

CHAPTER 28

NOW YOU SEE IT; NOW YOU DON'T

Harry, Ron, and Hermione filtered over the threshold of their Potion's class on Monday morning, the first week of December, under Mad-Eye Moody's charge. He ushered them swiftly through the dimly lit dungeons room, his wooden leg clomping heavily away at the parched flagstone floor. His deep resonant voice secreted soft cyclical grunts of acknowledgement while his spinning glass eye took to securing every angle of the dreary space.

Harry pushed past several clusters of his half-asleep Gryffindor consorts, his face smothered in its new-fangled, lost-in-space expression as he thought ahead to the weekend. In less than a few days, he would be at Grimmauld Place sharing the secret room with Hannah for the entirety of it. It had been months since he had last been granted this fine opportunity and he couldn't be happier.

"Alright, Potter," grunted Mad-Eye Moody, plucking his hip flask from his pocket and taking a swig of its contents. Then wiping his mouth with his sleeve, he said further, "I'll be outside the classroom door should you need me. Remus is due to return by the end of the period, so expect to see him waiting out here for you."

"Thanks, Moody," said Harry.

"So, Hermione, did you ask your Mum and Dad if you can come with us this weekend for the winter festival at Diagon Alley? Everyone will be there," said Ron,

"Yeah. I'm only to stay into early Saturday night though. I have three essays that are due on Monday I need to tend to. Lupin said he'd see me back to the castle."

"I don't get it, Hermione. How is it you manage to acquire more homework than the rest of us? We're all in the same classes and we don't spend *near* as much time studying as you do," said Ron.

"And your marks show it!" snapped Hermione defensively.

"*Excuse me*, for wanting a life outside of the one you have, where your nose is always planted firmly in the pages of a book!" snarled Ron.

"As opposed to the one that you would gladly spend *snogging away* and the other half *thinking about snogging*?" retorted Hermione cleverly.

"I should only be so lucky!" said Ron.

“Guys, not this again. Can’t you lot find something else to argue about?” droned Harry.

Hermione scoffed and pushed steadfastly ahead of him and Ron, taking a seat at the far end of the table, next to Neville.

“Good morning, Neville,” she said, throwing her nose in the air at Ron and Harry. She flopped her knapsack onto the table, pulled out her potions book, her quill and parchment, and arranged them neatly across the surface of the table in front of her.

“Good morning, guys,” said Neville, switching his gaze curiously between a begrudged Ron, a tart-faced Hermione, and a deep in thought looking Harry.

“Neville,” addressed Ron shortly, letting out a short disapproving grunt in Hermione’s direction and plopping himself sourly on the other side of Neville. He leaned forward and snarled out to Hermione, “You know, if you spent *near* as much time tending to me as you do those bloody books of yours, I’d be the *happiest* bloke on earth!”

“Perhaps, if you made it worth my while, I might be inclined to oblige!” snapped Hermione. “Interestingly enough, I happen find the company of a good book far more intriguing than *your* lumbering touch!”

Ron’s face practically melted beneath this scorching humiliation.

Hermione grinned triumphantly with the knowledge that her insults had burned his self-esteem to a near crisp. Her smile ever expanded as she watched him prop his potions book in front of him and slump uncomfortably behind it to avoid the gaping mugs of Neville and Harry.

Then, bursting into the classroom came a swirling mass of school robes, escorted by the sound of a prominent Scottish brogue crooning out, “Hey, you lot! Have you heard the *dreadful* news?”

It was Seamus Finnigan, dashing across the space in a near frenzy to reach the table in front of Harry, plopping next to Dean, and swinging around to face the lot of them.

“What news?” inquired Harry, his eyes situated with fixed purpose on Seamus.

“Hannah Abbott is *DEAD!*” rasped Seamus chillingly.

Hermione gasped.

“*DEAD?*” echoed Harry with alarm.

“That’s right,” said Seamus. “She was weekending at home with her dad and her brother and apparently a group of Death Eaters killed the lot of them late Saturday night!”

“Have you heard anything about Ernie?” inquired Ron crassly.

Hermione elbowed him in the gut. Ron grunted.

“Huh?” asked Seamus confusedly.

“Nothing,” said Hermione quickly. “So, what *exactly* happened?”

“Dunno,” answered Seamus, “I overheard McGonagall addressing the staff in the teacher’s lounge a bit ago. She said something about the Abbott’s neighbors reporting the Dark Mark floating over their house. Apparently, when the Ministry went to tend to the complaint, they found Hannah and her family laying face down in the back yard, all of them alleged victims of the killing curse!”

“That’s *awful!*” said Hermione.

“Yeah,” said Seamus breathlessly. “The good news is that McGonagall has called for a stepping up of security about the castle.” Then, turning to Harry, he said, “Looks like Hannah is going to be the guard in charge of the seventh floor corridors during the school week. Pretty cool, huh, Harry?”

Harry perked up. “You *sure* about that, Seamus?”

“Uh-huh,” he answered. “She’ll be in the castle from eight till five, Monday through Friday. That’s what McGonagall said, at least. I heard her informing the other professors that she insisted Hannah be the one to cover our floor. Rumor has it that, McGonagall had quite a falling out with Remus over it. Dennis Creevy said he heard them arguing outside the Great Hall at breakfast.”

Hermione raised her brow and said, “That explains why he took off so abruptly and put Mad-Eye in charge of you this morning, Harry. My guess is he went straight to the Minister of Magic to contest it.”

“*Contest it?* Why would Remus contest such a thing?” inquired Seamus confusedly. “What’s he got against Hannah?”

Hermione scoffed and said, “Let’s just say that she’s not exactly the poster child of innocence.”

Harry growled and shot Hermione a disgruntled glare.

“Good-morning-class!” thundered a jolly male voice from the back of the room. “Sorry for the holdup — urgent staff meeting, you know!”

The short, bald, jovial figure of Horace Slughorn, the Potion’s professor, waddled to the front of the classroom. He was tugging sharply on the lapel of his lavishly striped suit as

he proceeded to call out, “Right, then, alright, let us turn to chapter twenty four in our Advanced Potion Making texts!”

The sounds of textbooks slapping against the surface of the tables and the clapping of pages being turned filled the room as the students flipped them open according to their teacher’s instruction.

“Magical Detection Serum!” called Slughorn. “This particular potion is incredible, indeed! It allows for the imbiber to see magic which is under the influence of invisibility for its duration!”

The students shot upright with interest while Slughorn offered more details.

“The potion permits for all types of magical auras to be seen from at least eighteen meters in the direction the consumer looks. The higher or more magical the item, the brighter the glow. Consider it as more of an energy unveiler. For this potion does not tell of what magic each invisible item is, