’s been keeping you out of trouble.”

Crabbe starts scratching at his arms with a little more feeling now.

“It is what it is. I have to keep my nose dirty, in order to give you guys the information that you’re looking for. It’s what they call a quid pro quo sorta thing, ya know?”

Neville is back to nodding along in understanding.

“Absolutely, and we thank you for your service.”

I can’t hold in my snort.

“Back to the blokes from yesterday. What can you tell us about them? The main one, the one who’s dead—” If Neville says that a smidgen harder than strictly necessary, I’m sure it wasn’t on purpose. “His ID came back fake. No hit on his prints, no facial recognition. Car was registered to a third-party corporation that we lost in the highways of cyberspace. That means you’re our only connection. Who was he? Who does he work for?”

Crabbe stares up at the ceiling, pulls a cigarette from his pack and brings it unlit to his lips.

“I already told you. I didn’t know the bloke. Maybe I’d seen him around at a house party a time or two, but that’s it, pal. It’s not like I run background checks on everyone I do business with. Someone told me they were looking to move some product, I told them to give him my number. Ain’t nothing more than that.”

Neville sits back in his seat, letting his shoulders slump.

“Crabbe. I’m treating you with respect. My only hope is that you’d do the same. I need you to be honest with me.”

“I’m here, aren’t I? What—you expect me to pull what I ain’t got out my arse? Last I checked, I’m no wizard.”

McLaggen looks over Neville's shoulder, staring at the window.

"Go," Kingsley says from beside me, and it's the only encouragement I need.

John immediately starts to protest, but I ignore him as I open the door and close it behind me. I grab the extra chair from the corner, pulling it up to the table and slowly lowering my bulk down so that I don't make my ribs burn. If it makes me look stiff and unyielding, so much the better then.

I lean forward with my elbows on my knees, grasping my hands together.

"Did you kill Peter Pettigrew?"

His response is immediate. Crabbe shoves up from the table so hard it squeaks forward several inches from the impact. His chair topples sideways, and his eyes look like they're going to pop from their head.

"What?! No! Nononono. Hell no! You ain't pinning that shite on me, mate. I didn't have nothing to do with that. I ain't no killer. And I'm certainly not stupid enough to murder Pettigrew."

His fight or flight instinct has kicked in strong, and his eyes are zooming from corner to corner, looking for a way to escape.

McLaggen rises from his seat, shushing Crabbe and coaxing him down like a spooked horse.

"No one's saying you did, Crabbe. I know you better than that. No offense, but you don't have it in you."

Crabbe glares at McLaggen, probably trying to decide whether he should be offended or relieved that we're not looking to pin Pettigrew's death on him.

Neville stands up, alternating between apologizing to Crabbe for my rudeness and reprimanding me for my insinuation. He rights Crabbe's chair for him, picks the dropped cigarettes off the floor, and watches with barely contained amusement while Crabbe puts yet another unlit butt to his lips and proceeds to take a hard drag from it.

"Where were you the night Pettigrew was killed?" I ask, voice as bland and banal as the first question.

"I don't remember, but track my mobile. Use whatever means you have to show where I've been. . I don't care what you've got to do, just don't let it get out that you asked me that. I'll be dead before the sun sets."

"We can contact the NCA for them to protect you, if you need it," Neville advises him, but Crabbe simply waves it away and takes another drag from the cig in his lips.

"Tell me about the girl?"

"What girl?"

My hands twitch with the need to wrap them around his throat.

“The girl you mentioned at the meet yesterday. They asked you to find her. Why? When? What did they want with her?”

“Fuck if I know. They didn’t ask for her, anyway. They asked me to find some bloke. A doctor. I mentioned it to my girl one night, and she said she knew a chick doctor with a boy’s name. So, I took a trip to the A&E, and wham, there she was. She’s fit too. With how much they paid, I thought she’d be hard to find.”

I feel Kingsley boring holes into the back of my head, but I’ve got no attention for anyone but Crabbe.

“What do they want with her?”

Crabbe shoves the cigarette back into the pack, looking anywhere but at us.

“Who knows? They didn’t offer and I didn’t ask.”

I stand, bringing my chair with me, and move until I’m standing close enough to Crabbe for my knees to touch his.

Then I sit again.

“Fine. What did you do with the information?”

He roughly clears his throat, rubbing at his neck.

“I mean, nothing. You were there. I told him, then you killed him. That was it.”

He’s lying through his fucking teeth.

“What did you do with the information?” I ask again, leaning forward so I’m deep into his personal space. He angles his body away from me, but in doing so, he’s halfway off his chair.

“I mean. I don’t know what they wanted with it. But I figured if they wanted it, someone else might too. I’m a facilitator. So, I mighta asked around if anyone knew why the East Siders were looking for information about some hot doctor with a weird name.”

Neville jumps in before I have a chance to.

“East Siders? I thought you said you didn’t know who they were?”

“Well they ain’t from our side of the lake, are they?” He’s getting some of his groove back, and when he gives me a nasty look and sits up straight in his chair, I sit up in mine as well, moving out of his personal space.

He finally looks Neville straight in the eye.

“Look, mate. Here’s the God’s honest truth. Only name I got for the man was Caillen. I saw him a time or two at a party. Helped with some smaller jobs. He asked if I knew anyone wanting to move some weight, I said yeah, he says by the way, find someone for me, I say it’s my regular price, and then you storm in like the Hulk and pop the guy. I’m not into the details. I don’t know more than that. I’m more like a paper pusher.”

He keeps rambling on, but I zone out, another piece of the puzzle dropping into play.

Paper pusher.

Paperwork.

I rise from my seat, without bothering to excuse myself. Crabbe’s rambling stutters as I slam the door behind me. Neville can handle it from here.

“Harry, what the—?”

I storm past John and my captain, making my way to my desk in the back of The Lair.

Paperwork. Paperwork. Paperwork.

I give my mouse a rough shake, waking my computer from sleep mode while I rummage around the stacks of files from my desk.

There!

The cream-coloured folder with the name *Pettigrew, Peter* , is distinctly rough around the edges, with a coffee cup ring sitting in the middle. I tip another pile over the side of my desk in my rush to grab the Pettigrew file, but leave them where they land, spreading in a sea of reports over the floor around me.

I don’t bother to unhook the clasps holding the papers in place; simply flip through until I find the original report submitted by Neville at 9:08 a.m. that morning.

There, in the first paragraph. *999 called by a bystander on scene, a Dr. Herman Granger* . My eyes scan the rest of the report, confirming what I already know.

Nowhere on any of these papers does it state her sex, or her place of work.

Dr. Herman Granger, cooperating witness.

They pulled her name right from the police report.

They got her name from us.

# Secrets Revealed

## Chapter Summary

I hear the chime go off in the house, alerting me that someone has entered one of the doors. Since the alarm doesn't follow shortly afterwards, I imagine Harry must finally be home.

I debate, for a heartbeat, about getting out of his bathtub. After all, it isn't like I was invited to use it. But since I was essentially held hostage this morning, I think I've earned the right.

## Chapter Notes

This is the second chapter of the day. Go back and read the one before if you haven't yet.

GAH! You're guys's idea about her showing up to the station was SO COOL!!!! If I hadn't already written the book, I so would have used it. I hope what I did write was, if not AS good as your suggestions, but somewhere close.

Thanks Happily!



## Hermione

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He knocks on the semi-shut door, lifting his voice to be heard.

"That you, Mia?"

I roll my eyes in irritation.

"No, Harry, it's the bogeyman. Of course, it's me."

He's silent for a moment or two.

"May I come in?"

There's a hesitation in the way he's speaking. A trepidation I'd never expect to hear from *Harry Potter*. It gives me a perverse sense of pleasure to know he's scared of what he's come home to find.

I think about it for a minute, looking at the bubbles all but dissolved, before making up my mind.

“It’s your house.”

He pushes the door open the rest of the way and takes a step into the room.

He freezes one foot in, his body rigid and tight with pain. His eyes sweep me from head to toe, darkening to the deepest emerald as he takes in my naked form in his tub.

He clears his throat roughly, and pain laces across his face.

There’s something else there too. Something akin to desire.

His hands flex at his sides.

Serves him right.

Biological urge indeed.

“I didn’t expect you to be here when I got home,” he says, and I hear the sincerity in his voice.

He’s dressed differently today. Jeans and a button up t-shirt. He’s barefoot, having already ditched his shoes somewhere in the house. His shirt is blue and untucked at the pants, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He’s wearing those silver round-framed glasses with his hair a right mess. It’s a good look on him, and it only pisses me off more.

Especially since he’s probably in a button-up because it hurts too bad to pull a shirt over his head.

“Since you took my keys, and my *clothes* , I’m not sure why not.”

He scoffs lightly, then steps further into the room, shoving his hands into his pockets.

“I wouldn’t expect that to stop you.”

So he isn’t as big a prat as he seems then.

“I admit. It wasn’t going to. I came over here last night to...I don’t know. Protect you from yourself, I suppose? Now I understand that’s a lost cause. I realize you’re a Royal Marine. The scars on your body prove this isn’t your first bout with a gunshot wound.”

I pause, looking for what I want to say.

“I thought, maybe—I don’t know. That I could make it easier for you, *this* time. I was wrong.”

“You did make it better,” he whispers.

“I had my Uber ordered. Found a set of women's clothing in the guest room. Since it was in a drawer mixed with toddler clothes, I’m assuming it belongs to a sister.”

He nods his head in affirmation.

“I was already waiting in the driveway. But when it got here, I realized you owed me an explanation. I’m going to charge you, by the way, for the cancellation fee for the driver.”

“I’ll add it to the list of today’s IOUs,” he mumbles so softly I almost don’t hear him.

I don’t like how sulky my voice sounds. How hurt my feelings are. He owes me nothing. He doesn’t deserve the animosity I’m throwing his direction. Except for maybe taking my clothes, that is.

I don’t quite understand *why* I’m so mad.

Only that I am.

And it feels good to take my anger out on him.

“I’m surprised you didn’t know I was still here. I figured your cameras would have told you everything you need to know.” I point my finger at the ceiling and twirl it in a circle, indicating how weird it is that he’s got this place wired like Buckingham Palace.

“I got the alert about the alarm being deactivated. Then reactivated. But I didn’t check the cameras. I—” he clears his throat, as if what he’s about to say is painful for him. “I didn’t want to see you leave. I assumed from the alerts that you *had* and left it at that. It was a pleasant surprise to come home and see your stuff in the living room. I put your keys in your bookbag, by the way. Your clothes are on the bed.”

“Thank you,” I tell him stiffly.

He’s making a conscious effort to stare at my face, and not let his gaze wander down my body. His eyes have flickered once or twice, but for the most part, they’ve stayed locked with mine.

“Why did you stay?”

He reminds me of the Harry I met at the crime scene. Back stiff, arms flexed, face bare of any emotion.

I don’t answer for a moment, trying to gather my thoughts.

“I figured you owed me an explanation.”

“Oh?”

I’ve realized, over the last eighteen hours, that even his bland expressions have a weight to them. A glint to his eye, or the way he holds his head. What was once so empty, now tells me chapters of a story.



His face reads nothing, but he dips his tongue out to wet his lips.

*This* blandness is wary. Nervous even.

Good.

“I thought you were on administrative leave. Isn’t that a polite way of saying you’re suspended?”

“Yes,” he replies, his mask firmly in place. “But they brought a subject in for interrogation, and I had to be a part of that.” His lips twerk up in that non-smile, smile again. “I make a certain...impression, with the suspects. It helps to have me brooding in a corner. Besides, they already cleared me.”

That fast, huh?

I can’t contain my snort, one hundred per cent believing every word he says. Harry probably doesn’t even have to say a word. He just glares at them, and they admit to offing their grandmothers.

“So, what was so important then, that you had to sneak out of your own home, before the crack of dawn, leaving me alone, in your bed, without a word?”

My anger is warming to the subject.

“What was so *Goddamn Important*?” I stand up in the tub, the porcelain no longer able to contain my fury. Water splashes out the sides, and I look down as it surges over Harry’s bare toes. “That you locked me in your house? Stole my transportation! Stole my bloody *clothing*” —he visibly winces as my voice rises in the tiny chamber—“and left me with nothing but some cryptic arse note, telling me to stay put like some bloody dog?!”

My chest is heaving in gasping breaths, and my voice is shaking with my anger.

Harry's fists clench and unclench at his sides as his eyes roam over my body, currently trembling in fury. Just like last night at the hospital, he reaches out to touch me, but stops himself, his fists landing at his side.

I thought something was happening here. Between us. I’ve never met a man who infuriated me more. But I’ve never met a man who I find so infatuating either. There it is, ladies and gentlemen. I am infatuated with Detective Harry Potter. This morning, though, he proved one of two things.

Maybe both.

That it’s all in my head.

Or that he doesn’t care enough to respect me.

I think that’s what’s brought me to the edge of tears, dripping water in Harry's bathtub. Because I thought, for a moment, that he was a man who had it all.

Now, I realize he's just another jerk with a pretty face and a motorcycle.

I scoff in disgust, sliding back into the water. I dip further than I was intending and let the motion pull me under, pushing my hair slick against my head as I rise.

"Get out, Harry," I say, all the fight gone from my voice. "I'll be out of your hair in a few minutes."

He doesn't leave the room.

Instead he sits down on the toilet lid and scrubs his hands roughly over his beard, before pulling his mobile from his pocket.

"You, Mia. You are what is so important."

I don't bother to hide my disgust, then an unknown voice erupts from the speaker on his mobile.

I jerk in my bath, water slipping up the sides again when my name comes up in the conversation.

When a stranger asks someone to find me.

The bath water suddenly turns to ice as bile rises in my throat. I have to swallow twice until I'm sure I won't throw up. Ripples glide across the top of the water as trembles wrack my body.

"When did you get this?" I pant, my voice tinged with fear.

He looks me in the eye before he answers.

"The day we fought at the gym."

What the—

All my fear dissolves, to be replaced with white-hot rage.

"What the hell, Harry!? That was weeks ago! Why the hell are you only telling me now?"

I can taste my anger on my tongue, burning with rage and indignation. My voice is harsh against the tiled walls, and it echoes in a haunting quality.

In contrast to my anger, Harry seems to deflate in on himself. His breath releases in a slow hiss and he twists his neck, that God awful grinding noise sounding horrific in the acoustics of the bathroom. He almost looks relieved to have said it out loud.

"You need to go to a chiropractor," I mumble under my breath, but he hears it anyway. He laughs then moans in pain and wraps an arm around his middle.

“I was going to tell you that night. That’s why I went there. I went to the hospital first, and when I didn’t find you, I spoke with your head of security. They knew about the threat.”

I interrupt him before he can continue.

“Is that why they keep asking me if they can walk me to my car?”

He nods his head, yes, and I droop back down in the bath, the need for information overrunning my anger.

“I’ve been going over the hospital’s video feed too, whenever they think they see something suspicious.”

Weeks, he’s known about this. Weeks.

“I went to Dean’s intending to talk to you about it. There wasn’t an obvious threat. You heard the tape. I couldn’t offer you any sort of official protection at that point in time. But I felt like you needed to be told.”

“But you didn’t.” There’s heat in my voice, my body taut with anger. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I didn’t. I *couldn’t*. I knew I needed to, but—”

His voice catches on the word, the sound petering out to nothing.

But.

Harry sticks his fingers into the bathwater, making patterns and little waves.

I think I know what he means.

But instead of telling me that my life was in danger, we kicked each other’s arsees, then talked for hours about nothing. I hadn’t had that much fun in a legitimately long time. Or enjoyed someone’s company as much as I did that night.

Something profound changed between us.

But, indeed.

*But*.

“Is that why you’ve been stalking me?”

The jogs, the late-night phone calls. Has this whole thing been a way to keep me in his sight?

Have I imagined it after all?

“At first, that’s what I told myself. I needed to keep you safe. I *will* keep you safe.” There’s a fierceness in him now, that sends a shiver down my spine. “But it was more than that. *Is*, more than that. The recording was simply a reason to justify getting close to you, to myself. I

think I made it pretty clear before; I haven't devoted a lot of my time to women. It's been a learning curve, craving someone the way I've craved you the last few weeks."

My breath freezes in my chest, as his words sink into my soul. But there's time enough for that conversation later. I need to know more about the danger I'm in.

"That's why everyone reacted the way they did when they learned my name. Because they'd all heard the tape."

"Something like that."

His face takes on a contemplative set that I've started to associate as his detective face.

"But they were all surprised. The police and MI5. They didn't know who I was. And Neville told me something unexpected happened that afternoon. Tell me."

He brings the mobile between us again.

"Listen. Tell me what you hear."

He plays the recording back a second time, and I try to detach my emotions as I listen.

Realization dawns and my mouth parts in a silent, *oh*.

"The recording: they don't know I'm a woman."

Harry gives me a grim expression.

"No one knew outside my team. We took great pains to keep it that way. No one heard the tape except for me and Neville. And MI5. Until yesterday, at least. I didn't even tell Ron, and I told Ron the first time I wanked."

I snort at that admission.

Knew. Past tense. Something happened at that bust, that ended with Harry shot, and a man dead. And now, every criminal in Hogsmeade could be on the search for me.

We're silent for a moment. Despite the bombshell he just laid at my feet, for the first time since I woke up this morning, there's a peaceful feeling in my chest.

"I'm still mad at you," I huff.

"You have every right to be. I never knew I was a coward, until I snuck out of my own home, leaving you asleep in my bed. I didn't want to leave. Please know that. There's nothing I've ever wanted more than to stay in that bed with you wrapped around me. But I still have a job to do. I *will* keep you safe."

Safe. As in locked in *his* home, asleep in *his* bed. Inside the Buckingham Palace set up of a security system. It would have made so much more sense, if he'd had told me all this last

night. I twine my fingers with his where they still flicker around the water and ask what's been on my mind.

"So, if that recording was taken weeks ago, what happened yesterday? And why is MI5 involved?"

"I can't—"

I don't know if it's my face shutting down, or his own conscience that stops him from forming that sentence.

"Everything I'm about to tell you is classified. Like spending the next few years in Her Majesty's hospitality sort of classified."

"Patient doctor confidentiality," I say, desperate to know what's going on.

He laughs in my face, then wraps his arms around his chest as it morphs into a moan.

"That doesn't count, and you know it. But I trust you, if you can trust me."

I bring his hand to my lips, kissing the back of his fingers.

"You can trust me with your life. I thought you knew that by now."

He stands suddenly, and the unexpected motion makes me jerk in the bathtub. Water rises and crests over the edge for a third time.

He takes a moment to undo his buttons, before dropping his shirt on the floor. Next go his trousers, and before I can do more than stutter, he's standing in the bathtub clad only in a pair of grey trunks. He was considerate enough not to stare at my naked body, and I try to do the same for him, but it's hard to ignore the bulge in his pants and the scattering of scars and tattoos that cover his frame. Not to mention the size of his thighs.

Before I can do more than stutter in surprise, he lowers himself into the bathtub.

He groans in pain at the effort, and the water rises so precariously that I reach for the drain to let some out.

"Hotter," he groans through pain tightened lips. "Make it hotter."

I roll my eyes but do as he asks, turning on the tap.

"We should be icing your ribs," I reprimand gently. "Ice the first few days before we bring on the soaking."

"After," he breathes out in a sigh. "I need the heat first. Trust me, I know my body. I kept my port, see?" He straightens his arm across the lip of the tub, showing me the port that I already saw from his rolled-up shirt sleeves. "From this moment on, I promise to be a good patient."

"Is that your way of asking for pain meds?"

He attempts to shrug, then stops suddenly in pain.

I try to keep my amusement contained, but I'm pretty sure I fail.

"Are you trying to distract me?"

I'm only half joking.

He shakes his head no.

"I couldn't sit on the side of the tub anymore without being in it, that's all. Between you and me, it's been a really shitty twenty-four hours. A soak in hot water with the most beautiful woman I've ever met sounds like just what the doctor ordered."

His nose scrunches up in a half grimace of agony before he looks me in the eye.

"I promise to tell you anything you want to know. I submit to your mercy, Hermione," Harry acquiesces with a sigh, and I re-plug the drain, letting hot water fill the available space.

Well, in that case, there's more than one way to skin a cat.

I gingerly rise from the water, careful not to overflow the top again.

"I didn't intend to kick you out," he says, reaching out his hand for me. I can feel his eyes staring at me, boring holes into my bare skin.

I kiss him on the forehead, before quietly stepping out of the tub. I wrap one of his oversized towels under my armpits and make my way back to my bag.

I grab an I.V. flush, a vial of pain meds, a couple of alcohol wipes, and my cuff from my bag, then come back into the bathroom, squatting by the tub.

He watches me in silence, as I slip the blood pressure cuff onto his wrist, lifting his arm and waiting for the beep and slipping it back off again.

130/80. Perfect, for any normal human. High, compared to his medical record, which I scoured through this morning. Harry is a warrior, which means his body runs at a higher level than the rest of us mere mortals. He should be 100/70 ninety per cent of the time.

Pain makes your blood pressure rise.

Pulse is seventy-six.

I untwist the cap on his port, clean the tip; flush, meds, flush.

I watch in fascination, as the Dilaudid courses through Harry's bloodstream. The way his eyes close in abdication. He fights it, but eventually surrenders control. His breathing immediately comes easier, his chest rising and falling in a slow easy rhythm. His muscles slacken and unclench; the control with which he holds himself slowly loosens its grip.

A sigh escapes his lips, and his body slips down into the bath, a physical manifestation of the medicine working its magic.

“You used the good stuff,” he mumbles, and I can tell he’s trying to be mad. Thanks to the Dilaudid, he doesn’t have the wherewithal to make it happen.

I only gave him a small dose. Just enough to ease his pain.

I run my fingers through his hair, and he lets out an *mmm* sound, leaning into my touch.

“Relax, Harry. I’ve got you. I promised to protect you, remember.”

“We’ll protect each other. Now get back in the bath, and I’ll start at the beginning.”

I settle between his legs, making sure to take most of my weight onto my arms, and let him tell me what the bloody hell is going on.

## Harry

“I still don’t understand what happened yesterday.”

She’s on her belly on my bed, her feet kicking in the air. She’s back in the t-shirt she wore to sleep last night, and not knowing whether or not she’s wearing any knickers underneath it is driving me to distraction.

Her wet curls are dangling down her back, and I want to dig my hands into them and pull until she’s whimpering and arching underneath me.

I’ve grabbed a chair from the kitchen and am sitting on it backwards, letting my arms take the pressure from my front. It’s not that I don’t hurt at the moment, it’s that the meds she’s given me have made it so that I don’t care so much that I do.

It’s one of the reasons I dislike narcotics so much. I need to feel the pain.

“What do you mean?”

“Why did you jump the gun?”

I give her a bland look, but she lifts her eyebrows silently demanding information.

“I told you Neville got the tape from his cousin.”

“The wank,” she interrupts, making sure she’s got all the players straight. Her honesty makes me chuckle.

“Yes. The MI5 wanker. Nev and I didn’t tell anyone about it. We didn’t add it to the file. We didn’t tell Ron or our boss. We put the word out that we were looking for new players in town but didn’t tell anybody why.

“McLaggen and his CI brought us new players.”

“Okaaaaay,” she prompts, clearly not intending to let me off the hook.

I run my fingers through my beard, scratching at the skin underneath. This wasn’t any easier with my boss, either.

“Well. I fucked up, that’s what happened. I’ve officially lost my parking spot,” I joke. “We already suspected that the guy Narcotics was meeting was part of the crew that we’re looking for. Then, Crabbe—”

“The informant,” she confirms. I nod my head in agreement.

“Crabbe blurts out, ‘Oh by the way, I found the dude you were looking for. Only Herman is Hermione and—’ well that was about the time I stopped listening. I was out of the car and busting into the warehouse.”

“Oh,” she says, and sucks that bottom lip between her teeth. The way she’s looking at me, with a blush cresting over her cheeks, makes me think that she’s finally understanding.

“Next thing I know I’m flat on my back with three slugs in my vest, the person looking for you on that wiretap was dead, and MI5 are screaming at me for killing their informant.”

She climbs to her knees, moving to sit cross-legged on the bed.

“So, when half the district shows up at the hospital and sees my name...” Her voice fades into silence, as she comes to grips with the reality of the situation.

“McLaggen hadn’t heard the tape yet. He just listened and watched as the mention of your name on the undercover wire caused me to storm the castle. In my defence, Neville and Ron were right there with me. McLaggen has heard the tape now. Beyond that, he’s about fifty per cent in love with you, after watching you go toe to toe with the MI5. And me. He offered his CI up as an appetizer if it’ll catch these guys.”

Hermione releases that adorable snort, not bothering to hide her face like she’s done in the past.

“I imagine everybody’s heard it by now,” she says, and her shoulders slump in defeat.

“Everyone that matters on my end, yeah. As for the word on the street? Crabbe tried to sell the information the minute we let him go free last night. MI5 officially offered to bring in the UK Protected Person Service for you today. I’m to take you in tomorrow for processing, if you so choose.”

The vice squeezes my lungs, and it has nothing to do with my busted ribs.



Her facial expression drips with disdain, and she lifts her top lip in a scowl.

“No, thank you.” She gives me a bashful smile. “Besides, I was under the understanding that I’ve already got a personal protection detail.” Her sassy snarking is back, but I can’t find it in me to rise to the occasion.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe,” I tell her, never having meant anything more in my life. “I’d die a happy man, if I was dying to save your life. But the reality is, I can’t be with you twenty-four hours a day.”

“And isn’t that a shame,” she whispers, before her voice gains strength. “But how about we find a way out of this where neither of us is in the morgue.” Her eyes flare in determination.

My need for her doubles, crawling up the base of my spine. I dig my fingers into the back of the chair, and when that doesn’t help, I have to close my eyes.

Her hair is still wet, pulled back off her face. As it’s dried, tendrils fall across her forehead and over her throat. She’s not wearing any makeup. She rarely ever does. At least, not during the increasing amount of time we’ve been together these last few weeks.

She’s not trying to hide anything. She’s more real, then any woman I’ve ever met.

I inhale through my nose, trying to centre myself. It should work. It always works. I’m not a man that gets ruffled. Instead, I draw in a waft of her clean skin, and my mouth waters with the need to have my lips on her. When I’ve opened my eyes, she’s moved to sit on the edge of the bed.

I roughly clear my throat and attempt to change the subject.

“The one thing I still can’t figure out, no matter how many thugs we pull in and question, is what Pettigrew was doing in that neighbourhood.”

“Oh, yeah?” Hermione asks, and there’s something odd about her voice. She tugs at the hem of the shirt, pulling it out and over her knees.

Son of a bitch.

“Mia.”

“Hmmm?”

She’s looking at the floor.

I stand from the chair, flipping it around and sitting back down so there’s nothing in between us. I lean my elbows on my knees and tip her chin up with my finger so she’s looking me in the eye.

“Tell me,” I demand, all traces of our earlier congeniality gone.

“I can’t,” she whispers, and there’s a tremble in her voice.

“Now,” I growl, and the tendons in my neck pull and strain under the tension tightening my gut.

“The conversation was privileged, Harry. She didn’t commit a crime, she didn’t confess to knowing about one, or participating in one. At least, not one that I haven’t already confided in the police about. I can’t tell you.”

“She?”

The iron has returned to her voice, and she throws her shoulders back in defiance, looking me straight in the face.

“Besides,” she continues, “I *wanted* to tell you. Desperately. So, I made sure I couldn’t. I don’t know her name. I closed the medical record without writing it down. In case this ever happened.”

“Tell me what, Hermione?”

Her pause lasts for less than a heartbeat.

“I know what Pettigrew was doing there. He had a girlfriend. Or a girl he saw on the regular, at least. They met through her job and couldn’t risk making it public. That’s what she said. It’s just as possible that it was an excuse Pettigrew laid on her. Either way, she saw the shooting from her window. She came into the ER a few weeks ago with a burn on her arm and recognized me. She told me the whole story.”

My hands rise automatically to my face, and I run my fingers over my mouth, digging my fingertips into my cheeks.

She’s known. All this time.

I can’t even grasp the concept. I lean back in the chair, putting as much space between us as I can.

I can’t even. I can’t—

“You didn’t think this would be information that I needed to know?” I try to keep my voice even, but I’m shaking with the anger coursing through my body.

“It was privileged information, Harry.”

I rise to my feet, towering over her miniscule form.

“I need her name, Hermione. I need to speak to this woman. Today. Now.”

Hermione doesn’t even blink.

“What part of privileged information aren’t you grasping, huh?” She places her hands on the bed and leans back, to glower at me without straining her neck. “I don’t have her name. I don’t have her address. All I have is her medical record number, and that’ll do you diddly-

shit without a warrant, which you can't get. Because unless there's proof a crime has been or will be committed, all communication between a patient and a physician is protected under privacy laws."

"I can't believe you kept this from me."

I storm away from her in anger, shoving the chair to the ground.

Hermione shoots to her feet, pointing an accusing finger in my face.

"Don't you dare pull that bullshit with me. You've been keeping shite from me for weeks. All because you didn't have the balls to man up. I did it because it's my job, Harry. My career. I could lose my license. I've sacrificed everything to get where I am right now, and the hell if I'm going to lose it all for you!"

I feel like I've been shot without the vest this time, thinking about the danger she's been in. The information she *had*, that could have helped me catch the killer. I can't breathe through the fear suddenly coursing through my bloodstream.

"Fuck your job, Mia. You could have lost your life!"

"Whose fault would that have been? You should have told me a month ago that people were after me! I'm a doctor, Harry. I *am* my job, and that job is to save lives. What do you do? You killed someone yesterday, simply because he said my name. It was *that* important, that you *killed* a man because of it, and you don't think I had a right to know?"

"God Dammit Mia! You're just—"

My tongue gets stuck on the last words, my throat seizing up in anger and fear.

Anger at myself. Anger at the situation. Anger at her, for making me feel this way.

The terror of losing her, before I even realized how badly I need her, rips itself from my throat in a roar, and I bring my hands to my hair, violently shoving my fingers through it.

She takes my discomposure for outrage, and meets my hostility beat for beat. Her eyes flash a simmering brown and her cheeks flush in anger. She turns to face the wall then whips around to face me, throwing her hands out in accusation.

"I'm what Harry? What? Some stupid little girl who can't take care of herself? Someone who can't be trusted to make their own decisions. Please, oh master of the universe, tell me, just what am I, huh? What gives you the right to keep that sort of information from me?"

The pain in my ribs has vanished, to be replaced with a different type of burning coursing its way through my bloodstream. My heartbeat thunders in my ears, and I see it echoed in the pulsing of her throat.

Her beauty is candescent with her rage, and I finally realize I'm fighting a battle I lost the minute I met her.

I grab her by her arm to yank her to me, and she reacts like a cornered tiger, trying to remove my head with her other fist. I catch her swing mid arc, and haul her to me bodily, grasping her wrists and pinning them behind her back.

My lips are almost touching hers, when my control finally snaps.

“You’re mine, Hermione. Mine to protect. Mine to keep safe. You’ve been mine since the minute you stood in front of me dripping with someone else’s blood, determined not to show your fear and exhaustion. And by God, I’ll kill a hundred more men and tell a hundred more lies before I let someone harm a single hair on your head.”

I let go of her hands, and she plunges them into my hair, surging onto her tiptoes to close the distance between us. Her grip is rough, greedy, as she uses my hair to pull me to her. She bites at my lips with her teeth, and I open for her, moaning when her tongue meets mine.

She makes a wanton, needy sound from the back of her throat, and my knees almost buckle with how bad I want her.

I shove my hands up under her shirt, leaving trails of fire over her tanned skin.

She jerks her head away, leaving her fingers entwined in my hair, and I trail my mouth over her throat, sucking at the spot I’ve wanted to taste for a month.

“Harry,” Hermione pants, her chest heaving under my shirt, “we can’t do this. I don’t want to hurt you.”

As if she could ever hurt me.

“The only way you’ll hurt me is if you stop touching me. Fuck Hermione, I can’t breathe with how bad I need you.”

I grab her upper thighs and lift her effortlessly from the ground. She wraps her legs around my waist and holds on for the three feet it takes me to climb onto the bed, dropping her underneath me.

"Your chest," she whispers, then pushes to a sitting position, running her fingers over my rib cage. The pain combines with the electricity of her touch to send me into an overwhelming hunger. When Hermione brings her lips to the centre of the bruises coating my skin, dropping gentle kisses over my wounds, it's then that I know I love this woman. We could have never met, and still, I think I'd love her.

“Hermione.”

I dig my fingers into the nape of her neck, and I think God for how gorgeous her hair is as I run my fingers through her tangles.

What else do I get to discover today?

“Up, up, up,” I chant, reaching for the bottom of the shirt she's wearing. She lifts her hands above her head, allowing me to remove the offending material separating me from her. I drop

it on the floor, still resting on my knees on the bed.

“I don’t want to hurt you, Harry,” Hermione says again, trying to slow my motions. The tenderness in her touch, the way her hand cups my face, the other resting over my heart, makes me want to throw myself at her feet.

“Do I look like I’m in pain?”

Hermione looks at me, really looks, her eyes trailing down my bruised body to the hard-on barely contained by my sleep pants.

“No,” she laughs, then pulls her bottom lip between her teeth.

I groan at how sexy that is.

“Nothing hurts when I’m with you.”

I bring my lips to hers again, relishing the taste of her mouth, and lower her back onto the mattress.

Her touch is so gentle, a calming counterpoint to the frenzy I feel inside of me.

I lick and kiss a trail down her throat, over her shoulders, nipping at her collarbone, until I have a perfect pink nipple between my lips. I lavish her with my tongue, licking and sucking until she’s peaked in my mouth. By the time I’m done with the other one, she’s practically mewling underneath me.

“May I?” I ask her, bringing my hands down to her knickers. I’ve been dying to take them off her for weeks.

She nods her acquiescence.

Sliding off the bed, I pull the scrap of cotton down her legs. My cock gets inexplicably harder when the thatch of hair covering her mound comes into view.

I take a moment to admire her, exposed and glorious before me. I know she was naked just a few hours ago. But I wasn’t allowed to look then. Not really. Now she’s bare underneath me, and mine for the taking.

Her skin is beautiful, covered in constellations of freckles I can’t wait to memorize.

Pushing my pants down my hips, I let the fabric pool at my feet, before lifting a knee onto the mattress.

“Condom?” I ask, my hand on my drawer.

She shakes her head no, and her knees drop open to expose her to me.

I gasp in a sharp inhale, when she rubs her fingers over her clit.

“I have an IUD. I spent half the morning reviewing your medical chart. I know your blood work by heart by now. Not needed, unless you want it.”

“Thank fuck,” I breathe.

I never want anything between us again.

Unable to resist a taste, I spread her legs by her knees, burying my face in her centre. My tongue delves in and out of her entrance, and I trace along her curves. Hermione arches underneath me, her hands finding my head and her nails scraping my scalp. I can't decide what's more delicious. The taste of her cunt or the way my name sounds as it's ripped from her lips.

I could stay down here forever, but Hermione has other ideas, and starts yanking on my hair.

“I need you,” she pleads, and far be it for me to ever deny her anything she asks of me.

When I centre myself on top of her, resting my weight on a forearm, I can't help but pick at her from the last time I was on top of her.

“I told you it was a man thing.”

She throws her head back and laughs, and I line myself up with her entrance.

I mean to go slow.

I do.

To savour the woman who's been haunting my dreams. But she lifts her legs to wrap around my thighs, and I sink myself inside her. The impact makes us both cry out.

I lower my mouth to hers, swallowing her cries until she cups my face in her hands, lifting my lips away.

“Are you okay?” she pants, and I can't help but laugh. I pull back until we're almost separated, then bury myself again, relishing the way her eyes close at the impact.

“Shouldn't I be asking you that?”

Her hands trail up my sides, and I bring my palm to her face, cupping her chin so I can lick my way across her throat.

“Do you always have to bicker with me?” she asks haltingly, her lip between her teeth. I suck it between mine instead, pulling it taught before letting it go. “Is this my life now? Constantly fighting with you?”

That thought makes me happier than it should, and I dive in for another kiss.

“You fucking love it and you know,” I pant in her ear. “Otherwise, you wouldn't rise to the bait so easily. But I can think of better uses for your mouth.”

She draws my face back to hers, gasping against my lips. I can taste the sweat across her upper lip, smell the sex between us. I know, when we're through, that my sheets will smell like us, and the thought spurs me on faster.

With every thrust of my hips, I aim to get deeper inside her. The need to imprint myself on her, the way that she's already done to me, is almost visceral. I need to be as close to her as I can be. Our banter has fallen away to be replaced with gasps and moans. My ribs are on fire, but the fire only fans the flame of my desire for her. It's a vicious circle, for every inch I gain I need a mile more.

Will I ever be content again, now that I know what her essence feels like clenched around me? What her body feels like demanding I give her everything, and my soul is straining to comply.

Her skin is slick under my touch, and I force myself to slow down, to pull her pleasure out for as long as I can make it last.

"Harry," she pleads, and despite the pain, my chest swells in pride at the desperate tone in her voice.

"I've got you, baby," I whisper against her lips, and I feel her body relax underneath me before coiling and tightening once again.

I drag my hand down her side, groping her breast, her arse, before grabbing her knee and bringing it higher around my hip. I cup her arse in my palm, holding her close to my heart, and help her grind her clit against me.

The sounds of our sex fill the air. The way she whimpers with every thrust. The echo of my heart beating every time she says my name. The harmony of our bodies, as a violent impact, becomes the act of love.

Hermione seems to have at last forgotten about my ribs, because she's clawing at my back, holding me to her. She chants my name, every time I bottom out inside her. I'm happy to be her anchor, as she finds her release.

She cries out underneath me, as her muscles fire in rapid spasms. The feel of her coming undone is intoxicating, and I lift my body as far as she'll allow, so I can watch her back arch and her nipples pebble while her orgasm crashes through her.

She doesn't let me watch for long. Mia kisses me with a passion that steals my breath away, and it's enough to trigger my release. I stiffen in her arms, and this time it's her turn to hold me. I feel like I'm flying to the moon and crash landing to the ground simultaneously.

"Need you," I hear her whisper against my lips.

Oh, baby. I need you too. More than I think she'll understand.

~\*\*~

The high from being in Mia's arms leaves me slowly. Unfortunately, when the endorphins leave, the pain block goes with it.

With the powers of the physician, Mia seems to sense my growing discomfort.

"What's wrong?" she asks, pushing to a sitting position.

I have no intention of admitting it out loud, but whatever power she has over me seems to have only increased by the time spent in my bed.

I'm lying on my back, my body limp and sated next to her. It was a mistake to crash like this. It's going to be a bitch to get back up again.

My hand rises to my ribs, and I rub my palm against them gingerly.

"My chest hurts," I admit, ashamed of the pouting quality my voice takes on.

I wasn't trying to be funny, but apparently, Hermione thinks that's hilarious. She tips over on her side and laughs until tears are streaming down her face.



# **The Calm Before The Storm**

## Chapter Summary

“For someone so tiny, you sure do eat a lot of food.”

I give Harry a look that's made lesser men cry and shove the last garlic knot into my mouth. We're sitting at his dining room table, sharing a pizza and an order of knots. He's lounging in the chair backward again, and watching the casual way he straddles the seat is short-circuiting my brain in a way I've never experienced before.

## Chapter Notes

I keep lowering the chapter count, because I'm posting 2-3 chapters in one batch since they're so small lol.

Thanks Happily!

## **Hermione**

“For someone so tiny, you sure do eat a lot of food.”

I give Harry a look that's made lesser men cry and shove the last garlic knot into my mouth. We're sitting at his dining room table, sharing a pizza and an order of knots. He's lounging in the chair backward again, and watching the casual way he straddles the seat is short-circuiting my brain in a way I've never experienced before.

“I have a decent metabolism, thank you very much. Add in the fact that I work rotating twelve hour shifts and spend a few hours a week running laps around the park, and I think I've earned the right to stuff my face on occasion.”

“Hmm,” is all he replies, that deep low rumble he has that encompasses nothing and everything all at once.

“I should probably go home,” I say, and a look akin to panic skates over Harry's features.

“Absolutely not. You should stay here. Forever. Or at least until we find these guys. Your flat has zero security. Give me a few days. A week, tops. Then I'll let you back into your place.”

I dig my fingers into my eyes, trying to rein in my irritation.

“A week, Harry? Really? Don’t you think that’s a little extreme. I need clothes. I need to go to work. I need a new pair of underwear, since mine magically disappeared after you took them off me.”

His eyes sparkle at that, and he licks his lips in a way that sends heat pooling at the base of my spine. I’m painfully aware the only clothing I have on is the shirt he gave me last night.

“I heartily disagree with that statement. I don’t think you need any clothes. At all. Ever again. Nothing I have planned over the next couple of days requires you to be dressed. As far as I’m concerned, you’re already wearing too much.”

I feel the blood rush to my cheeks and tilt my head so he can’t get a good look at what the thought of being naked with him does to me. If that was Harry not at his best, I’m not sure I’ll survive the whole experience.

“Yeah, okay. Says the man who spent five minutes stuck on his back like a turtle because it hurt to sit up and you wouldn’t ask for help. All you should have planned for the next several days is recovering, mister.”

He laughs low in his belly, and the heat pooling around my spine turns into lava.

“Does Angelina have a key to your place?” he asks, swallowing back a chug of his coke.

“Sure.”

“Call in sick tomorrow. My captain already talked to the hospital. They know what’s going on. Then have Angelina bring you over enough stuff to last a few days. If she doesn’t have to work, she can even bring Neville with her. We can watch a movie. Or something.”

His lack of enthusiasm for that idea is breathtaking. I’m thrown back in time to Harry from a month ago, trying to avoid hitting on me by talking about his couch. Now he’s basically trying to force me to move in. I attempt to hide my surprise at how easily he’s fallen into this little domestic scenario we’ve got going on here. Apparently, I fail.

“What?” he asks, scrubbing his fingers through his beard. A sure tell if there ever was one.

I bring one of my feet to rest on the chair and wrap my arms around my knee. My heart is thundering in my chest, but I’ve never been good at keeping my thoughts to myself. Especially when it comes to Harry.

“What’s going on here, Harry? What are we doing? I’m not the type of girl who throws herself at a guy. I don’t skip shifts at work for a booty call. I don’t do casual sex. Usually, anyway.”

I have to admit, my MO is off a little after the last few days.

“I appreciate everything you’re doing for me. Everything you’ve done.” I try to make sure he can read the sincerity in my voice. “But I have goals, and ambitions, and none of those line

up with getting my heart broken by you.”

The way he stares at me is full of challenge, and something that I can’t place. I’ve seen it in his eyes before. When he was screaming at me that I belong to him.

“Who says I’ll break your heart?” he asks, so earnestly goosebumps break out over my skin. My nipples pebble under his gaze, and my next breath comes in as a shudder.

I swallow back my emotions, struggling to keep my voice even.

“You did.”

“Hmmm,” he intones, rising from his seat. He towers over top of me, caging me in by placing a hand on the back of my chair and a hand on the table. “That was before,” he says, his mouth so close, his breath moves the tiny hairs across my forehead.

“Before what?” I whisper, unable to give my voice the support that it needs.

“Before you.”

He tips my chin up with a finger, angling my face how he wants me. You wouldn’t think a man as big as Harry would be so soft. You’d be wrong.

He places the gentlest of kisses against the corner of my mouth, his lips blazing a trail up my jawline. A whine, deep and broken from the back of my throat, escapes when he won’t lean down and kiss me properly, and I wrap my arms around his neck, trying to strengthen our contact.

“So needy,” he teases, before lifting me from the chair as if I weighed no more than air. I cling to him like a monkey, arms and legs entwined around his back.

He walks us to the living room easily, then collapses hard onto the couch when the back of his legs make contact with it.

“Fuck, Mia,” he hisses against my lips, and his hands are everywhere. Roaming, touching, exploring. I lift my arms above my head, and the shirt is discarded in a heap on the floor.

I’m already straddling his lap, and I grind myself down on his length. I’m so wet he slides against me easily. Even through the fabric of his pants, sparks shoot up my spine.

“The first time I saw you,” Harry whispers against my skin, “I knew there was something different about you. I felt it, like a physical blow. I should have run as fast as I could in the opposite direction.”

Harry buries his hand in my hair and grips, angling my neck in a way that should be painful. He latches onto a patch of skin underneath my ear, and it’s like there’s a direct line from his lips to my clit. Every pull against my skin I feel in a gush of fluids between my legs.

“It’s not too late,” I pant, in between searing kisses.

“Yes. It is,” he says, lips nipping at my throat. “You’re mine,” he growls in a voice so low it rumbles through my chest, and goosebumps break out over my body.

I lift my hips from his lap, reaching for the waistband of his sweats. Knowing what I need, he lifts me with one arm around my waist and uses the other to shove his pants past his hips. I don’t wait for anything else. As soon as his clothing is gone, I sink onto his cock.

I grit my teeth at the sensation, my fingers digging into the meat of his shoulders. I’m sure he’ll have bruises, where my fingertips imprint into his flesh. But the stretch this way is immeasurable. Harry is rearranging everything inside me, inside my body, inside my heart.

By the time I’m fully seated, Harry is chanting the word *mine* like a prayer. Like it’s a request and a declaration all rolled into one.

Mine. Mine. Mine.

“Yours,” I say, voice so breathy it’s nothing more than a gust of air. But he hears me all the same, and the noise that escapes his throat sounds like he’s breaking.

I rise up slowly and the burn of pleasure is almost too much to bear. My body can’t decipher if it’s being eviscerated or if this is the most fantastic feeling we’ve ever felt. My mind is spooling to ribbons as the sensations run through me and over me and I drop back onto his lap. I can’t decide whether to cry or sing the gospel. My body is a shaking, trembling mess as my nervous system short circuits from the over stimulation.

Harry’s hands never stop moving. His fingers trail up and down my sides, rub soothing lines into the arch of my back. Cup my breasts in his palms, his thumbs flicking over my nipples.

His mouth is everywhere. My neck, my shoulders, my chest.

I finally find my rhythm, and his lips eat the little whimpers and moans that I can’t even contemplate keeping contained.

His voice is deep and husky, while he whispers gibberish against my skin.

“Love the way I feel inside you,” and, “never been an addict, but I’m addicted to your taste,” and, “you broke me and fixed me all at the same time.”

None of it makes any sense, but his voice is so thick, and broken, and the sound alone is enough to send me over the edge.

I feel almost otherworldly when my body clenches tight around him. The sound I make is unhuman, and it tapers off into a whimper, as he pours himself inside me.

I open my eyes in time to watch Harry shatter, my name on the tip of his lips that morphs into a moan. The aftershocks of his release are evident, and he’s trembling under my fingertips. His chest is quaking as he hauls in gasping breaths of air. I trail little kisses over his shoulders, then dig my teeth sharp and quick into the meat of his shoulder. I feel the heat of his hiss deep in my belly.

I stay that way, seated on top of him, blissed out and sated, even after he softens inside me. Even after I feel the combined efforts of our love making, trickling its way down my thighs.

We stay that way, me pressed against his chest, him babbling nothing into my ear, until the world twists on its axis one more time, and we're back to being two separate people.

~\*\*~

"Come here," Harry says, settling his pants back around his hips and handing me the shirt.

I've been laying on my back on the couch, my legs splayed across his lap. I don't know how long we've sat like this, both of us trying to catch our breath. He left me for a few minutes, but came back with a wet washcloth, and cleaned his mess from between my legs.

It was enough to make me ready for round three.

Harry reaches for my hands, and I let him pull me to my feet. He doesn't let go of my hand when I'm upright, however. Instead, he twists our fingers together and pulls me behind him and through his kitchen.

My legs still feel like jelly, and I wonder if it will always be like this, after I give myself to Harry?

"Did you go through all my shite earlier?" he asks, no accusation in his voice.

"Yes," I reply honestly. "There wasn't anything else to do. Turnabout is fair play and all that. You shouldn't have locked me in the house."

Harry bobs his head slowly, agreeing with my logic. He drags me into his workout room, flipping on the light as we go. It's on the smaller side but has everything he'd need to keep his body looking the way it does. Weight bar, treadmill, punching bag. There's a wardrobe in the closet that I couldn't get into because of the biometric lock on the front.

"Nice set up, by the way."

"Thanks," he says, not bothering to look at me.

The lock beeps after he places his hand against the screen, and my chin hits my chest when he pulls open the door to show me his own personal armory.

"Holy shite Harry. You have enough firepower in there to invade a small country."

He chuckles at that, but it's a dry humourless sound.

"I have invaded small countries. I'd tell you about it, but then I'd have to kill you." He looks at me over his shoulder, and even though he's smirking, I get the feeling he's probably telling me the truth.

"All you're missing are explosives," I comment, eyes roving over the guns and knives and bullets all stacked in neat precision.

“The C4 is in the basement,” he deadpans, and I honestly can’t tell if he’s joking.

He pulls open a drawer that’s full of handguns and grabs the smallest in the bunch.

Harry checks the chamber, in that eerily efficient manner I’ve seen him use with his service pistol countless times by now, then drops the mag before clicking it back together. Then he faces me and starts to explain the moving parts.

The gun looks tiny in his massive hands.

“This is a Ruger EC9. It’s a 9mm pistol. It has a trigger safety,” he says, holding the gun up in front of me. The trigger has a piece in the middle, which sticks out further than the rest. “It’s an added layer of protection, to prevent the weapon from firing if dropped or if pressure hits the trigger that isn’t a finger pulling it back.”

I nod my head to show I’m following along.

“This right here? This is the external manual safety.” He points to another upraised piece of metal, towards the back and on the side of the weapon. “It will not fire while this is in place. Use your thumb to slide it down before you shoot, then use your thumb to put it back when you’re done.”

He points to a tiny upraised button on the side.

“This is the release for the magazine. This gun is small, compact. Perfect for dainty hands like yours. It’ll only hold seven rounds. We can get you an extender if you want that will take it up to ten, but I don’t think that’s necessary at this point. The bottom has a grip extender, so that your whole hand will feel secure around it. Okay?”

He says that so matter of fact, like I have any say whatsoever over what’s happening right now. He looks at me so earnestly. I feel like he’s preparing me for battle.

Maybe in his mind, he is.

He hands the weapon to me butt first, lifting his eyebrows in my direction. It’s one of the proudest moments in my life, that my hands don’t shake when I take it from him. I know what he’s waiting for, so I repeat his steps from a moment before, checking the chamber and checking the magazine to see how many bullets remain. It’s a full mag, not that I’d expect anything less.

I look at the gun in my hand. The bullets that cause so much damage as they rip through human flesh, and the machine that gives them the power to do so. Then I remember what Harry told me about pulling his weapon to save people. I shove the magazine home in the gun, then raise the weapon to my chest.

He takes me by the hips and pivots me to where a pad of targets hangs up against the wall. Harry centres me in front of it, one foot slightly back, then raises my arms into a shooting position.

“Women are naturally better shooters than men. Don’t ask me why; I couldn’t tell you. Maybe because you don’t let your ego get in the way. You? You’ll be a fantastic shot. Your hand eye coordination is top form, and everything you do, you do with precision and skill.”

His hands cover mine on the weapon, and he pops the mag from the gun, letting it fall into his open palm.

“There’s more to it than aim and shoot, of course, but in the end, that’s what it boils down to. Aim, and pull the trigger. I want you to do it until it’s as natural as breathing.”

He steps away from me, arms over his chest, giving me space to breathe.

I don’t take lives, I save lives. I lower the safety level. I don’t take lives, I save lives. My finger curls around the trigger, feeling the slight give under my finger as the trigger safety falls into place. I don’t take lives, I save lives.

Click.

The gun fires empty, and I flinch at the sound.

Click.

Flinch.

Repeat.

Everything around me narrows, until all I see is the gun in my hands and the target on the wall.

Until suddenly, I’m not flinching anymore.

Harry steps into my view, his hand covering the barrel of my weapon. He has a pleased, almost proud expression on his face, and he lowers the weapon until it’s resting at my side.

He hands me a slim holster, the kind you stick into the waistband of your pants. I shove the gun into the thick fabric, and try to pass it back to Harry, but he puts his palms up to refuse, pushing it back in my direction.

“Keep it. I want it on you at all times if you’re outside of this house. I pray you never have to use it. But you need it, all the same.”

“Harry,” I coax, uneasy at the reminder that there are in fact people that want to hurt me walking the streets. Not to mention, I took an oath to do no harm. I wonder what Hippocrates would have to say about a gun-toting doctor?

“No, Mia. If I can’t be at your side twenty-four seven, I need to know you’re at least protected. A mean roundhouse won’t do anything against a gunman. Keep it with you. Don’t hesitate, if the time comes.”

I do hesitate though, the thought of carrying a weapon is so against everything I believe as a physician. I don't take lives, I save lives. Would I be able to take a life, if it meant saving my own?

Harry cups my face in his hands, bringing his lips down to gently glide across mine. My eyes close against the sensation, and I lift up on my tiptoes to get just that much closer to him. "Please," he whispers against my lips, and I taste the desperation on his tongue. His unyielding need to keep me safe at all costs.

"Okay," I agree.

The gun digging into my palm is a strange painful counterpoint to the gentleness of Harry taking me apart with his mouth.



# More Surprises

## Chapter Summary

I'm sitting in front of the A&E room entrance, waiting for Hermione to finish her shift. I tried to talk her into ringing in sick. We could have even played doctor if she wanted. But Hermione is a business before pleasure sort of girl.

You've got to admire her dedication.

My eyes pass over two guys standing outside the hospital, looking back and forth around the building.

My bullshite meter begins blaring in my mind, before I've fully registered their presence.

One of these things is not like the others. One of these things does not belong.

## Chapter Notes

Chapter 2 of the day! If you haven't read the first chapter, go back and read it!

## Harry

I'm sitting in front of the A&E room entrance, waiting for Hermione to finish her shift. I tried to talk her into ringing in sick. We could have even played doctor if she wanted. But Hermione is a business before pleasure sort of girl.

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My eyes pass over two guys standing outside the hospital, looking back and forth around the building.

My bullshite meter begins blaring in my mind, before I've fully registered their presence.

One of these things is not like the others. One of these things does not belong.

Or two of these things, as the case may be.

For one, it's after ten o'clock at night. Unless someone you know is dying, there's no reason for you to be loitering outside of hospital that late.

They're chain smoking. There are no smoking signs plastered all over this campus. Including right in front of their heads.

They're casing the place.

Like professionals.

Like they came here for a purpose.

I pull out my mobile and hit my speed dial without looking. Ron picks up on the second ring. I know I woke him up, but his voice never wavers.

"Yup," he answers, short and to the point.

"Hospital. A&E entrance. Something's up. Call Nev."

I don't have to hang up on him. He ends the call all on his own. I can already hear him up and moving before the line goes dead.

I open my texts and pull up the string from Mia.

***Me: Wait 2 minutes. Use the ambulance bay. Walk towards the employee car park. Head on a swivel. I'll be right behind.***

I wait for what feels like ages until a thumbs up appears on my screen. This is what I love about her. Any other woman would have hit me with a slew of questions and demands.

Not Hermione. That woman has her priorities straight.

Emergency first. Questions later.

I can't let them see me. To arrest them, I need them to get close to her.

I open my glove box and see her holstered weapon, where she shoved it when I dropped her off at work. I'm going to need to explain to her that taking it everywhere, means bringing it into the hospital too.

Too late now. At least I'm here.

I start the car, easing it away from the sidewalk, and keep the men in my rearview mirror as I drive to the car park exit. A third guy shows up nodding, from inside of the hospital.

Fuck.

Bile rises in the back of my throat, and I flex my hands on the steering wheel as a weight falls on my chest.

I pull out of the hospital, only to drive the twenty feet to the next entrance and pull back in, parking between the ambulance bay and where the three thugs stood.

Only they're not there any longer. There's a perky little curly ponytail bouncing along the sidewalk that leads to the back lot, and the three men are hot on her trail.

I don't take the time to shut my car door. I hit the pavement at a run, my feet silent on the asphalt as I close the distance between us.

The first guy ups his speed and reaches out a hand for her. I yell out a warning, throwing my arm out in a futile attempt to make me reach her quicker, but I'm far too late. I'm still miles away. The two in the rear turn towards my voice, halting in their progress. But the one already on top of her gets his fingers on Hermione's shoulder.

Then promptly gets an elbow to his face, as she pivots on her heel and angles her arm up and out. I see a knife flash in the lamplight as she lowers both hands to wrap around his wrist. I can't hear the impact, but I can see the blood splatter from here as she makes contact with his face again.

Then I have to take my eyes off her, to meet the men running in my direction.

This is going to hurt.

I put my hand on my gun, then release it without unlatching the clasp. I can't kill them. I need someone to talk to me.

The lead holds his weapon in front of him, and immediately I know he's not a professional. This is a thug picked up off the street, not prepared for the task in front of him.

Or maybe he wasn't expecting to meet me.

His hands are shaking, and he misses me by a mile, even though I'm less than five feet in front of him by now. We're on an inclined ramp, and he shoots right over my shoulder.

Thank God for small mercies.

I grab his wrist and twist his arm, stopping his forward momentum and pushing him backwards. He fires again, and his body jerks then goes limp in my hands.

The fucking moron shot himself.

I let him drop on the spot, and duck as moron number two takes a swing at me. This one knows what he's doing. His form is tight and in control.

I catch a glimpse of Hermione, still fighting over the knife. She gets another whack in, but then he backhands her across the cheek. Apparently, he knows what he's doing as well.

The vision of her head snapping around like that sets my blood on fire, and I duck to avoid the next blow while trying to make my way over to her.

My assailant grabs me from behind, and I twist into the motion, ramming my elbow into his face. He lashes out with his fist, landing a blow into my shoulder that causes me to cry out in pain. He uses the opportunity to pull his weapon and bring it to aim, but I catch him around the wrist. I use my other hand to break his hold on the weapon, jab the heel of my palm into the side of his elbow, repeat the process into his face, then flip him over my back.

He makes a satisfying crunching noise when he hits the pavement.

He doesn't get up again.

I pivot to rescue Hermione.

Whooooo doesn't need rescuing.

The heel of her shoe goes into his gut, and he crashes against the wall, his arms up in front to protect his face.

The knife has skittered away, probably kicked by a roaming foot.

"You, stupid bitch," he growls, shoving from the wall, but she roundhouse kicks him across the jaw before she follows it up with another heel to the belly.

He slumps against the wall, hands limp at his side, and Hermione takes a step back, her head whipping around looking for more danger.

I jump for him, ready to smash his head into the pavement, but Hermione steps in between us, halting me with a hand on my chest while the other lifts to guard her assailant.

"No, Harry," she snaps, and the harshness in her voice stops me in my tracks. "I know it's your instinct to protect me. It's your job to keep us safe. But it's *my* job to protect people too. He's not getting back up. He's not a threat to us any longer. I can't let you hurt him, simply because he hurt me."

I watch, my vision blurring in anger, as the man who attacked her slumps against the wall, slowly falling in on himself as he crumbles to the ground. I can hear his panting, the pain laced with every breath. She didn't kill him, more's the pity, but it's obvious he's going to hurt tomorrow.

Good.

I look at Hermione, taking in her messy hair and her dishevelled sweater. She's wearing yet another pair of yoga pants, and her tennis shoes are bright green today.

She thinks the reason we blend and clash is because deep down we're the same. But seeing her standing here, protecting the man that tried to kill her?

She's wrong.

She's so much better than me.

My eyes sweep her from head to toe taking in the way her chest still heaves in exertion. Her eyes flash a brilliant blue, but her cheeks are pale and in sharp relief. All of her blood has fled the surface, driving deep to protect her vital organs.

My hands roam up her arms and over her face, reminding myself that she's safe and whole and alive in front of me. I dig my fingers into her hair, twisting her neck side to side, looking for cuts or blood; anything to show she's been hurt. Did he hurt her? If she's got so much as a paper cut, I'll fucking kill him with my bare hands.

My neck snaps back around to the git lying at her feet. He's curled in on himself, moaning with his arms around his middle.

Mia seems to sense the struggle going on in my head, and lifts her palm to my cheek, tilting my face so he's no longer in my vision.

"I'm fine," she assures me, though the breathiness of her voice gives truth to the lie she's comforting me with. "Nothing an ice pack and a bottle of wine won't cure. He didn't get that many hits in."

Involuntarily, I lean into her touch. She rubs her thumb across my cheekbone, the callused skin going from beard to flesh to beard again in rhythmic motions. My eyes drift closed, and my chest releases its grip on a fear I've never felt before.

Until I notice the blood silently slipping down her arm, to pool at the dip in her elbow. It spreads before my eyes, the discolouration of her sleeve turning from grey to pink to red to black as the blood soaks into her sweater.

She hisses when I pull her elbow straight, shoving the sliced fabric further up her arm to examine the wound at her wrist. It's not deep, and I don't think it'll need stitches. But it's six inches at least, and I watch as blood trickles out of the slash to leave a puddle on the concrete between us.

It gives a particular ooze, and I rethink the part about it not needing to be sewn closed.

"Son of a bitch," I growl and kick out at the monster on the ground. He'd been trying to get to his hands and knees, to what extent I have no idea. He makes an *omping* noise as my foot smashes his leg, and tips over to the side.

I get very little satisfaction as he slumps back onto the pavement.

"You need stitches."

She gives me a hard look, pulling her arm out of my grasp.

"When did you finish medical school? Tell you what. You handle the bad guys, and I'll handle the doctoring."

Says the woman with a semi-unconscious man whimpering at her feet.

“First thing tomorrow,” I tell her, still running my hands over every inch of skin I can see, checking for what else I may have missed, “we hit the practice mat. You may be able to kick someone in the face, but you obviously need practice in disarming an attacker. He held that knife in his hand for far too long.”

She scoffs at me and shakes her head, her eyes flaring with something akin to tenderness.

“Okay, Detective Potter. Feel free to *mansplain* everything I did wrong.”

I know she’s mocking me, but I’m dead serious.

I hear the sirens in the distance, and the sounds of feet pounding against the pavement, as Neville and Ron finally make it onto the scene.

Their eyes take in the spectacle in front of them, starting at the two unconscious men I left at the bottom of the ramp. Their gazes’ flick over Hermione and me, locked in an embrace in the middle of the sidewalk, exposed for everyone to see. Lastly to the whimpering man now propped against the side of the building. His eyes are closed, but he’s obviously awake. He’s going to have to stay that way. I’m nowhere near done with him tonight.

Ron meets my eye, and at his questioning gaze, I tighten my hold in Hermione’s hair, leaning forward to drop a kiss on her forehead. It’s the only confirmation Ron needs.

“Deal with this. Mia needs treatment.”

Ron squats in front of the first assailant I downed, while Neville makes his way to the other. “I think he’s dead,” Ron tells me, then crosses himself and says a prayer for the departed man’s soul.

I let out a sigh of frustration.

“This is becoming a habit, Prongs,” Ron says, without any accusation in his voice.

“Tell me something I don’t know. It wasn’t my fault this time. He actually shot himself.”

Ron snorts through his nose.

Neville checks the other guy’s pulse, then lifts up both of his eyelids.

“He’ll live.”

He gives him a nudge with his shoe, and the guy opens his eyes before letting them close again.

He handcuffs the man to the lowest rung in the railing, then gives him another once over. When he’s confident there’s no permanent damage, Neville makes his way to Hermione. He surveys her from head to toe, a more clinical version of the sweep I did a few minutes ago.

“Okay?” he confirms, putting his hand under her forearm to examine the wound, before wrapping his arm around her shoulders.

“Okay,” she affirms, her eyes closing at the gentle touch of her friend. “I could use a Tylenol, but otherwise I’m fine.”

“Call it in, mates,” I tell them. “If it hasn’t already been reported.”

Ron gets on the mobile with Kingsley. Neville pulls his radio from his pocket, calling in extra stretchers. Both suspects will need to be treated in the hospital, and I don’t want them transported together.

We only have a minute, before half of Hogsmeade PD is swarming over this area.

“Come on. We’re going into the hospital, and then we’re going to MI5.” I gesture to Hermione to come with me, placing my palm in the small of her back, but she doesn’t budge.

“Thanks,” she replies, with a definite lack of sincerity in her voice, “but I think I’ll pass. My arm is fine, or at least it will be once it’s wrapped with gauze and a plaster. Look, the bleeding has already slowed. Take my statement here if it’s really necessary, but then I’m going home. I wasn’t lying about wanting that bottle of wine. Plus, I’m back on shift in eight hours.”

I share a look with my team, reading their thoughts as loud as my own.

“Not happening, Hermione. They know who you are now. They know what you do. You’re not going home. You’re not going to work. You’re going into the Protected Persons Service.”

We’re not going to The Lair because right now, I can’t trust anyone but the two men at my side.

Her face whips around to look at me as she takes a step out of my reach.

“I can take care of myself,” she snarls. “I think the man at my feet, crying for his mum, is proof enough of that. I know they’re coming *now*,” and there’s an accusation in her voice as her eyes cut me like daggers, “they won’t sneak up on me again.”

“Told her, huh?” Neville asks, not bothering to pick up on the anger radiating from my girl. I barely spare him a glance.

“Yup.”

“She looks a little narked, boss,” Neville remarks as if Mia isn’t even there. I tighten my fists at my sides, and Ron hides his smirk in his shoulders.

The gits are enjoying this.

I turn my attention back to Mia.

Her anger makes her beautiful. It causes her pulse to pick up speed, her blood to pump faster through her veins. The wound on her arm had almost stopped weeping, but pulses to life again with every thrum of her heart. Her hair seems to be crackling around her head.

But apparently, it also makes her dangerous. And stupid. Because there's no fucking way I'm letting her out of my sight. If we go back to her flat, this isn't the last man I'll kill tonight.

She tries to move past me right as Ron checks on the man she downed, and we all end standing next to him.

"Get her away from me," her attacker whimpers, when she turns her glare in his direction.

Ron freezes in the process of pulling the man's arms behind his back, glancing between Mia and the would-be assassin with incredulity on his face.

"*You* , did *that* ?" Nev asks, not even trying to hide his surprise.

"Hermione has a black belt in Judo and Krav Maga," I tell them, staring Mia in the eye. There's a slight tremble coursing through her limbs, but I can't tell if it's from shock and pain, or because it's chilly outside and her warm blood is cooling against her skin.

Or maybe it's simply rage.

Ron whistles through his teeth, resuming his task of handcuffing our remaining assailant.

"That's hot," Neville observes, and the tension shatters around us as laughter is ripped from Hermione.

"God, Neville, you're like a twelve-year-old," she accuses through her smile.

He doesn't even have the grace to look embarrassed. Just shrugs his shoulders and wiggles his eyebrows in her direction.

I grab her by her uninjured arm, pulling her away to talk to her quietly.

"You can't go home," I tell her cupping her face in my hand. "Certainly, you realize that now."

Her bottom lip trembles, but it's the only negative sign of emotion she lets show.

"I'm assuming your house is out too?"

I nod my head in agreement, and she closes her eyes in frustration.

"If they have any intelligence on us at all, that'll be the first place they look, after checking for you here. They, *whoever* they are, obviously have some connections. All it will take is one viewing of the cameras out here to know all they need to know about you and me. You need to call your parents too. Get them out of town."

Her sigh of frustration is palpable, and I wish I could make it all go away.

"If you let me though, I know of a place that could keep you safe. Where no one would think to look."



“Not the Protected Persons?” she asks, and I hear the desperation in her voice.

“Not even close,” I confirm.

“Fine.”

I hear the sirens coming up the block.

“Grab your bag. Let’s go. I don’t want to risk them taking you from me.”

“I’d like to see them try,” she growls, and I feel sorry for the next person who tries to get in Hermione’s way.

## Hermione

I was expecting Harry to head out of town. Instead, he’s driving deeper into it. I’ve already called my parents, and they promised to head to the airport. It took some convincing, to be sure. I didn’t exactly want to tell them there’s a price on my head, or whatever it is that’s going on.

But it was hard to convince them to leave, without admitting how much danger I was in.

In the end, I had to tell them that I was with Harry, *the Alpha Man*, and that they didn’t need to worry about me. It took another several minutes to end the barrage of questions about my love life to get them on their way out the door.

Angelina already sent me a text, telling me she’d talked to Neville. I set a reminder on my mobile to call into work tomorrow. I wonder if on the run from a hitman is covered under FMLA?

Thank goodness I don’t have a cat. I couldn’t bring myself to get another when my poor Crookshanks died last year.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere safe,” is all Harry says. He rubs his hand up and down my thigh before letting it rest on the inside of my knee. I can’t decide who he’s trying to comfort. Me? Or him?

A month ago, I couldn’t stand the man sitting beside me. Now simply inhaling his scent is making me feel better. My head falls back against the headrest. I take a moment, in the peacefulness of the vehicle, to wonder how my life got this out of control before digging into my bag again.

It should freak me out how quickly we've gone down this rabbit hole. Me. Harry. *Us*. It doesn't. Instead, it feels natural to have Harry at my side. For a man who swore he'd never submit himself to love, he certainly surrendered quick enough.

Love?

Is that what this is?

I trust him with my life. Am I trusting him with my heart and soul as well?

This is not the time for life-altering conversations with yourself. I give my head a shake and go back to what I was doing.

Harry gives me a quick look before turning his attention back to the road. My book bag is in my lap, and I'm trying to search through it one-handed to find supplies for my arm. I think I'm going to need to start carrying more gear with me. I already went to the medical supply store after the shooting, and added a CPR mask, suture kits, scalpel, tourniquets, and anything else I could think of that might be needed in an emergency.

But now I'm thinking that maybe I should start carrying a duffel bag with me, filled to the brim with gauze and seals and nasal cannulas and anything else I could reasonably get away with. Patching people up outside of A&E seems to be becoming a habit of mine.

"Do you need to do that now, or can you wait until we get there? It needs stitches, you know."

I do know, thank you very much. Now that the adrenalin has faded, I feel every millimetre of the six-inch slice along my arm. He doesn't need to know that though.

"I'm aware, Dr. Potter. Is there anything else you feel the need to mansplain?"

He doesn't rise to the bait.

"I'll do them for you when we get there."

I pull my arm into my chest, protecting it from his boorish attempts at field medicine.

"The hell you will. Frankly, I'm insulted that you don't think I can do it myself. It only needs a few stitches. It's shallow, except for in the middle. I don't need both hands to suture. I can suffice quite well one-handed. And yes, it will wait until we're somewhere safe. But it's started bleeding again, and I want to get it covered."

I pull out the roll of bandage, trying to use my mouth to finagle it open, as it kind of hurts to use my other hand at the moment.

Without saying a word, Harry lifts his knee to the steering wheel, pulls the packaging out of my grip, rips the seal, then hands it back to me.

"It's okay to ask for help," he says quietly.

“Pot calling the kettle black much?”

He chuckles under his breath but doesn't say anything else.

By the time I have my arm wrapped and tape securing it in place, we're deep into downtown Hogsmeade.

“What are we doing in Italy?”

Italy is a squared two blocks by two blocks section that was originally carved out by Italian immigrants in the twenties. Now it houses some of the best restaurants in the city. There's even a sign saying welcome to Italy as you drive into the community, and most everything is written in Italian.

He pulls in front of a three-story building that has the sign Marauders Defence Academy on the storefront. Most of the lights are off, and there's no indication that the business is still open.

“Is this like one of those Secret Service safe houses or something? Or is it one of those storefronts that look legit from the front, but when you walk through the back, you're in an illegal gambling ring?”

He gives me a bemused smile.

“Not exactly,” he says.

Then he pockets his keys, grabs my bag from between my feet, and gets out of his truck. He's already at my door by the time I climb out of the car, and laces my fingers with his, pulling me into his side and scanning the area for danger.

“If this is something that's going to happen on a regular basis, me in your truck I mean, then I'm going to need a footstool.”

Harry laughs, and drops a kiss to my forehead.

“I'll have running boards installed tomorrow.”

Instead of walking to the front of the place like I was expecting, he moves to a side door, hidden behind an over-large potted plant.

My heart is suddenly racing in my chest, as Harry hits the buzzer, and I take a glance up and down the street, trying to figure out when the hell is going on.

When he said he had someplace safe to go, Little Italy was not what I was expecting. My nerves are flittering around in my stomach like butterflies, and Harry must sense my unease, because he squeezes my hand tighter in his, bringing it to lay a kiss on the back.

“Let me in,” he says without announcing himself, and a young female voice replies snarkily, “Don't be such a git, Harry,” before the sound of the door unlocking drowns out her voice.

I bring my hand to my mouth to cover my snort.

“Friend of yours?”

He’s pulling me up a flight of stairs, and I watch in fascination as his shoulders square, and he stands at his tallest height.

“Something like that,” he mumbles, before pushing open one of two doors on the third level.

“Harry, son, what are you doing here so late? I—”

The man stops as Harry pulls me into the room with him, and three sets of eyes turn in my direction.

Harry doesn’t let go of my hand as he shuts the front door with his free hand then lowers my bookbag from his shoulder to the floor.

The older man who was speaking stares at us with shrewd eyes, his lips opened in a surprised *oh*. Harry finally lets go of my fingers, to walk a few feet and drop a kiss on the sitting girl’s cheek before making the rounds through the other people.

“Where’s Dad?” he asks, and the floor tips out from underneath me. My eyes fly in rapid-fire across the room, to the man with his hand on Harry’s chest, to the teenager sitting on the couch, watching this play out with an absorbed expression. A second woman is standing at the back of the room, holding a baby close to her chest. She looks most confused of all and walks over to a playpen to lower her bundle to the mattress.

Dark hair, blue eyes. For all that she’s sitting down, the teenager will obviously tower over me.

I can’t breathe, as realization crashes over me. The bastard brought me to his parents’ house.

I imagine the sight we must make. Me covered in blood. Him covered in bruises and with stitches in his head. Nausea rolls in my stomach, and I avoid contact with the questioning gazes being thrown our way.

What in God’s name would make him bring me to his parent’s house?! This is the most ill-conceived, ridiculous...I would never in a million years have guessed this is where we were going.

There it is.

Who in their right mind would think to look for me here?

“He’s still downstairs, finishing up the nighttime chores. Do you want to introduce us to your friend?” the man asks him. His voice is pleasant enough, but his intonation is anything but. It’s a sweetly sarcastic version of Harry demanding I tell him the truth.

It makes me want to giggle.

I paste a smile on my face, hoping it doesn't look like I'm on the verge of puking.

"Everybody, this is Hermione. Mia, this is everybody. Or almost everyone. This is one of my dads, Remus, and my sisters Gabby and Isa. Beth doesn't live in the building anymore."

I give a little wave, trying to contain my roiling emotions.

Harry looks at his dad when he speaks.

"Mia's in trouble."

Harry's father glances at me, his eyes raking me from head to toe. The pain in my arm gives a rather dramatic flair under his gaze, and I see his mind calculate almost as quickly as his son's does.

"Finally knock somebody up, huh?" comes from the youngest on the couch.

Gabby, I think, closes the distance between them and smacks her sister on the head while their father unleashes a litany of demands and exclamations from the front.

"No," Harry says, and it's his detective voice. The one he uses when he expects to be obeyed. The sister shuts her mouth immediately, but the glimmer doesn't leave her eye.

"I need to get dad," Harry says, turning away from his family.

Sirius. The other man who raised him.

His father nods his agreement.

Harry turns to me, cupping my face in his hands, and the anger that's been simmering in my belly since he sprung this on me minutes ago changes to an ache of—something—at the open affection he's showing me in front of his family.

"Will you be okay, for a minute?" he whispers, and I see the apology in his eyes. He must have had a reason for not telling me where we were going. Probably because he knows I'd tell him to go pound sand. I take all the scathing remarks dancing on the tip of my tongue and swallow them back before I speak.

"I thought we said no more secrets," I whisper back.

Well, most of my scathing remarks.

Something soft and earnest covers his face, at least for a moment, before he builds his fortifications again.

"This one doesn't count," he counters, "it lasted less than an hour."

I can't contain my huff of annoyance.

"Go get your dad. I'm not going anywhere."

He lowers his lips for a quick kiss, and while I'm sure it was meant to be chaste, I can't help but raise up on my tiptoes and meet him halfway. For a heartbeat that lasts a lifetime, I forget about the throbbing in my arm, and the dead assailant we fled. I forget about his family, watching our interaction from five feet away. Instead, I concentrate on the way Harry's lips feel against mine and the way his touch is calming my runaway nerves.

Then he's gone, and I'm left with three people staring at me with expressions ranging from disbelief to awe.

"Hi," I say awkwardly, and pray that Harry doesn't take too long.

~\*\*~

Harry's dad, Remus, is the first to break the silence.

"Do you need medical attention, dear?" he asks me, stepping forward and indicating the blood covering my arm and splattered over my leggings.

I drop my lip from between my teeth, smiling at the concern in his voice.

"No, thank you. I mean yes," I babble like a moron. Perfect. "I mean, I do need medical treatment. But I'm a doctor. If you could point me to a flat surface, and maybe a roll of paper towels, I can take care of it myself. Thank you."

"A doctor. Nice," the girl from the couch croons, and ducks when her sister tries to smack her again.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" her sister growls, giving a fantastic imitation of Harry's hostility.

"Shouldn't you be in your own flat?" the teenager snarks back, and I don't quite get my snort controlled in time.

"Ignore them, please. Isabella has the manners of a sloth, and Gabriella seems to forget that she was seventeen not that long ago."

I grab my bag up from the floor and follow Mr. Black into the kitchen, where a huge but ancient-looking kitchen table takes up the majority of the dining space.

"Harry and my husband should be back soon. Sirius is just closing the academy for the night. I take it from your surprised expression when you walked through the door, you weren't exactly expecting us?"

Mr. Black seats me at the table, and flitters around me in a flurry of activity, placing a dish towel on the table and resting my arm on top of it. He brings me the roll of paper towels, then a bottle of water, before pulling the trash can next to my seat.

"I knew of your existence," I reply, watching as he scrubs his hands. "Harry told me how you taught him how to cook, and how to fight. I know you raised him, and what happened to his parents." Mr. Black's eyes widen at that. "We've talked about his sisters, and his nephew. And the new baby," and I glance over my shoulder to where said sisters are watching us with rapt

attention. “But no, I wasn’t given fair warning that this was our destination. Getting information out of Harry sometimes is like pulling teeth from an eating lion.”

Mr. Black throws his head back and laughs, pleasure blooming over his cheeks.

“Well, I can tell you know him well then,” he says, and I think that’s about as close to asking about the kiss he witnessed as he’s going to get.

He pulls a chair up next to me and settles himself at the table, looking at me expectantly.

“I can help, dear,” he says in a fatherly manner. “I’ve raised four children.”

I smile at him, taking my bag from my lap and placing it on the table.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Black.”

The man in front of me makes a funny face.

“Please, it’s Remus. I never took Sirius’s last name, though the children have it. He’s never forgiven me. Don’t let him hear you call me that. It’ll go to his head.”

The first genuine laugh of the night forces its way onto my face. He reminds me of my own father. Dry yet charmingly sarcastic.

“Okay, Remus. I have everything we’ll need in there. Cleaning supplies, suture kit. Gauze and plasters. If you wouldn’t mind pulling out the supplies, I’ll work on getting the wound clean.”

We work in companionable silence, as he hands me supplies before I can ask for them. There’s a twinkle in his eye that reminds me of his son, and I can’t stop the smile from spreading on my face.

“As you can imagine,” he finally breaks the spell, “Harry got quite a few stitches as a child.”

My laugh is less than dignified.

“Harry as a child. It’s a hard concept to grasp. I always supposed he appeared this way, out of thin air.”

“Oh, my dear,” he laughs, reaching out to hold my arm still as I dose the area with lidocaine.

“I’ll be happy to break out the baby pictures for you. Harry will hate it,” he says conspiratorially.

“All the more reason to do it,” I joke.

The playful banter with Harry’s uncle, one of the men who raised him, helps to distract from the tugging of the silk going in and out of my skin, and by the time the door opens again, I’m holding the string out straight for Remus to snip it after the knots.

A tall man with salt and pepper hair proceeds Harry into the flat, and I can tell from the tension in his face that they took the extra time to discuss our situation downstairs.

Harry immediately storms over to where I'm sitting with his father, kissing the top of my head and examining the wound before his uncle places a bandage across it.

"So, you'll let my dad help, but not me," he asks with a playful tone.

"Your father isn't a pompous arse," I reply before I have a chance to moderate my words. Harry's other dad explodes into laughter, and it startles me so much that Remus slips when he tries to stick the plaster to me.

"I like her already," Mr. Black exclaims. He turns to look at me.

"You'll be staying with us a few nights," he tells me. He phrases it as a question, though there's a brook no argument tone to his voice, for all that it rose at the end.

"I, uh," I lick my lips slowly, bringing my wounded arm to my chest. Harry gives me an assuring nod, rubbing his hand up and down my back.

I turn to look at Remus. Despite his placid face, he still has no idea what's going on. Harry's sisters are sitting together on the couch, watching our exchange with curious and concerned faces.

I turn in my chair to face my wayward lover.

"This is ridiculous," I whisper at him, even though everyone can hear me. "There's no need to put your family in this type of danger. I'll go with Protected Persons, Harry. Just take me back to The Lair."

Harry squats at my side, cupping my face in his hand. My eyes close of their own accord, and I lean into his touch.

"I'll find these bastards, Mia. I promise. Just give me a few days. I'm not ready to lose you to the bowels of the National Crime Agency. I can't—" and his voice catches, deep and rumbling in the back of his throat. "I won't lose you."

Mr. Black comes to stand behind his husband, as Harry's other father reaches out for my hands.

"You *are* safe with us dear. I promise you that. Gabby and her husband live in the flat right across the way. No one is in this building except for the family. Let us care for you, while Harry does his job."

I nod my head in acquiesce.

It's still, in the room, until Harry breaks the silence.

He pulls the pistol he gave me, the one I left in his glove box, from the small of his back. He places it on the table in front of us, mixing in with my medical supplies.



“Just in case.”

Just in case.

# Who Needs Sleep

## Chapter Summary

It's after midnight by the time I make it back to The Lair. My mobile has been blowing up. I only answered one call, to tell Ron to handle it until I got there, then turned my ringer off.

It's no surprise when pandemonium hits me when I walk through our doors. There are at least twenty people, in uniform and not, shoved into our little corner of the basement.

## Chapter Notes

Chapter 3 of the day (I think lol) If you haven't read the previous ones yet, go back and check them out. Thank you Shipforsure for feeding into my ego today!

Thanks Happily for the awesome beta, as usual.

## Harry

It's after midnight by the time I make it back to The Lair. My mobile has been blowing up. I only answered one call, to tell Ron to handle it until I got there, then turned my ringer off.

It's no surprise when pandemonium hits me when I walk through our doors. There are at least twenty people, in uniform and not, shoved into our little corner of the basement.

"Potter!" Kingsley bellows, the minute the elevator doors open. "Where the hell have you been? You discharge your weapon for the second time in as many weeks and this time don't even bother to hang around and give a statement? I'm going to nail your arse to the wall."

Technically, I didn't discharge *my* weapon. I didn't even pull the trigger on the one that went off. It's not my fault the man was a moron.

Kingsley's eyes are bulging from his head, and I can tell from the uncomfortable expression on Neville and Ron's faces that this isn't the first time they've heard this tirade tonight.

I dig my hands into my jacket pocket and try to resist snarking back.

“Sorry,” I lie, my face as bland as I can make it. “I had to take our witness somewhere safe.”

His sneer is a sight to behold.

I stride past him towards my desk, hoping he’ll take the dismissal for what it is. I have more important things to worry about than him tonight.

“Can the bullshite, Potter. You weren’t thinking like a cop out there. You were thinking like a boyfriend. Go get your girl and bring her here. Now.”

I close my eyes and centre myself, before I do something, we’ll both regret.

I slip my jacket from my shoulders, throwing it haphazardly onto my desk. My palm digs into the butt of my gun, and I use the pain to try to calm down.

Don’t do it Harry.

Don’t do it.

I whirl on my heel, and my captain is so close behind me that he stumbles backward when I get into his face.

“No, Kingsley. I was thinking like a Detective, who can’t trust his own department. They got her name from us. They know who she is, because of us.”

The entire station has fallen silent. Kingsley stands his ground, his back straighter than a telephone pole, but he turns his face to the side when my ranting turns to screaming.

My heartbeat is thudding in my ears, and I realize, dimly in the back of my mind, that I’m actively throwing away my career right now. But the need to let loose my rage is overwhelming.

There’s no containing this beast.

“I’m *thinking*,” I roar, shoving an accusing finger in Kingsley’s face, “like I made a vow to keep this woman safe, and I can’t do that when the criminals have more information than I do, and I can’t trust the person who sits across the desk from me.” I shove the piles of folders from my desk, the explosion of paperwork flying in a thousand different directions, a sick sort of catharsis for the storm raging inside of me.

“So yeah, I took her somewhere safe. She’s going to stay that way, until these guys are in a cell, or dead at my feet! They tried to kill her tonight, Kingsley, and *we* told them who she was. We did! And I’ll be damned if I let them get a second shot at it!”

I gulp down a shuddering breath of air and fall into a squat, covering my head with my arms. I’m shaking with the silent acknowledgement that the woman I love; that I *love*, was almost taken from me tonight, and there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it.

A gentle hand lands on my shoulder, and my head snaps up to see the concerned gaze of my captain staring down at me. My eyes flick around the room, to see we’re alone except for Ron

and Neville, who are blocking off the side entrances into our floor.

“Look at me, Prongs” Kingley says, deep and quiet in the room. The determination in his eyes is palpable, and I’m reminded how he’s risen so high in our ranks. “We’ll get these bastards. I give you my word. But you’ve got to keep your shite together, or I’ve gotta send you home. Can you handle that?”

We stay like that, both crouched low, his hand on my shoulder like a priest comforting a supplicant. He’s offering me salvation, and I want to grasp at it with both hands and hold it to my chest.

My throat seals closed with the barrage of emotions tumbling through my body, and I give him a sharp nod, confirming that yes, I can handle this.

“Is your girl okay?” he asks me in a hush, and I close my eyes and nod my head, thankful for a subject I have information on.

“He didn’t get too many hits in. Mia’s tough. She can take care of herself. She gave herself a few stitches where he managed to slice her arm, but other than that, she’s fine.”

He gives a small smile, probably at the mention that she sewed up her own arm, but I don’t have the energy to ask.

“She’s safe?” he confirms, his voice even softer still.

“She’s safe,” I assure him, and rise to a standing position when he lifts his hand from my shoulder.

He tries to climb to his feet but seems to get stuck halfway up. He lifts his hand in the air, wiggling his fingers.

“Help me up, would ya? I’m too old for this shite.”

A laugh slips unbidden from me, and it breaks the molasses like tension that’s fallen over my friends.

“Mungos just cleared the attackers. They’re on their way,” Ron says from across the room, and just like that, I have something to focus my anger on.

~\*\*~

I wait outside the interview room, as thug number one is being brought in from the holding cell. Kingsley just left, after advising me since I didn’t actually fire the shot that killed the dimwit from tonight, I wouldn’t have to go through the ordeal of Professional Standards.

Ron and Neville walk into the tiny room, conversing in hushed tones as they make their way next to me in front of the glass. They pass what they assume are covert glances between each other, and I roll my eyes in exasperation.

“Out with it,” I demand, my arms crossed over my chest.

“You know we’re with you on this one, Harry,” Ron says, his voice firm sure.

“Till the end,” Neville pipes in, shoving his hands into his vest.

“We know you’re not used to asking for help. But you don’t have to. We’re here to back your play.”

My throat closes up as emotion roils through me, and I give them a jerky nod of thanks, unable to trust my voice. The knowledge that if nothing else, my team has my back, brings a calm to my psyche that I’m sorely missing tonight. Ron pats me on the back and gives my shoulder a squeeze, in silent acknowledgement of words we don’t need to say.

“So,” Neville says, effectively moving us past the moment, “Good cop, bad cop?”

We watch in companionable silence as uniformed constables lead our suspects from tonight into different interrogation rooms.

“I was thinking more bad cop, boogeyman,” I say eager to break the men who tried to kill my girl.

An evil grin appears on Neville’s face.

“Sounds good to me, boss.

## **Hermione**

Whoever it is, they’re good. I’ll give them that. But my mind is too jumbled by all that’s happened to fall asleep in a strange home on a strange bed, and they don’t have to be loud for me to know they’re there.

As the window slides open, there’s a subtle air pressure change in the room, and I push the covers from my legs, slowly reaching over and grabbing the gun from the bedside table.

I have one foot on the floor, one on the bed, and the gun raised steadily in front of me, when the first boot hits the carpet.

“I gotta admit, when I gave you that weapon, I didn’t expect it to be aimed at me less than twenty-four hours later.”

Harry pauses halfway through the window of his childhood bedroom as I level the gun at his chest.

“Harry,” I hiss, relief and anger warring for dominance in my voice. “Don’t sneak into the room I’m sleeping in and I won’t aim a gun at you. How’d you get in without the alarm going off? I watched your fathers set it.”

“In my defence, I didn’t realize they’d put you in my bedroom. This window is the only one not set up with a sensor.”

“So that you could sneak in and out of your parent's house?”

His noncommittal grunt is all the confirmation I need.

He finishes climbing into the flat, shutting the window behind him, then making a scene of locking the latch. The look he gives me is priceless, and I already know what he’s going to say before he opens his mouth.

“It’s not my home Harry. How was I supposed to know the window wasn’t locked?” I can’t help it if I sound defensive. I was a pretty big oversight, all things considered. Still, if it wasn’t unlocked, then he never could have snuck in, so I don’t see what he’s complaining about.

Not that he actually even said anything.

“Hmmm.”

There it is! Accusation and recrimination all rolled into one.

I flick the safety up on the gun before shoving it back in its holster.

“What are you even doing here anyway?” I ask, sitting on the edge of the bed. “I wasn’t expecting to see you until tomorrow at the earliest. Maybe not even then.”

“We’re in a holding pattern,” he says plopping down next to me to take off his shoes. He drops his jacket to the floor, unlatches the Velcro from his vest, then reaches behind his head to pull off his shirt. “We’re stuck, until we get the video from the hospital, and I doubt that’ll come in until tomorrow. Ron is still there; he’ll call me if there’s an update in the case.”

The case, he says, like he’s not talking about people who tried to grab me coming home from work five hours ago.

It’s my turn to go, “hmmm.”

Harry stands up and unclasps his belt, but doesn’t remove it from the loops. Simply drops his trousers to the floor and climbs up in the bed, dragging me down with him.

“What are you wearing, anyway?” he garbles, through a yawn that unhinges his jaw. I look down at the shorts and tank top his sister gave me to wear.

“Oh, Gabby gave me something to sleep in.”

He freezes in his attempt to settle on the bed, giving me a tiny shove.

“Uh-uh. No. Absolutely not. The clothes have to go. Now.”

I’m not looking at his face, but if I were, I’d imagine disgust dripping off it in droves.

“You’re being ridiculous,” I tell him in between tired giggles, but he keeps shoving me towards the edge.

“Take ‘em off. I’m not sleeping with you when you’re wearing my baby sister’s clothing.”

I huff at how ridiculous he’s being, but do as he says anyway. I sit up in bed and pull the shirt off over my head. Then I lie down and lift my arse from the mattress, taking off the shorts and dropping them over the edge.

I curl into his side, and he wraps his arm around my waist, pulling me into his chest. Then he feels my underwear, and a sound of disgust drips onto my shoulder.

“Knickers too,” he intones, already trying to push them down my hips.

“The knickers belong to me,” I hiss at him exasperatingly. “Besides, I’m not sleeping naked in your parent’s house Harry. That’s so inappropriate.”

He grumbles under his breath, before rolling away from me. The next thing I know, his trunks are dropped off the side of the bed to gather dust with the rest of our clothing.

“There. I’m naked too. Now lose them.”

“That doesn’t help!” I hiss, but somehow, end up losing my knickers anyway.

“Happy now?” I seethe at him, as he pulls me back into his arms.

“Yup,” he retorts with pleasure, and I make sure he can hear my sigh in the dark.

We’re quiet for a few minutes. The only sounds between us are the noises from the street outside and the creaks and groans of a building several decades old.

“Your family’s really great,” I whisper, knowing that he’s still fully awake behind me, but not wanting to shatter the intimacy of the moment.

“I know,” he agrees. “When this is all over, we’ll spend some real time with them, if you want. Remus will want to fatten you up.” He chuckles, and I can’t help but laugh along. I’ve already heard something similar.

“You know,” he says conversationally, his hand roaming over my belly, but not quite reaching the thatch of curls between my legs, “I’ve never had a girl in my bed before.”

I snort at that, because never has a lie been so obvious.

“In case you hadn’t noticed, I’ve been in your bed every night for the last five days. Last time I checked I was a girl.”

He laughs against my back, something dark and sultry that coats me like velvet.

“No. This bed. I never had a girl in this house before.”

“I find that very hard to believe.”

His other hand has joined the first, and his lips start trailing down and over my throat. His thumb tweaks over my nipple, until it's pebbled and hard and aching to be sucked. Then he repeats the process on its twin.

“It wasn't for lack of trying, believe me. But my grandparents lived in the flat Gabby lives in now, and Issa wasn't even born yet. The other two were spaced out just enough, that between the group of them, they were the best cock blocker you've ever met. They could have made an Olympic sport out of foiling my attempts to get a girl in my room.”

Harry's dick is pinned between us and has grown thick and engorged against my back. I reach behind me and take it in my hand, stroking him once, then twice, before bringing him to my folds. His intake of breath is sharp and cutting, and I know without having to ask that this is why he came here tonight.

He's as frantic to be inside me, as I am to feel filled by him.

His hunger for me is a heady feeling. It makes me dizzy, my heart pounding out an erratic rhythm.

“Do you want me?” I ask him, feeling drunk on the power I wield over this proud and mighty warrior.

“So bad I can't breathe,” he gasps against my ear. “I had to touch you. To feel you alive and thriving underneath me.”

He takes my wounded arm gently in his grasp and entwines it backwards around his head. My fingers dig into his hair, and I hold on as if it's the only thing keeping me from drowning. It makes my body arch and bow against him, twisted half on my side and half on my back, and he catches my lips with his. His breathing is harsh and urgent, but his touch relays a tenderness that steals my breath away.

I reach for his dick with my other hand, and I coat him in my wetness, before the tip of him teases my entrance. He groans out "Mia," the name only he calls me. His dick is thick and throbbing between my legs. But I know he won't go any further, until I give him the okay.

“Then take what belongs to you,” I whisper against his lips, and moan when he sheaths himself inside me. It's not as deep at this angle. Not like it has been in the past. But then he takes my knee and pulls me open, draping my leg across his hip, and suddenly he bottoms out inside me, and my oxygen and my soul flee my body to make room for Harry.

Only and always Harry.

We rock against each other, the urgency of our earlier couplings gone. In its place is a fluidity of lovers lost united. A quiet desperation to be one, until we're forced to separate again.

His fingers find my core, and he touches me where we're joined as one. His fingers coat in our slick, as he feels himself enter me over and over again. His rhythm never changes. It's



even, and steady, like the beat of his heart hammering against my back. We're partaking in a marathon tonight. It's not a race to the finish.

His mouth covers mine completely. He sucks on my tongue, my top lip, and then my bottom. He works me with his teeth. He slips two fingers into my mouth, and we suck them clean together, before he lowers them back to my clit and drags them through my folds. I'm teetering on the edge, and instead of pushing me over, he continuously holds me back.

Harry works me like a master works a piece of clay, always pulling away when my body coils to fire under his touch. Tears leak from the corners of my eyes, and I realize I'm crying and gasping all at once when Harry runs his fingers slowly over my clit.

When I finally fall apart around him, it's like an ocean cresting at high tide, rather than the explosion I was expecting. Every time I think it's passed, another wave flows through my body. I don't scream. I don't yell out his name. Instead, I let Harry hold me against him, and breathe my oxygen from his lungs.

Harry's own orgasm is beautifully violent. His muscles quake and his body bows. He covers me completely, pinning me against his bulk. It feels like he's trying to climb inside me, and maybe that's what he's doing.

He whispers something against my lips, but his voice is broken and shattered, and I lose the words in the pounding on my own heart.

Sweat is quickly cooling against our skin, and he knows when my trembles turn to shivers. His grip, while never gone, loosens against me considerably, and between a grasp of his hand and a kick of his foot, he covers us with the blanket.

I don't think my pulse will ever return to normal. My own breathing sounds loud against my ears. I rotate in his arms, and his chin is resting on my shoulder.

"I love," Harry pants, his voice hitching in pain. "I loved," he tries again, so quiet it's almost an echo. Then his panting turns to gentle huffs, and Harry is asleep in my arms.

~\*\*~

He doesn't doze for long.

When he wakes, his muscles coil tight under my touch. This time it's Harry the Royal Marine readying for battle, rather than Harry the lover.

"I won't lose you," he says, then steals my lips in a bruising kiss, his stubble rubbing against my face in a burn that I've quickly come to crave.

I don't have time to answer. I don't even have time to open my eyes. One minute he's spooned behind me, the next I'm on my back. He pins my arms above my head and sinks himself inside me all in one motion. I scramble to spread my legs far enough to make room for him, then wrap my legs around his waist as he quickly bottoms out inside me. A gasp is stolen from my lips when he pulls back out and slams home again.

We make love, under the covers, the cloak of darkness separating us from the rest of the house. There's fear lacing our movements this time, and we both come in under a minute. Fear that this might be the last time we're together. If we don't find the men who are after me.

He's dressed and back out the window before the sun even rises.

# Bullocks

## Chapter Summary

“You look like shite,” Neville says, smirking at me from his desk.

He’s one to talk. He looks like he slept in his clothes last night. I take a closer look at him and decide that’s exactly what he did. He’s wearing the same jeans and shirt he showed up at the hospital in eight hours ago.

Has it only been that long? It feels like it’s been days.

“I haven’t been to sleep yet,” I say, “what’s your excuse?”

## Chapter Notes

Dum dum duuuuuuuuummm.....

Thanks Happily!

## Harry

“You look like shite,” Neville says, smirking at me from his desk.

He’s one to talk. He looks like he slept in his clothes last night. I take a closer look at him and decide that’s exactly what he did. He’s wearing the same jeans and shirt he showed up at the hospital in eight hours ago.

Has it only been that long? It feels like it’s been days.

“I haven’t been to sleep yet,” I say, “what’s your excuse?”

Neville *did* go home, since we were stuck waiting for the video from the hospital to come over. But since we left at the same time, and he's back before me, if he did sleep, he didn't get much. Ron was still here when I left this morning, but I don't see him when I get to my desk.

I slip my jacket from my shoulders, then scrub my fingers through my beard, trying to purge some of the exhaustion from my system. My chest throbs, and I use the pain to fuel my determination to catch these bastards.

There's a paper cup with an expensive coffee logo sitting on my desk, and my shoulders slump in momentary relief when a double strong black tea explodes over my taste buds. I don't usually take cream or sugar, but the small amount Neville added to my cup blends with the bitter bite of the tea to immediately give me a pick me up.

"Thanks," I say sincerely, lifting the cup into the air.

"No problem," Neville says, giving me a tight smile.

It's still quiet in The Lair, the morning crew not yet trickling in.

Neville leans back in his seat, rubbing the heels of his hands into his eyes. I perch on the edge of my desk, too stressed to sit in the chair, and slowly sip the tea Neville got me. Letting it attack all my neurons.

Suddenly Ron storms into the room, waving his mobile about like a banner before him.

"Got the video," he says, walking right by our desks. Neville starts yanking cords out of his laptop, taking it with him to bring to the video room.

Neville runs ahead of us so he's the first one through the door, already sitting down and connecting his computer to the screens.

"Did you go see Luna?" I ask Ron tightly, as we wait for Neville to get hooked up.

He gives me a tiny nod, rotating his shoulders in frustration. He crosses his arms in front of his chest, and I can see the need pulsing in his muscles.

"I just... I had to touch her," he says, low enough that only I hear. For the first time in my life, I truly understand what he means. I give him a squeeze on his shoulder, and whatever he sees in my face makes his eyes soften when his gaze meets mine.

"We'll get these guys," he assures me.

I give him a sharp jerk of my chin, unable to trust my voice.

We turn our attention back to Neville right as his monitor duplicates onto the screen on the wall.

He starts clicking around on the laptop, and a familiar web page pops onto the monitors.

"Are you in my email?" Ron demands incredulously.

Sure enough, Neville finishes typing in Ron's password, and his government email account opens on the screen.

“I know all our passwords,” Neville replies absentmindedly. “Don’t make them so easy next time.”

Ron is still grumbling under his breath when the video feed from outside the hospital blooms into life. It’s angled from the parking lot, and we’ve got a perfect view of the ramp where the fight took place.

Here we go.

The video starts a half hour before I pull into the hospital, and we hit the fast forward button, stopping whenever someone comes into view to grab a snap of their profile and run them through facial recognition.

I want to turn away when the thug reaches out for Hermione, but I force myself to watch the entire fight. It doesn’t take more than a minute or two. Between the two of us, we dispatched the trouble fairly quickly. I wish it had audio, so I could hear what he was saying to her.

“She really kicked his arse, didn’t she?” Neville comments, the bounce in his voice unexpected, considering why we’re watching this video.

“Yeah, she did,” Ron sniggers, and it forces a reluctant chuckle from me as well.

That’s my girl.

The smile slips from my cheeks quick enough.

“This doesn’t tell us anything new. What else do we have?”

There were half a dozen attachments included in the email from hospital security.

The next holds nothing.

The one after that is the same.

Ron yanks out another chair and logs into one of the administrative computers. He pulls up the reports generated on last night’s attackers, looking for anything we may have missed.

“Wait,” Neville says, freezing the video before rewinding it a few seconds. “Look at that car.”

This camera is labeled ‘light pole’, and it’s facing into the car park. The park itself holds nothing special. It’s half empty because of the time of night, and no one has entered or exited the frame of the camera.

“There,” Neville says again, clicking at the screen, and blowing up a car in the lower right corner. It’s a green Toyota, body style unknown. Year unknown. Fairly beat up, at least from the front. In the driver’s seat is a man in his twenties, with sandy coloured hair. He sits there without getting out of his vehicle, without so much as blinking, before starting his car, and gliding out of the frame.

“Run him,” I bark, the adrenalin spiking through my body.

There's too much energy bursting in my system, and I start to pace along the back cabinets. I clasp my hands behind my back, to keep from punching at the wall.

I was never this uncontained until Hermione walked into my life. Six weeks ago, nothing ruffled my feathers. Now I feel like I'm coming apart at the seams.

"We got him," Ron rumbles, and I know I'm not the only person itching to take a bite out of this guy.

"You're bloody right we do," Neville agrees.

Not yet we don't. Not until my fingers are around his throat.

"Check the other videos while the facial recognition runs," I order Neville. "See if we can't get a different view of that car. I want those reg plates."

I lean over Neville's chair, one hand on the back, the other on the table. Neville, for his part, pretends I'm not even there. Clicking and scanning and basically running our system like a boss.

"Got it," Neville announces, and I have to breathe in through my nose as the last video plays out before me.

It's angled from the front of the hospital, and both the main and the side entrance are centered on the screen.

It seems like nothing goes on forever, as Neville fast forwards the clip. When my truck pulls onto the screen, I feel like I'm watching in slow motion, for all that the video is running at a higher speed than normal.

I watch as I pull out of the side entrance, only to pull back into the first. Neville's car follows and I remember the squeal of his tires as he sped into the car park. Ron's car jumps the curb.

My fingers dig into Neville's chair so hard my fingertips puncture the material.

Facial recognition pings on a different screen, alerting us that there are no matches in the system.

Which means that whoever this guy is, he doesn't have a criminal record or a driving license.

I didn't think we'd get that lucky.

My truck pitches out of the side entrance as the candy cars come rounding the opposite corner. Then the Toyota comes into the frame, and it's as if my whole world comes to a standstill. He pauses at the exit, before sedately pulling out from the hospital, tailing me from a discreet distance behind.

Son of a—

Mother—

“FUCK!” I bellow, turning and kicking the filing cabinet closest to me. It shudders under the impact, the metal making a horrible crunching sound, but doesn’t topple over. I kick it again, and again, screaming my anger into the air.

“Run the pl—” Ron starts to say, but Neville cuts him off.

“Already on it. Plates came back stolen. Reported at five a.m. Last seen at six last night. They live a mile inside the bridge. Owners are Tom and Rebecca Morning. Running their records now.”

His voice is tight and clipped, his hands moving over the keyboard so fast I can barely make out his fingers moving. I’ve never seen him this intense, and a wave of terror washes over me.

I fall into a squat, pulling at my hair in desperation.

“Call her,” Ron barks, and I almost topple over in my rush to follow his commands.

A bobby sticks his head into the office, checking on the commotion coming from inside.

“Is everything okay in here?” he asks, looking at my discomposure with fear in his eyes.

“No. I need a BOLO for this car.”

Ron rips a sheet of paper from a pad, shoving it in the direction of the uniformed officer. He looks at it, then at us with apprehension, before Ron snaps at him again.

“Go! Run!”

He does.

His footsteps echo loudly on the tile until they fade from our hearing.

Hermione’s mobile goes straight to voicemail, and I hit the speed dial for my parents’ landline.

Neville is still dinking around on the computer, grim determination on his face.

I surge to my feet, walking out of the office and grabbing the first person who catches my eye.

I latch onto the sleeve of his shirt with more force than I mean to and almost throw him into the wall.

My parents’ line rings for a lifetime, before the answering machine picks up. I disconnect the line.

“Get the fire brigade on the phone. I need to know if they’ve put out any car fires within the last eight hours. Both sides of the bridge. We’re looking for a green Toyota. Now!”

He takes off at a run, the opposite direction of the first patrolman.

I turn to face Ron.

“Call Dung.”

He pulls his mobile from his pocket when I hit the next speed dial on my list.

My dad picks up after the second ring. I don't wait for him to say hello.

“Where are you? Where is she? Are you safe?” I demand, my heart thundering in my throat. There's a bustle in the background of my father's line, and I realize he's already out of the flat.

“I'm at the meat market, but they were fine when I left. Remus was downstairs calling and canceling today's classes and Isa stayed home to keep Mia company.”

Even with the horror crushing my heart, I start at the sound of my father calling her Mia.

“They followed me. Get home. Now.”

He doesn't wait for anything else. I hear him drop what he's doing and run.

“Neville,” I bark, hitting the speed dial for my father. “Get constables over to my parents' house. Now. They've got Hermione with them.”

Both men turn to me, and the horror in their faces makes my throat close up with fear. Footsteps pound on tile, and Ron hands me his mobile as Kingsley and a bevy of constables, the first we commandeered included, round the corner into The Lair.

I disconnect from Remus as soon as it hits his voicemail. I bring Ron's mobile to my other ear.

“Dung. I'm looking for a new guy. Burns his cars when he's done with them. Help me,” I demand, pacing the length of the desk.

He stutters for a moment but gathers his wits quick enough. It's a testament to our relationship that he doesn't take the time to haggle over price.

“Give me fifteen minutes, I'll find out what I can.”

“Make it quicker,” I beg him, before another thought comes to me. “Reach out to the other side. I think he might be an East Ender.”

I disconnect the line as soon as I have his okay.

Ron is explaining the situation to Kings. Neville has his mobile pinned between his shoulder and his cheek, barking at his cousin, I'm sure. I get a glimpse of the screen in front of him and watch as he pulls up traffic cam after traffic cam, watching the trail of the man following me back to my parent's house.



I kick at the filing cabinet again, and the metal crunches and bends under the impact.

How could I be so stupid?

How could I be so unpardonably *stupid* ?

“Patrol is on their way,” Neville tells me, but I shake off the comfort he’s trying to offer.

The alarm for my parents’ flat alerts on my mobile.

“We have to go. We have to go now.”

My team reacts at once, Neville rising from his seat and sprinting to his desk. Kingsley starts barking orders, and a handful of constables peel off from the crowd, skittering in different directions.

I start out towards the door, walking, then jogging, until my mobile begins to ring in my hand.

“Harry,” Remus pants, terror lacing his voice. I’m running full out by the time we hit the stairs, as Ron reports, “shots fired at Marauders Defence Academy.”

## **Hermione**

I’m sitting on the main couch in Harry’s parents’ living room. Issa, the baby of the family, sits snuggled into the love seat across the way. Her hair is tucked up neat in the back of her head. For all that they don’t share a drop of DNA she’s almost a spitting image of Harry: dark hair, creamy skin. She’s fiery and sarcastic, traits her brother carries in spades. Only he’s learned how to keep his sharpness contained to a dirty look and an occasional sneer. Her hands are wrapped around a paper coffee mug that Gabby brought back from dropping the kids off at day nursery .

“How anybody lives without coffee, I’ll never understand.” Issa closes her eyes in bliss every time the liquid hits her lips, and I try to remember at what age I started mainlining the stuff. Not until college in America where it was easier to get coffee than tea.

“I know,” Gabby says, taking a sip from her own cup. She’s seated next to me on the couch, slowly flipping through the half dozen photo albums Remus dropped on the coffee table before he went downstairs to handle some stuff for their business. “I still can’t get over the fact that Harry won’t drink it. He’s a tea man through and through.”

The coffee is very good. Spectacular, even. If the shop weren’t thirty minutes from my flat, I might have to make it a regular part of my morning. Gabby said it’s from a little Italian coffee house on the corner of the block. Something she says niggles in my mind though.

“Harry will drink coffee. It’s not that he doesn’t like it. He even has a Keurig, though I gather he mainly uses it for the hot water function. Too lazy to use the kettle that sits on his stove. But he said that when he was in the Middle East he got out of the habit. It was easier to carry tea bags with him. Now it’s what he prefers. You should see the collection of flavors he has in his pantry. Though, I guess you probably already have.” I look up from my cup to find both of his sisters staring at me like I just spoke in tongues.

“You’ve been to his house?” Issa states, blinking at me wide eyed like an owl.

“Yes?” I reply, now unsure if that was the right answer.

Gabby chuckles under her breath, giving Issa an amused look.

“Don’t mind her. She’s young. Harry is still a bit of an enigma to her. The thought of him having a girlfriend seems to have fried her brain some.”

“She’s not the only one,” I mumble under my breath, but Gabby must still hear it, because amusement lights up her face.

“Yes. Well, you’ve gotten closer to figuring him out than the rest of us,” Gabby says, and I can’t help the flush of pride I feel creeping into my cheeks.

I clear my throat, hoping to diffuse the amused looks his sisters are throwing my way. It only makes Issa grin wider.

“Why don’t you tell me some stories about Harry as a teenager. I’d love to hear about him when he was all gangly and awkward.”

Gabby laughs, her smile wide and her eyes glittering.

“Hate to break it to you, but Harry was never awkward and gangly. He excelled at sports. He was a star player on his school’s football team. He moved so swiftly across the pitch, we’ve been told it was like he was flying. Hell, dad says he was ten pounds when he was born. He and Remus were in the waiting room. Beth is closest to him in age; she’d be able to give better stories. But dad left the photo albums out for a reason.”

She grabs two obviously older albums and places them both before me.

"This one is entirely Harry with James and Lily, his parents."

I open the first page, and there’s a woman with red hair cascading down her back and a man with shaggy black hair and glasses standing over her shoulder, a baby with his black hair and her green eyes in her arms. Harry looks just like his father, and I wipe a tear from under my eye.

She nudges the other forward.

"This one is all of our parents from their school days. You know our dads aren't biologically related to Harry, right?"

I silently nod my head.

"The four of them went to boarding school together. Prepare yourself for fashion from the seventies," Issa jokes with a false shudder.

I laugh at her dramatics.

I place my coffee cup onto the side table, scooting to sit closer to Gabby then pull Harry's baby album onto my lap. Issa moves to the other corner of the loveseat, angling her body closer to me and her sister. A thrill runs through me at the thought of not only being able to see Harry as a baby, but of seeing pictures of Harry with his birth parents. His sister's are opening and closing books, bickering about which book holds which pictures when a thunk crashes into the door, the crunching of wood pulling little squeaks of surprise out of all of us.

My hands reach to my hip, where the gun Harry gave me should be. Where he taught me to wear it the three days I spent practicing and lounging in his house. Only it's not there. It's on the bedside table where I left it this morning. Convinced it would only scare Issa if I wore a weapon in her parent's house. After all, this was the perfect hiding spot. Nobody knows I'm here.

The door smashes open, wood splintering everywhere. It hits the wall and rebounds, one of the hinges busted, and a man storms into the flat, gun raised to his chest.

I don't think. I barely even breathe. He points the gun into the room, waving it around like he can't decide where to aim. In a heartbeat I'm up and off the couch, reaching for the weapon.

"Run," I scream at Harry's sisters. Gabby stands and dives for Issa, grabbing her hand and yanking her out of the loveseat with so much force they stumble, until I lose sight of them as they hide out of my vision.

My heart is thundering so loud that it almost sounds like an echo. Like I've screamed into a tunnel and the pounding of my pulse is the only thing that rebounds back. Harry's sisters, one of which is screaming, fade into the background, until all I know is the man in front of me, and the determination coursing through my bloodstream.

There's no time to be afraid. I'm sure that'll come later. Right now, all I can concentrate on is not letting this asshole hurt Harry's family.

He fires into the room, and then my hands are around his wrist, twisting them sideways and jerking the gun from his grasp. It skitters across the floor, and I push it from my worries, content that it's no longer a threat.

He's livid. God is he furious. He bares his teeth and digs his hand into my hair, yanking my head at a painful angle.

"You stupid bint," he growls into my face, spittle flying in every direction, but I ram my elbow into his nose, feeling the satisfying crunch of shattered cartilage vibrating up my arm and into my shoulder. He drops my hair at the impact, his hands rising on instinct to protect his gushing face, and I kick out with my heel, using the force of my legs to ram my foot into

his gut. He lands on the ground in an awkward thunk, bouncing once as he tries to protect his blow.

But the fight angles us the wrong way, and instead of knocking him away from Harry's family, he lands within inches of the gun.

Gabby, who was easing out from behind the couch, scurries back behind its protection.

I throw myself forward, not caring about protecting my landing. My body lands prone, arms stretched out and scrambling for the weapon. But it's a lost cause. All it takes is for him to twist and reach, and the gun is back in his grasp.

His hands are trembling, and he rubs his free forearm across the dripping of his nose, smearing the blood in a hideously grotesque fashion. He rises to his knees, pointing the gun at my head with shaking fingers.

"I should kill you right here," he spits at me, and flecks of his blood splatter across my face.

"Not here," I beg, rising to my knees with my arms spread wide. My palms are out and open, and I hope it's enough to convince him I won't try to attack him again.

"I should," he hisses, and the barrel of the weapon touches my forehead, as he climbs the rest of the way to his feet.

My chest is heaving in painful gasps, and tears slip out of the corner of my eyes, but I don't let them close. If I'm going to die, I want to see it happen. Harry would never close his eyes when an enemy is in his sight.

Besides, if he should kill me, but he hasn't, there must be a reason why.

One of the girls lets out a squeal, and our attacker swings his gun violently. I think, in the struggle with me, that he forgot about them. I rise to my feet, slowly, watching as his eyes flick around the room, his arm with the gun jerking with his agitation.

I can get it away from him again. I know I can. But I can't risk Harry's sisters.

"Look. Whatever it is you want, it's yours. I'll go with you, just leave everyone else alone. They don't know anything. They're not part of this. I'm who you came for, right?"

He glances at me, a wild and obstinate look in his glare, before nodding his head in tight little jerks.

"Then you have me. I'll come with you. Let's just go. Before the cops show up. Someone in this building had to have heard the gunshot. The police are probably already on their way."

With any luck, Harry and his team will be waiting for us outside.

He brings his free hand back to his face, wiping another smear of blood from under his nose, before moving his body, still holding the gun in front of us.

“Go,” he barks, and I do, walking quickly towards the door. I entwine my fingers behind my head, just to show him I won’t be any more trouble.

Nausea roils in my stomach when we hit the stairs, and I swallow back the bile that’s coating my tongue like a film. My senses feel hyper aware, every sound and breath amplified to a hundred and ten. I can smell the sticky sweet stench of insanity pouring off the man in waves. Lunacy and determination. It’s as scary a combination as it comes.

This man, whoever he is, has no idea the mistake he just made. Does he realize he just kicked in the front door of a police officer? Not just any police officer, but one the local gangs fear like a physician fears the plague.

I take the steps at an even quick pace, letting my mind process everything I’ve learned in the last two minutes. This man isn’t local. That’s for damn sure. I’ve learned enough about Harry and his reputation over the last two months to know that no one in this county would be stupid enough to kick in Harry Potter’s door. Especially his parent's door. Above a defence academy for heaven's sake.

The man is scared. His hands are shaking worse than mine are.

But he’s tenacious. Coming after me here, like this? The man either has the biggest balls on earth or has nothing else to lose. Or maybe, in his eyes at least, everything to gain.

“Stop,” he barks when we reach the bottom of the stairs, and the gun digs into the small of my back. I stand frozen, hands open at my sides, as he looks around me through the tiny window in the door. Whatever he sees makes him feel safe enough, because he pushes on the bar that opens the latch and moves the gun until it’s pressing into my skull. “Move.”

This is the first time I’ve seen the street in daylight. Cozy little shops line the block, with shade being offered from tables with umbrellas and trees lining the street. It’s not all that busy, seeing as how most of these buildings house businesses on the bottom levels and it’s still too early for them to be open. But there’s one or two people on the street, setting up signs on sidewalks and such.

What I don’t see are police lights, or uniforms, or a mountain man wearing a vest and as angry as a raging bull. My chest collapses in on itself when I realize how heavily I was relying on Harry being out here. On Harry rescuing me.

I throw my shoulders back, my fingers tingling with the need to do something.

Well.

Fuck that then. I’ve never been one for damsels in distress. I see no need to start now.

The man marches me to the car sitting directly in front of the door and digs around in his pocket for the keys. Sloppy. Every woman knows, you have your keys in your palm ready to go. In case you need to fight.

His hand holding the gun loses some of its gusto, the weapon tilting to the side when he transfers his keys to the latch. I step to the side and twist, bringing my arms up and grabbing him around the wrist, scraping my nails as I drag my fingers down and over the hand that holds the gun. His grip was weak, and I easily strip him of the weapon. It fires in the scuffle, and I pray that no one is hit by the stray bullet.

He grabs me around the waist, and my breath whooshes out in a painful explosion as my back hits the trunk and my skull smashes against the window a millisecond later. Stars explode around my vision, and my line of sight narrows and twists before my lungs contract enough to allow much needed oxygen to burst along my red blood cells. I taste copper in my mouth, pain lancing and sharp, and I know I bit something when I collided with the car.

He's growling in my face, his saliva secreting like a rabid dog, but all I hear is white noise, and the blood rushing through my head. I feel the moisture already pooling behind my ear, and know that I must have a head wound, and probably a concussion.

I kick out with my feet, hands turned into claws, desperate to hold on until someone else arrives. Then something shatters across my head, and suddenly, I feel nothing at all.

# The Pieces Start to Fall

## Chapter Summary

Neville makes the twenty-minute drive to my parents' place in less than fifteen, and still, I feel like I've been sitting in this 4X4 for hours.

I'm out of the vehicle before Neville finishes slamming on the brakes. The entire block is cordoned off, the flashing lights of the candy cars are bright, even in the haze of sunlight streaming through the buildings.

I vault the closest barricade, ignoring the people calling my name as I make a beeline for my family. The sound of boots on the pavement echoes in my ear, and I know that Neville and Ron are right behind me.

## Chapter Notes

I'm just going to post the rest of it today.

One more time lol. I am NOT a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer, or british. All mistakes are my own, and anything else, let's call creative license lol. Let me also add, I'm well aware what Hermione does in this chapter is not accurate and probably highly illegal. Just go it with. It makes it more fun lol.

Thanks Happily!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## Harry

Neville makes the twenty-minute drive to my parents' place in less than fifteen, and still, I feel like I've been sitting in this 4X4 for hours.

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Neighbours and gawkers line the street, watching the chaos with fear and curiosity in their eyes. My family, on the other hand, stands rigid in front of the building, anger and determination cresting from them in waves. My stomach lurches in relief when I see everyone is okay.

Until my father catches sight of me running full tilt across the police barricades, and his chest hitches in a sob. He's already offering explanations as he pulls me roughly into his arms.

"She never left the flat, Harry, I swear. I don't know how they could have known she was here. I'm so sorry, son. I'm so sorry."

I gather him close to my heart, giving him the opportunity to apologize, but look over his head to my dad. Sirius, the other man who raised me.

Dad's face is bleak.

"Neville," I say, knowing he's at my right. "Go inside to the office in the back. Video feed is in there. Issa, go with him. Help him with anything he needs."

Neville gives me a squeeze on the shoulder as Issa gives me a watery nod, before leading Neville into the building.

"It wasn't your fault," I tell my parents. I feel like my insides have been scooped out and left on the pavement. "He followed us from the hospital last night. It was my fault. I did this. I should have given her over to Protected Persons."

"Nobody could have anticipated this, son," my father says, trying to be reassuring. All it does is twist the knife deeper into my heart.

"Tell me what happened," I tell them, pulling Remus back far enough that I can see his face.

I look around when I feel a presence closing in around us, and see Kingsley finally made it, with half a dozen other uniforms trailing him.

Another pat on the back.

All I want to do is shoot something.

"We're pulling video now, Harry," Kings says. "All of the other store fronts have offered theirs willingly, and street cams should be in our email within the hour. It's only a matter of time until we get him."

Time I may not have.

"That car is a pile of ash by now," I tell Kingsley, sure that our assailant will keep to his M.O. It's easy enough to avoid the street cams, and this guy has already proven he knows how.

My father looks like a cross between a wolf and a wounded animal, and I give him another hug. He doesn't handle loss well.



“I’m not sure what went on upstairs. But I heard the gunshots from above me, and then another from outside. I don’t think she was hurt, Harry. Or at least, I don’t think he shot her.

"After the first shot, I was trying to make it to her, but they fought for the gun when they made it to the sidewalk and it went off. I ducked, and by the time I was on my feet again they were too far away. She was holding her own against him, winning probably, but he must have hit her on the temple. She crumbled like a rag doll.” My father's voice growls when he says it, and I bite my tongue to keep my scream inside. “He picked her up and shoved her in the boot. There wasn’t anything I could do,” Remus says in a pleading tone, and I try to swallow back my need to chase after Hermione in order to comfort my father about losing her.

It wasn’t their fault. The only person who fucked up here is me. It doesn’t stop me from wanting to punch my first through the window.

“What colour was the car?” I ask my parents.

“Green,” my father replies, and I feel a surge of hope that we might be able to track the car after all. “I already gave them the plate number, and there’s a good shot of it on the video cameras,” he tells me, and my hope rises just a smidge.

“You say she went with him willingly?” I wonder out loud, already suspecting the answer. Gabby confirms it with the tremble of her chin.

“I dropped the kids off at the day nursery this morning, then went back to the flat to hang with Hermione and Issa. Dad went downstairs to close the academy for the rest of the week. Whoever it was kicked in the front door sometime around eight thirty. He fired into the room, then started waving the gun around like a madman. Hermione was already yelling for us to hide. He missed, and Hermione fought him for the gun, sending her elbow into his face. You didn’t tell us she could fight like that, Harry. The gun went flying, and I tried to grab it, but he got there first. I think she broke his nose in the scrabble. There was blood everywhere. The techs are upstairs scrubbing it up or whatever.”

Gabby pauses to take a shuddering breath, and my father reaches for her hand, squeezing it with his. A new wave of terror and anger washes over me at the thought of Gabby trying to grab for the loose weapon. She knows how to handle one. My fathers made sure all of their children could fight and fire a weapon. But the fact that she needed to, in our parents’ home, because I put them in danger, makes me feel sick.

Thank God the babies weren’t there.

“Hermione jumped in front of him again and told him to just take her and go. He looked panicked, Harry. Wild. His face scared me as much as the gun did. You can’t trust a man with that much fear in his eyes. He grabbed her by the arm, shoved the gun in her back, and they left. I hit the button for the alarm as soon as they did. I was at the bottom of the stairs when the gun went off again. I hit the ground until dad pulled me up and told me they were gone.”

I close my eyes and breathe in through my nose. It doesn’t help. All I see is the gun pressed into Hermione’s spine. I rub at the spot on my chest where I was shot, and where she laid the

gentlest of kisses against my skin. It doesn't stop the ache throbbing where my heart should be.

"She saved us, Harry. I thought he was going to kill us. But she saved us."

Of course, she did. My baby's badarse

"She's a doctor," I reply, without giving much thought to what I'm saying. "Saving people is what she does."

"If he wanted her dead," Ron says, conviction in his voice, "he'd have killed her on the sidewalk. The fact that he took her is a good sign, Harry. It means we have time to get her back."

Nausea roils through my stomach, and I drop into a squat, trying to keep from spewing all over the sidewalk.

"What do you want to do, Harry?" Kingsley says, and I look around to see a dozen people or so waiting on my direction. My entire team has shown up behind me, ready to back my play.

My hand lifts to my chest again, rubbing away an entirely different sort of ache. Ron's right. If they wanted her dead, she'd be at my feet right now. I rise from my position, running my hands roughly over my head.

"Let's find this bastard," I growl.

## **Harry**

Neville, Ron, Tonks, and two plain clothes bobbies start taking witness statements. My lead tech girl throws on her lights and speeds back to the office, prepared to fast forward through hours of video hoping to get a clear indication of where this asshole went. Kingsley was barking orders into his mobile to pull the two guys from last night out of holding so that he can try to get more information from them.

Two more techs are across the street, pulling the bullet where it embedded itself when Hermione and her kidnapper struggled for the gun.

Me?

I go upstairs into my parents' flat. I need to see where he took her. Where they fought. There are still more techs in the living room, taking pictures of the blood splatter across the floor. The door is off the hinges, the lock splintered in the wood, a shoe sized hole in the middle of

the door. It took him more than one kick; and thank goodness for that. It gave the girls time to hide, which is probably why he missed everyone when he started shooting into the place.

There's nothing I can help with in the living room, so I wander back to my old bedroom where Hermione slept last night.

Her bag is sitting on the foot of the bed. It's overflowing with medical supplies. I pick through the gauze and the vials of medicine I'm sure is illegal for her to carry around. I should buy her something better to use than a ten-year-old rucksack. I bet this is the same one she used at university. It's thin in places, well-worn in others. Well-loved, more likely, if the way Mia carries it around everywhere is any indication.

The covers are messy, and I sit on the edge of the mattress, letting my fingers linger over where she slept. The sheets are soiled from where we made love, and my stomach rumbles with the fear that last night might be the last time that I kiss her.

The shirt she slept in after I left, one of mine, is draped across the pillow, and I bring it to my nose and inhale the smell of our scents mingling together.

Six hours ago, she was in my arms. In this bed. Now she's in the hands of a psychopath, suffering at his mercy. The muscles in my neck tighten and burn as my mind runs through scenarios of what could be happening to her right now.

She could already be dead, and I'd have no way of knowing.

I slam the door on those fatalistic thoughts. That is not who I am. I don't wallow in self-pity, and Hermione wouldn't expect me to. Hermione is a fighter, and I'll fight through the demons of hell if I have to until I've got her back. I have to trust that she can keep herself alive.

Her prescription pad is on the bedside table, the gun resting uselessly beside it, and I double-take when I see it, dropping her nightshirt and picking up the pad instead.

Written in Mia's sloppy writing is a patient number in blue ink. Under that, scribbled in hot pink, is a name, address, and mobile number. The address is on the same block where Pettigrew was killed.

All the muscles in my body go slack, as comprehension floods through me. After all that muss about breaking confidentiality, Hermione got his girlfriend's information. I rip the top paper from the pad, grab Mia's medical bag, and take off at a run, out the front door and down the two flights of stairs.

"Neville," I holler when I hit the outside. He's a few buildings down, and we meet halfway in the middle. I'm already handing him the crumpled paper.

"Run her! Now. I think she's Pettigrew's girlfriend."

He stammers to respond, his face all wide-eyed confusion, and Ron rips the paper from his grip, already on the mobile with dispatch.

“Keys,” I say, holding out my hand. Neville drops them into my palm without question, rubbing at his forehead like he can’t quite understand what’s going on. Then he runs when I run, trusting that I know what the fuck is going on. This is the first lead we’ve had in six weeks. I’m not taking the time required for Neville to catch on.

“Bane,” I hear Ron yell, then catch sight of Ron’s car keys flying through the air. “Take it back to the station,” he commands with his mobile still at his ear as a uniformed constable I don’t recognize catches the keys to his chest. When we reach the car, Neville climbs into the back seat without having to be told.

I take a few seconds to try to explain as I jam the key into the ignition.

“Mia treated Pettigrew’s girlfriend and kept it to herself. Some bullshite about patient-doctor confidentiality.” Neville almost chokes on his tongue when I put a hand behind the passenger seat and throw the 4X4 into reverse.

“She did what?” he exclaims, besides himself with indignation.

“Don’t get me started,” I huff, my anger at the situation already blooming. “I found that on the bedside table,” I say, nodding at the note in Ron’s hands. “It’s got to be the girl. It’s the only explanation for the patient ID number.”

It has to be her. Why else would Mia have it there? She must have planned on giving it to me today.

“I’ll have the woman’s information in a minute,” Ron confirms from the passenger seat, dropping his mobile into his lap.

The strobe lights are on in the 4X4, and I pull onto a motorway, hoping it has less traffic. Two squad cars fall in line behind me, one with its sirens on, and people move out of our way as we fly down the road.

“Here we go,” Ron says, pulling up information on his mobile. “Marlene McKinnon, age forty-four. Lives at 2313 Hogwarts Ave. No record, but, has a juvenile file that’s sealed. Works across the lake at Hargraves International for the last two years. Employment history is spotty before that.”

I open my mouth to tell Neville to check if she’s at work, but he’s already beat me to it. The ringing on his speaker phone bursts into the car.

His voice deepens and twangs as he asks to speak with Ms. McKinnon, then he drops the call when a sweet-sounding female picks up. Ron picks up the radio and lets dispatch know our new destination.

“How are we going in?” Neville asks, pulling and checking his weapon.

“Hot,” I reply, zooming over the bridge.

The building is right on the other side of the bridge. It's in a newer business park that's outfitted with electric charging parking spots and little benches to feed the birds. Hargraves International has a warehouse all to itself, but the building is as nondescript as it comes. You can't tell whether they make baby baths or cocaine from looking at the outside.

There's only a handful of cars in a car park designed to hold hundreds. It has a definite feeling of disuse, despite the manicured lawns.

Neville steps ahead of us and pulls open the door, allowing Ron and me to step through. Two of the uniformed constables follow us in, and the others wait outside. Scoping out the place for danger. It doesn't matter that we're on the East side of the Lake. This whole place is making my bullshite meter screech.

It's beautiful. There's modern art against the walls. A fountain in the reception area. Yet, there's not a single identifying marker to say what this company does. There's not even a logo on the wall.

"Can I help you?" the receptionist says. An older woman, she's got a brook no attitude aura about her. Rather than finding five police constables intimidating, she seems irritated that we've busted up her workflow.

Apparently, this is not a woman who is used to being told no.

I pull my badge from my hip, showing it to the receptionist.

"I'm DCI Potter with Hogsmeade PD. Marlene McKinnon, ma'am. Where is she?"

The gatekeeper pushes up from her seat. It's impressive the way she seems to look down her nose at us for all that we're a foot taller than her bowed form.

"This is a place of business sir. I'm afraid you can't just barge in here whenever you want."

"The hell I can't," I snap.

Neville steps forward, trying to soothe her ruffled feathers.

I don't have time for this shite.

I push past them and into the hallway.

"Marlene McKinnon," I bellow, holding my badge out in front of me. "We need to speak to Marlene McKinnon."

It's a long hallway with doors every few feet. Faces start to appear in doorways, but none that match the picture from her photo ID.

"Marlene McKinnon," I yell, pitching my voice a little louder. "This is the police. Don't make us do this the hard way. Come out, come out, wherever you are."

The door at the end of the hall opens, and a woman in a long-sleeved dress walks into the hallway.

“I’m Marlene,” she says in a trembling voice. She’s wearing a pair of flats, her hair tucked neatly into a bun at the nape of her neck. She looks pure, and well put together, and nothing like I’d expect one of Pettigrew’s girls to look.

“I need you to come with us, ma’am,” I tell her, making an effort to modulate my tone. She’s shaking like a leaf, her eyes flicking around to everything but me.

“Wha-wha-why?” she stutters out, her weight twitching from foot to foot.

“We have some questions for you,” Ron says, pulling his cuffs from his hips in a menacing manner. “Regarding the murder of Peter Pettigrew.”

The girl practically melts on the spot and leans into the doorframe to keep herself upright.

None of this makes sense. Nothing.

Pettigrew was a pimp. A gangster. What was he doing spending time with a girl like this? This is not the type of woman Pettigrew would go for. She’s practically a wallflower. She’s terrified. This is no hardened criminal. You can’t fake this sort of fear.

I can’t imagine she had anything to do with Pettigrew’s murder. I’d bet my left arm she doesn’t know shite about Mia either.

Fuck, fuck, FUCK.

I kick the wall. They can bill the department for the hole I put in it.

The wallflower squeals in fear at my outburst, bringing her hands to cover her mouth.

Another fucking dead end, and the clock is ticking.

“Grab her,” I tell Ron, already moving onto the next step in my mind.

“What is this?” comes from a sharp voice behind Marlene. A secondary door I hadn’t noticed opens behind the girl, and a well-dressed older woman stalks up to stand at Marlene’s side.

A woman with grey hair.

Wearing Louboutin heels.

“What’s going on here?” she asks me in a sharp tone, and it doesn’t take Ron’s grunt of surprise for me to remember where we’ve met before.

Peter Pettigrew’s funeral.

A piece of the missing puzzle clunks into place.

Neville, God bless him, finally catches on. He steps into the lead, reaching out his hand for the older woman.

“Neville Longbottom, ma’am. And you are?”

She shakes his hand with a thin layer of civility, barely restraining from wiping her hand off afterwards.

“Professor Minerva McGonagall. I own this company. What are you doing with my assistant?”

Assistant. Pettigrew’s girlfriend is the assistant to the woman he supposedly knows through charity work? God himself couldn’t convince me of a coincidence this big.

Ron pulls the girl into his side, quietly assuring her that it’ll all be okay, then reading her rights.

I have no idea how that girl got mixed up in everything that’s going on. I still don’t *understand* what the hell is going on. But her reaction to us and Mia’s description of her from their one interaction tells me if we leave her here, she’s the next person we find dead on a corner. If we find her at all.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” Neville says pompously, soothing out any ruffled feathers. “This must be a huge misunderstanding. But we do need to take Ms. McKinnon down to the station with us. Just to get this sorted out.”

“Do you have a warrant?” Minerva demands, her tone no less harsh than before. Her posture changes, melting from hostility to wariness as she looks between us and the rest of her employees still staring out from their offices.

“No, ma’am.” Neville drawls, sounding all the world like it’s his greatest regret on earth. “But as it stands, we’re not looking to press any charges. We just need to ask your employee a few questions.”

“This is ridiculous,” she asserts, finally walking into the hallway. “Marlene had nothing to do with the death of poor Peter. She didn’t even know the man.”

I don’t miss the way her eyes narrow in warning in Marlene’s direction. A minute ago, the girl was trembling in fear from Ron. Now she tucks in closer to his side, silently begging him for protection.

“We’re really sorry for barging in like this,” Neville assuages the woman. “I’m sure you understand. It’s one of the necessary evils of the job.”

Ron starts walking Marlene down the hallway, his cuffs placed safely back at his side. The girl gives a terrified look over her shoulder, before allowing herself to be led out of view.

“Of course. I understand. We have nothing to hide. All the same, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t question her until her solicitor arrives. I’ll send mine to meet her there.”

“That’s awfully kind of you ma’am,” Neville replies.

“ We’re a family here. *Bidh mi a ‘toirt aire dhomh fhin* . We take care of our own.”

Coldness washes over me. Years of training is the only thing that keeps my face blank. As it is, I’m sure if she looked hard enough, she could see my heart thundering out of my chest.

That Goddamn Son of a bitch!

I shove my hands into my vest, taking in the building and employees with a new and critical eye.

The tightening of Neville’s shoulders is the only indication he understood what just happened.

No wonder the MI5 can’t find the guy they’re searching for. We stormed into an almost abandoned warehouse and ended up standing in the middle of the Scottish Mafia. MI5 has been looking for the Mafia in boardrooms, when they should have been scouring the streets.

No one’s checking beautiful senior citizens for connections to the mob. Just like no one bothered to confirm that a person named Herman could be anything but a man. My anger rises to a boiling point.

MI5’s prejudices almost got us all killed.

My fingertips scrape against my vest, looking for something to squeeze, and I turn on my heel and march out of the building, so I don’t give into the temptation to strangle her until she tells me where Mia is.

Neville makes it all the way back to the other side of the car, where he can’t be seen, before he starts kicking the wheel for all that he’s worth.

I don’t bother.

I finally have a target for all my frustrations. This can go one of two ways now. Either Minerva calls whoever is holding Mia and tells them to kill her now. Or they think they’ve got leverage by holding her.

All I can do at this point is pray she chooses the latter. I’ll either find Mia alive or kill every person who had anything to do with her death.

I still don’t have enough information.

“You two,” I bark at the constables who accompanied us into the building. “You sit right here. Let us know the minute anyone tries to leave the premises.”

I get swift nods of acknowledgement.

“You two,” I say, pointing at the other pair, “move so that you can guard the back. Same instructions. Someone so much as peeks through a window, you call it in.”



They don't even bother with the nods. Simply climb into their vehicle and pull out of the spot.

I turn and face the girl, who has silent tears dripping down her face.

"You have two choices as far as I see it. You tell us everything you know, and by the time you leave this car I'll have you in Protected Persons. Or you don't, and I give you back to the Mob, who'll assume you did anyway. You have the twenty-five-minute drive back to the station to make up your mind."

She bobs her head in a spastic little agreement, then climbs into the back of the 4X4 when Ron holds open the door. Ron, ever the mother hen, is already whispering in her ear about what a brave girl she is, for all that she's older than us.

I give the keys back to Neville and switch sides with him as I pull my mobile to my ear.

It only rings twice before the line picks up.

"John," I say, without waiting for his hello. "I think I found your mob boss. Gather your team, meet me at The Lair."

## Chapter End Notes

Soooo, twist lol!

# Final explosions

## Chapter Summary

“Uhhhhhh.”

My skull is killing me. I try to rotate it on my pillow, searching for a comfortable spot. When I lift my head, however, it simply flops back on my neck, a painful snapping sound reverberating over my senses. Not to mention down my spine.

Huh?

I try to open my eyes, but they’re heavy, like attempting to lift weighted curtains. Doable, for sure. But not with much grace.

## Chapter Notes

One more time lol. I am NOT a doctor, a lawyer, a police officer, or british. All mistakes are my own, and anything else, let's call creative license lol.

## Hermione

“ *Uhhhhhh* .”

My skull is killing me. I try to rotate it on my pillow, searching for a comfortable spot. When I lift my head, however, it simply flops back on my neck, a painful snapping sound reverberating over my senses. Not to mention down my spine.

Huh?

I try to open my eyes, but they’re heavy, like attempting to lift weighted curtains. Doable, for sure. But not with much grace.

It’s when I try to rub at my eyes and find my wrists held at a painful angle at the side and behind me, that the rest of the fog evaporates from my system, and I remember where I am, and how I got there.

Or at least, how I got here, since I have no idea where I am.

I twist my head from side to side, taking in the low-lit stuffy atmosphere of a basement.

A basement. It's the only explanation.

There's a set of stairs off to the side, a washer and dryer shoved into a corner by an industrial sink. The room is bare, at least the parts that I'm able to see. The floor is concrete. There's a tiny window at the top of the wall, so high that I wouldn't even be able to reach it with my fingertips.

Which is a moot point, since I'm zip tied to a chair.

I give my wrists a painful tug, but the ties dig into my flesh, and I stop before I draw blood. The bandage is still covering my arm, so that's a good sign, at least. But the sticky crusty feeling when I move my neck tells me that I've bled from a wound above my shoulders, and I mentally start to run through my checklist of concussion symptoms.

I'm nauseous, have a headache. Exhausted beyond belief. Though, seeing as I've never been kidnapped before, I have no way of knowing if those are normal sensations from the experience or a side effect of my head being smashed against two tons of metal. I was unconscious though, so that's a strong x in the Hermione has a head trauma box.

The floorboards above my head are creaking, and I hear someone walking in the room above. Friend or foe, I have no way of knowing. There's only one way to find out.

"Help," I scream at the top of my lungs. My voice cracks and breaks, my throat impossibly dry from the trauma of this morning. I really have no way of telling, outside of the window in the corner, but instinctively I know it hasn't been that long. I swallow thickly, trying to coax moisture back into my mouth, and then part my lips and scream again. "Can anybody hear me? Help! I've been kidnapped!"

The door opens, and his voice hits me at the same time the first shoe on the stairs does.

"Don't waste your breath, bitch. It's just the two of us. We're the only house around for ages. No one can hear you scream."

It's such a cliché thing to say that I scoff, and then end up in a coughing fit for my troubles, as my throat isn't strong enough to support such a sarcastic response.

We may be alone now, but he doesn't know Harry the way that I know Harry. He'll find me. I have no doubt about it. The goal is to stay alive until he does.

The way I see it, I have two choices. I can play meek and beg him for mercy. I can try to reach for his compassionate side, if he even has one. Or I can fight back. He's cleaned his face since I got a look at him last, but the awkward swollen shape of his nose confirms that I broke it for him. Not to mention the scratches covering his hands. I think it's a little late to play the pathetic princess card.

So.

“You do know who I am, don’t you?” I demand of him, trying to pretend I’m sitting in this prostrated position because I’ve chosen to, and not because I’m tied to a kitchen chair.

“Yeah,” he says, a sneer on his face. “You’re the bitch that talked to the police. You should have known better than that. Snitches get stitches,” he goads, cracking his knuckles. I have to bite the inside of my lip to keep from rolling my eyes.

Seriously? This is the guy that killed Peter Pettigrew? Harry’s going to be so pissed. He really has a thing against incompetent criminals.

Though, seeing as I’m currently tied to a chair, maybe he’s not as incompetent as he seems.

“No. I’m the bitch who’s dating a cop. Don’t you wonder why your men keep ending up dead? But you? You still have a chance. Let me go, and I won’t tell them who you are. You don’t even have to let me go. Just leave. Now. Get out of town while you still can. Save yourself, before you end up on a slab in the morgue next to your friend.”

His eyes flare in anger and fear, and he crosses his arms over his chest, digging the nails of his fingers into the opposite forearms.

He starts to pace in front of me and finally, an inkling of real fear trickles down my spine. His pupils are blown, he’s scratching at his arms. He’s mumbling under his breath, and every few steps he skips and jerks his arms, like he’s fighting with an unknown opponent.

Mania caused by drug use, or drug use to control the mania?

Either way, the man fighting himself in front of me is not in his right mind. A rational mind can be bargained with. Negotiated. Made to see sense. To the insane mind, the only sense is their own.

This man is mental.

“No,” he yells, and the outburst would have surprised me if I hadn’t been watching him so closely.

“No,” he says again, stopping to stand in front of me, and resolve slides into his eyes. “You’re going to tell me what exactly you told the police, and then I’m going to kill you. I’ll show them that we don’t need her. I got rid of our biggest competition, and then cleaned up all of the loose ends. All without any help from her. They’ll see, once I finish you. They’ll see.”

Without any warning, he balls up his fist and socks me in the stomach. Pain explodes in my solar plexus, and my diaphragm seizes, forcing all the air from my lungs for the second time today. My body bows on impact, an attempt to curl up and protect itself, but my bindings keep me in place. Tears stream down my face, and the room spins around me while I fight to bring my breathing back under control.

It returns to me in phases, and I attempt to take slow, shallow gasps, easing air back into my body.

“What did you tell the bloody fuzz?” he asks me, squatting in front of the chair. I shake my head no, the muscles in my body trembling from lack of oxygen.

I need to slow my heart rate, before I pass out from the shock to my system. I pull my wrists until the plastic bands dig into my flesh, using the counter pain to help center my brain and distract my concentration while my body relearns how to breathe.

I want to curl in on myself and go to sleep. I want Harry to pull me into his arms and hold me while I cry.

I’m terrified. Blind with panic and fear.

Because no answer I give this bloke is going to make him happy. I can’t tell him what he wants to know. Because I didn’t tell the police anything. I didn’t know who he was, until he kicked down the front door. If he were in his right mind, he’d already realize that. Seeing as he’s not yet behind bars. Or dead like his friends. If I’d known who he was, the police would already have him.

But he’s not in his right mind. Which means I’m in more danger than I could have possibly imagined. The nausea finally wins the battle at the back of my throat, and I tip my head to the side and throw up, the sound of the liquid splattering against the pavement only adding to the sickness surging through my body.

The clenching of my muscles fights with the contracting of my lungs, and for a moment I’m afraid I may choke to death on my vomit.

I have to stay alive. It’s the only thought I have any more. I have to stay alive, until Harry and his team find us. He won’t kill me, if he thinks I have more information to give.

I hope.

“Don’t you know,” I ease out between quaking lips, “that you aren’t supposed to punch a lady?”

He rises to his feet, shaking out his hands, and before I have a chance to prepare myself, he backhands me across the face. His knuckles make impact with my cheek, the bone-on-bone collision sending bursts of pain surging through my face. My head snaps on my neck, and I feel the crack of my joints and the whiplash in my spine. The force of the blow feels like a knife to my brain, adding insult to injury to my burgeoning concussion.

My chin falls to my chest, the loose tendrils of hair not stuck to my skin by sweat and blood covering my face.

“I didn’t tell them anything,” I whisper.

He kicks out at my chair, scooting me sideways but not knocking me over. It jerks my head again, and a fresh batch of tears leak from my eyes. I don’t want to cry, but I don’t seem to have any control over that facility at the moment.

They aren't tears from fear, I want to yell at the man. They're tears from anger, and frustration, and the fact that if I weren't tied to this fucking chair, I'd so kick this dipshit's arse.

Don't turn your back to an enemy, I hear Harry whisper in the recesses of my mind, and I lift my chin to look my attacker in the eye.

I spit the blood pooling in my mouth onto his shoes, and he grabs me by the cheeks, shaking my head this way and that. A moan of pain slips from my lips, and I cringe at how weak it makes me sound.

"You're a stubborn bint, aren't you?"

"Yes," I reply, before I have a chance to modulate my response. He whacks me again across the other cheek, but I'm better prepared for it this time, and my head barely moves.

He storms away from me in anger, his steps on the stairs a sharp contrast to the silence of him pacing on the pavement. I hear the creak of the floorboards, then the slam of a door, before peace envelopes the house.

I tug at the bindings on my wrists, ignoring the pain searing into my skin, and wiggling and yanking as hard as my non-existent leverage will allow.

Nothing.

My feet aren't bound, and I try to rise in the chair, to smash it against the wall. But my frame is too tiny. I don't have the bulk required to stand while strapped to a piece of furniture. I make it a few inches, maybe a foot or two, before I trip and fall. I hit the pavement on my side and cry out at the impact as pain lances up my arm.

The door slams again, and moments later steps return to the stairs.

"Stupid stubborn bint," he grumbles and kicks out at me before hauling my chair upright again. He makes contact with my belly, but thanks to the way I'm stuck in the seat, it's a glancing blow instead of a fatal one.

Then I see the items he dropped on the floor in order to pull me up, and I can't stop the way my chest heaves in fear and panic.

He hits the button to light the kitchen butane torch, and fire, blue and bright, ignites in the air in front of me. He wiggles the flat head screwdriver inches from my face, and my eyes cross in an effort to keep it clear in my view.

"What did you tell the police?" he demands from me, watching the metal turn from grey, to pink, to white, as he heats the screwdriver with the flame.

"Nothing. I swear. I didn't tell them anything because I didn't see anything. I promise. I promise!"

I'm panting, and dizzy, and I feel the blood dripping over my hands from the desperate tugging of my arms, but all he does is shake his head.

He looks like I've disappointed him.

"Wrong answer," he says, then touches the metal to my thigh, and I scream as the smell of sizzling flesh reaches my nostrils.

## Harry

"Where's Hermione," I ask, getting straight to the point.

Marlene is sitting in the back with Ron, and her head pivots between where I'm leaning over the front seat and Ron sitting beside her.

"Um. Um," she stutters, wringing her hands in her lap. "I want to help you. I do. I'm tired of being in this life. But I don't know who that is."

"That's okay," Ron hums at her, rubbing her back in gentle circles.

"The doctor," I reiterate, leaning farther in her direction. She pulls back visibly, a fresh coat of tears welling up in her eyes. At Ron's pointed expression, I turn back towards the front.

"Dr. Herman Granger," he says probingly. "I think you met her, didn't you?"

Marlene's start of surprise is audible.

"The lady doctor? What does she have to do about this?"

I start to turn around, but Neville places his hand on my chest to keep me still. I glare at him, eyes trailing between his face and his fingers digging into my vest. He shakes his head no, and as I can't actually remember another instance in the time that I've known him that he's stood up to me, I face towards the traffic again and let Ron handle the questioning.

"She's missing," Ron tells her gently, and the knife that's taken up residence where my heart should be twists around in the damaged meat. I watch in the rear-view mirror as Marlene brings her hands out in front of her and shakes her head vigorously in denial.

"Uh uh. Professor McGonagall didn't have anything to do with that. It musta been Theo."

I stare pointedly out the side window, watching the cars as we wiz by them. Copper coats my tongue as I bite it to keep my emotions in check.

"Who's Theo?" Ron asks.

“Theo is Professor McGonagall’s nephew. He’s a right fuck up. She’s always bailing him outta trouble. She tries to keep him outta town. She gave him his own crew to handle in Kensington, as an account that he was always complaining that she pushes him outta the family business. But he fucked that up too and came home a few months ago outta the blue. Been causing trouble ever since.”

“What’s Theo’s last name,” I ask her tightly.

“Notte.”

I pick up my walkie to have dispatch run his name, and almost miss what she says next.

“It’s Theo who killed Pettigrew,” she whispers.

I glance over at Neville and see the tension pulling his body tight. I hit the button for my coms unit.

“60-72 Henry. I need a name run on one Theo Notte. I need a mobile number, personal vehicle, address, anything you can give me.”

“Roger that. I’ll shoot it over when we have it.”

“This is in regard to a kidnapping. The quicker the better.”

“You’ll have it when I have it, sir,” the dispatcher assures me, and that’s as good as I’m going to get right now.

“Why don’t you start at the beginning,” Ron coaxes Marlene.

“What’s she a Professor of?” Nev asks.

“Chemistry. Alchemy.”

Why doesn’t that surprise me?

“Killing Pettigrew was an accident,” she says, and I can’t contain my disbelief.

“He was accidentally shot from a car five times?”

“No. Theo shot him on purpose. But he didn’t know the Professor had been working with him. Like I said, Theo is a real screw up. When his Pa died, he should have risen to head of the family. But Professor McGonagall took over instead, and no one batted an eye. I guess, when he saw Pettigrew walkn’ home from my place, I don’t know, he thought he’d be praised for popp’n a rival seller. But Professor McGonagall has been supplying Pettigrew’s crew with their product. She was right mad when Theo told her what he did. I ain’t ever seen her so mad.”

Her voice is trembling, and she has to pause several times to sniffle.



“I was able to get the police report from the station. I used Professor McGonagall’s foundation to pull the strings. Told the records lady that Pettigrew was a volunteer at our outreach program, which he was. Kinda.”

“You’re the reason they were after her,” I seethe.

“No!” She insists. “I told you. If the doc is missing, Professor McGonagall didn’t have anything to do with it. The Professor, she’s one of those OCD types. Likes things all nice and neat. There was no mention of Theo in the police report. The police didn’t start knocking on her door. I ran a background on the doctor. She obviously didn’t know anything. Professor McGonagall said we’d keep an eye on her, but unless something happened, she didn’t want to kill a prominent physician and bring even more trouble down on our heads. She told Theo that the best thing for him to do would be to go back to Kensington. We haven’t seen him for weeks.”

“Did Theo know about Dr. Granger?” Ron asks.

For the first time since the questions started, she hesitates before she answers.

“No? I couldn’t tell you, to be honest. Professor McGonagall told Theo that she’d clean up his mess one last time, but that was it. Theo got really mad. Screamed that he could take care of himself, and he could take care of the family. Theo, he’s not really the thinking type, you know. Drugs are only a small part of what the family does. Kind of like a side business? But seeing as how drugs were most important in his life, he seemed to think that they should have been the most important in everybody else’s. Honestly, the only reason he’s not dead yet is because he was her brother’s son.”

If they haven’t seen him for weeks, that means *Theo* has been looking for Mia, and not the Mob. From the sounds of it, he’s trying to clean up his own mess for once. But that doesn’t make the situation any better.

If anything, it makes it worse. If they don’t know where he is, then we’ve lost our main avenue of finding him ourselves.

We’re about two minutes out from the station. Her tears have dried. She looks almost relieved to be getting all of this off her chest.

“How did you get mixed up in all of this Marlene?” I ask her.

“My old man worked for Mr. Notte. He was good to us. Daddy died, protecting him. Professor McGonagall took me under her wing. I work in the office. Handle the paperwork. But I’m tired of being scared all the time.” The sniffles are back. “Pettigrew was only there that night because I’m not allowed to date. I certainly couldn’t date any of Professor McGonagall’s business associates. I want to be able to sleep again without hearing gunshots.”

When we pull into the parking lot, Neville takes his vest off and hands it back to Ron. Ron gives him a questioning look but doesn’t open his mouth.

“She’s had a half hour to get something in place,” Nev says succinctly. “This woman is dangerous.” Ron hands the vest to Marlene, who takes it like it’s covered in acid. “She needs it more than I do.”

~\*\*~

John is standing in the middle of our offices with a squadron of bored-looking suits around him when we make our way into The Lair.

“I don’t know what the hell has changed in the last twenty-four hours, Potter, but I don’t remember agreeing to being your lap dog,” he barks at me.

Marlene, who is currently sandwiched between Neville and John, baulks at the harshness in John's tone.

“I come bearing you presents, and that’s the way you treat me. Harsh cuz,” Neville says, some of his old playfulness dancing in his tone. “Harsh.”

“John Longbottom,” I say, pointing palm up in Marlene’s direction, “meet Marlene McKinnon. Personal Assistant to Professor McGonagall, leader of the Scottish Mob. Marlene,” I say, pointing towards John, “meet John Longbottom. Lead agent in a two-year MI5 investigation into your boss, and cousin to our esteemed Neville here. Make friends. He’ll make sure you’re safe.”

I turn and face John. A myriad of emotions skate across his face, and his jaw hits his chin as I explain who she is.

“What? How? I don’t understand.” He takes a step back, the reality of the situation too heavy for him to handle maybe.

“I’ll get her situated,” Ron says, leading Marlene towards the interview rooms.

“Neville.”

He looks at me expectantly, a hidden yawn pulling his face tight.

“Go get a cuppa and meet me at a computer in five. I want to run the property records for the corporation that 4x4 was registered to.”

“Got it,” he says. He gives his cousin a chin bob before high tailing it out of the room.

“Professor Minerva McGonagall,” I start without any preamble. “Head of the family. We got a tip that the girl, Marlene, may have had information regarding the kidnapping of Dr. Granger, and with that, the killing of Peter Pettigrew. We picked her up at her place of work. The boss, McGonagall, said the motto *we take care of our own* . Only she said it in Gaelic, when she was assuring Marlene that the family solicitors would meet her at the station. That enough to get you a warrant?”

His eyes bulge out of his head, and his arse drops uncoordinatedly onto the edge of a desk.

“A woman,” he parrots.

Of course, that’s what he’s hung up on.

“A woman,” I confirm.

“I guess that makes a weird sort of sense,” he mumbles, his fingers running over his forehead.

“You mean because the person you’ve been chasing is clean, well-organized and knows how to keep their shit together? Yup. Makes perfect sense you’re looking for a woman.”

His scowl is one for the ages.

“I suggest you get a move on. Marlene has already agreed to testify, so long as you keep her safe. Get the paperwork signed before Professor McGonagall’s solicitor shows up and tries to stop you.

“Yeah, mate,” he says, gathering his wits back around him. “You coming?”

I don’t even have to think about it.

“Nope.”

Ron catches up with me on my way to the computer room.

“I figured you’d stay with Marlene a while,” I say, glancing over at him as he falls into step beside me. “She looks like she could use the support.”

He runs his fingers through his hair, letting it go every which direction.

“A female MI5 agent took her off my hands. I figured that was better anyhow. I won’t be able to go with them when they take her from the building, and she’ll probably feel more at ease clinging to a woman than a man with six children.”

“That’s why she could cling to you,” I say. “You’re a good man, Ron.”

“Hmm,” is the only response I get.

Neville is already in the computer room. There are three Styrofoam cups lined up next to him, one with a tea bag dangling from the side.

When this is all over, I need to give him a raise. Or at least tell him thank you.

Ron and I each reach for our cups, and some of the tension leaks from my shoulders when the first burst of caffeine hits my tongue.

The only thing keeping me standing at this point is pure adrenalin.

“There’s precious little here, boss.”

He slides to the side and uses a mouse connected to a different system. A picture of Minerva McGonagall takes up the screen.

“By all accounts, the professor is as pure as the driven snow. Doesn’t have so much as a parking ticket in her name. Sole owner of Hargraves International. Owns a home on the East Side of the Lake. It’s in the low millions, but nothing that screams dirty money. Two vehicles registered to her name. No children and never married. Hargraves International states that they are a third-party distribution centre, but I can’t seem to find any companies that they distribute for.”

“What about the other company? Is there any way to tie her to it?”

He shakes his head before he answers.

“None. Or at least, not on the surface. The business license paperwork was submitted by a solicitor's office, and the address registered is to an older house on the outskirts of town.”

“Pull it up, let me look at it. Utilities?”

His fingers fly over the keyboards, as he flips back and forth between his laptop, which was still here from earlier, and the system used by our tech guys.

“Looks like they’re paid in cash, year at a time. The house is owned, no mortgage.”

An image pops up on the screen of a once nice home, now rundown from neglect and misuse.

“It’s secluded,” Ron says, as Neville flips through the blueprints on the computer.

Kingsley comes huffing into the room, his mobile at his ear.

“You put a bolo out on the green Toyota? Fire and Rescue just put it out under an overpass at McGrath and High Street.”

He hunches over as he gasps for breath, his hand supported on his knee. It’s been a long time since he’s been in the field.

“Boss,” Neville says, excitement coating his features. “That’s two blocks from the house.”

He’s already pushing up from the computer, chugging his coffee back before tossing it into the can.

“Have SWAT meet us there. That’s where she’s at. Let’s go, lads.”

I take a look at a clock as we run from the room. It’s barely twelve o’clock. He’s had her for three and a half hours.

But a lot of damage can be done in that short of time.

I send up a prayer that we get to her in time.

## Hermione

Shock.

It can kill you. Sometimes shock will kill you quicker than the injury that caused the shock to begin with. Shock will cause your body to shut down, your organs cutting themselves off in an attempt to limit the damage until you slip off into sleep, never to wake again.

Other times, shock will save your life.

Like when you're being tortured by a psychopath and your mind disengages from your body to protect itself from being overwhelmed by the pain.

Logically I know it hasn't been that long. We can't have been at this for more than a few minutes. No more than a few hours. But it feels like I've been in this chair for weeks. Months. With nothing but the pain to keep me company.

The agony in my body has merged into one giant ache. I'm no longer able to differentiate between the screaming in my leg and the pounding in my head. The bruises that are surely blooming under my shirt. The stitches that I've ripped from my arm.

I wonder, in that abstract sort of way my mind is functioning in, how much of my leggings are now branded into my skin? Will oral antibiotics keep the infection at bay? Or, by the time he's done with me, will I need to spend weeks hooked up to a picc line. Multiple medications multiple times a day to ensure my body doesn't succumb to a staph infection or sepsis. Will it take a surgeon's touch to dig the threads of my pants back out of the wounds again?

He's not even waiting for my answers anymore. This lunatic. Jesus, I still don't know who he is. He's really found his stride, playing with the fire.

He lights the torch, watching the flame for a moment or two. Rotating the device in his hand this way or that to observe the way the fire changes. Then he inserts the tip of the metal into the heat. I always watch that part too. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to turn my face away.

It takes longer than you think it would. For the metal to heat to a temperature that my torturer deems worthy of me. Frankly I'm wondering if I shouldn't be honoured, that he's taken such care to make sure the sizzling of my flesh is performed to such high standards.

If he attacked the rest of his life with that much precision, I doubt either of us would be in this position, to begin with.

The sound of the butane torch is almost as bad as the feeling of it against my skin. The anticipation of the contact is its own sort of punishment. It roils the muscles in my belly, clenching and heaving and retching as the steady hiss of the gas mixing with the oxygen fills the air.

Thank God my nose has gone scent blind. Another wonderful side effect of shock, I'm sure. I can no longer smell my own body burning.

I've managed to rein in my screams. He likes it too much. For that reason alone, I'm able to keep my throat closed, and my jaw locked with an iron key. I no longer care if he kills me. But I won't give him any more satisfaction than he's already got.

Occasionally he'll give my face a shove or run his knuckles across my cheek. But you can tell his heart isn't in it any longer. Now that he's found the fire, there's no need to waste his time on something as mundane as his fists.

But while I can't seem to turn my face away from the flame, I can't bring myself to watch whenever he adds a notch to the row he's building on my thigh. At my autopsy, I'm sure they'll see the crick in my neck, from flinching to the side over and over as he brings the screwdriver to my leg.

I wouldn't have seen it, if I hadn't been looking away.

I'm not even sure I really did.

A figure crosses over the window, throwing a leg shaped shadow into the basement before the weak sunlight filters back in. My eyes flick to the man in front of me, but if it really happened, he doesn't seem to notice.

No. He's paying much too much attention to the little stick in his hand, and the rainbow of colour that glows like a beacon in the night. Or a way to light his path to hell.

There's no mistaking the squeak of the floorboard though.

My heart thuds into my chest, and I'd throw up again, I'm sure, from the wave of adrenalin freshly surging into my bloodstream if there was anything left in my system to purge. As it is, I feel faint, the world tipping on its side when his ears finally pick up the footsteps I heard fifteen seconds ago.

I can't pass out. I can't pass out. I pull my wrists up and out, a fresh crest of pain and blood deluging my already overstimulated nervous system. But the grey fades from around the edges of my vision, the black spots swirling back into the muted colours of the basement.

Mr. Has a Screw Loose and is taking it out on me, drops the torch and the screwdriver to the floor, and it clangs against the cement in a clatter that feels worthy of waking the dead.

He yanks his gun from the small of his back, the hard-earned calm of moments before shattered in the knowledge that someone has, at last, come for me.

I almost smile, at the look of panic that crosses his eyes. Until he turns his shaking hands towards me again and levels the gun between my brows.

If I could cry, I'm sure I would. My sinuses, screaming as they are, well up in a practised fashion, willing the moisture to spill from my eyes. But I have no tears left. The well has run dry. Another symptom of shock. I need fluids. Stat. Before my kidneys start to fail.

This time I don't even have to think about the path to take. I won't beg, not when I'm this close to the end.

"Run," I tell him, trying to calm my own runaway nerves. My voice is shaky, I'm practically hyperventilating. But even with help so close at hand, there's only one way I get out of this alive. "Run," I command him again, and with a strangled cry of frustration, he does.

"HARRY!" I scream, as soon as my attacker's feet hit the steps. He aims over his shoulder and fires at me but misses in his zeal to make it up the stairs.

"HERMIONE!" I hear in response, and try to cry out again, but emotion overwhelms me, and my throat seizes up when I attempt to scream. The sound of boots hitting the stairs washes over my senses, and I collapse in on myself as much as I can when Harry bounds down the steps three at a time, skidding to a halt on his knees in front of me.

"Baby," he breathes, cupping my face where it lolls on my neck. With Harry so close my strength has fled, the trembling of fear merging with the shaking of relief to make me spasm in the chair like I've been left outside in the cold for too long.

"Harry," I weep in a shaking breath, my chest hitching in the effort to keep my whimpering held at bay.

"Oh, baby. I'm so sorry."

He rips his knife from his boot, flicking open the blade. I flinch automatically, my body not yet registering friend from foe, and Harry freezes in his attempt to free me, panic coursing over his face.

"I won't hurt you," he promises. Then he brings the knife to my wrists, slicing the bindings from where they've embedded in my flesh. The burn is a new kind of exquisiteness when he peels away the plastic that's become part of my body.

When I hear the footsteps on the stairs, I assume it's Harry's team. It doesn't occur to me that they don't announce themselves. Harry isn't paying any attention to anything other than me, and the catalogue of injuries he's already punishing himself for in his mind.

I stare into Harry's face, his anguish so clear in the way his fingers shakingly graze over my skin but don't touch me. The way his neck cords in anger and a shared pain. In the tears that pull to his eyes, and he rubs away roughly with the back of his hand.

It's almost in slow motion when I look up from the torment clouding Harry's face to see the affliction of insanity staring back at me. I don't have time to do more than flinch before the madman pulls the trigger, and Harry's body spasms into my lap, his cry of pain cutting through the haze that has taken over my thoughts.

The madman seems almost as surprised as I feel when Harry slumps onto his knees, blood already coating the side of his body.

I follow the trail of blood sliding down Harry's form, and my eyes land on his weapon hastily jammed back into its holster on his side. His badge, once gleaming and pure, now coated with a film of his own blood.

I don't realize I've got his weapon in my hand until my second palm wraps around the base of the weapon, and the trigger gives up its hold under the pull of my finger.

Again.

And again.

My kidnapper collapses in a heap. It's not like it is in the movies. He doesn't explode backwards in a spray of dramatics. He doesn't climb back to his feet, ready to go another round. He crumbles where he stands, gasping in pain and shock.

Neville and Ron and a gaggle of plainclothes constables bleed into the basement, all talking and jabbering at once. The constables go to my attacker, kicking away his gun before beginning the task of saving his life.

I should get up and help. I don't.

"Get her bag. Go!" Ron shouts, and Neville turns and runs from the basement, taking the stairs in batches and using the railing to haul his lithe form as quick as it will go.

Ron eases Harry from my lap.

He's already conscious, and bitching, and cussing up a storm.

Ron lays him on the floor, then reaches for me, his eyes and hands roaming over my body in a more clinical way than Harry's was a few moments before. But with no less concern behind his eyes.

I push his hands away, then stand so I can kneel next to Harry.

"You need to let us help you," Ron pleads, his hands offering me support when I teeter on my feet, trying to lower myself next to Harry. I let him steady me, then start looking for the bullet wound on Harry.

We end up looking like bickering siblings, each moving the other's hands in an attempt to one-up the other.

"You need to let me help Harry!" I grouch, slapping Ron's hand away from where he's attempting to take my pulse.

Harry tries to sit up, pain lancing across his face, but reaching for me anyway.

"Dammit, Hermione, I'm fine!" Harry practically yells.

"Shut the fuck up and lie still," I snap at him, and half the room freezes to stare at me as I place my hand against his forehead and shove him back down to the floor. A shudder runs



through me when I leave a bloody imprint of my palm on his face.

Neville comes bounding back down the stairs, my bookbag in his grasp.

“Harry made sure we brought it,” he gasps, heaving lungfuls of oxygen in between words. “The ambulance is two minutes out.”

“I’m fine,” Harry grumbles, then pales, when Ron rips the vest away to reveal the bullet hole in his shoulder.

The moron thinks he’s bulletproof. The puddle of blood proves he’s not.

Somehow, in the need to care for Harry, my injuries have faded into the distance. My hands are steady when I rip open the packets of gauze, waiting until Ron has Harry’s shirt cut away to reveal the wound in the meat of his shoulder.

I tip Harry up on his side, looking for an exit wound. None. I probe around the entrance and blood wells up and over my fingers. There. I can feel the bullet. It went all the way through the muscle but stopped before it came out the front of his chest. I lay him flat on the ground, as much gauze as I can grab wedged between his shoulder and the floor. His body weight should be enough pressure to keep the bleeding to a minimum.

Nausea wells in my stomach again. A finger's width to the side and it would have ripped through his lung. Thank goodness for that damn vest.

I reach into my bag, digging around until I find what I’m looking for, and pull out another prepackaged surgical kit, the morphine, and a bottle of iodine.

“Ron, feel the pulse in his wrist. Strong?”

He digs his fingers into Harry’s pulse point, feeling each of his fingers with the other hand.

“Good to me,” he says.

I pop the lid of the iodine before drizzling it over the protruding bullet. I reach for a syringe, only to realize Neville is at my other side, and already has a vial loaded.

“Thank you,” I mumble distractedly.

I let some dribble to the ground, so we don’t OD Harry on narcotics, then jab it into the muscle of his arm.

I reach for the surgical kit, and Neville yanks it open, holding it aloft and in my reach.

“This is gonna hurt,” I tell Harry. “Hold him.”

Once Ron and Neville have him on one side, and another officer has him pinned on the other, I slice a cut into his upper chest and dig the surgical tweezers into the wound to pull the bullet out the opposite way it came in.

The whole thing takes me less than ten seconds.

“Bad arse,” I hear someone, Neville probably, whisper into my ear.

Harry barely even flinches.

“I think it hit the bone,” Harry grunts between clenched teeth, then he hisses when I press on the wound, willing it to stop bleeding. I don’t have enough gauze, so I pull my already ruined shirt off over my head and press it down on the wound as well.

Harry growls in anger, but whether it’s from my near nakedness or the bruises littering my abdomen, I really couldn’t tell you. Or give a rat’s arse about.

The room spins around me, and it has nothing to do with the tons of people now crammed into the tight area.

“Neville,” I bark, and he’s at my side in an instant, eyes taking in the ruin of my body, and my face, and my dignity.

“Deal with this,” I say, grasping his hands and holding them where mine were a minute ago. I shuffle to the side, giving him better access to the wound on Harry’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong? Where are you going?” Harry demands, attempting to rise before his team pins him back down. What looks like a SWAT Team and paramedics pour into the basement, and Neville mumbles under his breath “too little too late,” as the commander takes in the scene in front of him.

“I’m just going right here,” I say, crawling until I’m leaning by Harry’s legs. “I’m going to pass out.”

Then I do. The last thing I hear are exclamations of concern and Harry bellowing out my name before my body finally surrenders, and I lay my head on Harry’s lap, letting oblivion claim me.

# Epilogue

## Hermione

Six weeks. That's how long Harry had to be out of work. I agreed to sign the form to get him on desk duty at week four if only to get him out of my hair. But six weeks is an eternity to a man like Harry.

He manages to find ways to fill the time. When he finally accepted, I wasn't moving in with him, he outfitted my flat with a state of the art alarm system. New door, new locks, video cameras, the works.

He spends more time with his family. Helps out with the business some. Took Issa to a movie one day. We spent a day with Ron and Luna, helping them build a chicken coop.

True to his word, as soon as he could hold a gun, we were at the shooting range. I am a better shot than him, not that he'd ever admit it. Harry took me to the police academy, to let me run their course.

At the end of his six-week-long prison sentence, (as he sees it,) all his wounds are healed and it's back to business as normal.

My wounds won't heal that fast.

Sure, the bumps and bruises fade with time. The neat row of burns on my thigh have started to dull from pink to white. Pretty soon you won't be able to see the ring of scar tissue around my wrist where the plastic of the zip ties held me in place. But the smell of burning flesh still haunts my dreams at night. Not every night. But often enough I wake up gagging on the scent of scorching meat and the taste of blood in my mouth.

That's when I crawl deeper into Harry's arms. His house or mine. My bed or his. It doesn't make a difference. Every night when I go to sleep, Harry is at my side, reminding me in a thousand different ways that I am still alive.

For a man who swore he'd never be in love, he's taken to it like a fish takes to the sea.

Harry never does anything halfway, and that includes loving me.

## Harry

I'm a dangerous man. I live a dangerous life. Women and romance have no place in a world like mine. But I love Hermione, body, and soul. Not that she needs me the way that I need her.

I need Hermione like I need oxygen. Too long without her, and I start to suffocate.

I watch her sometimes. When she sleeps. I watch the way her emotions dance across her face, as her dreams play out behind her eyes. I watch the way she searches for me in the dark, her body automatically hunting for my warmth. I relish the way her features soften and relax when I pull her into my embrace and whisper how much I love her.

Mia's untouchable during the day. She's even started volunteering at a local clinic. Instead of learning to fear the dark alleys of our city, she's trying to shine a light into the corners.

Theo Notte is dead at her hand, and can never hurt another person again.

Minerva McGonagall, well, that's a story for another day.

But Hermione's defences weaken at night.

She thinks this means she needs me. Needs my steadfastness to calm her nerves after what happened to her in that basement. But Hermione is the strongest person I've ever met. Soon enough, she'll remember how fierce she is. She'll remember the woman that left me flat on my arse on the practice mat. The woman who sacrificed herself to save my sisters. The woman who broke a sacred vow, in order to save my life.

That's been the hardest part for her, I think. But every time the guilt overwhelms her, I remind her that she did keep her vow. She didn't pick up my weapon, intending to take a life. She picked up my gun, determined to save one. Hermione is a healer.

She saved me. She saved *us* . It's what she does.

I know she loves me. Maybe she needs me. But she doesn't need me the way that I need her. I need her to breathe.

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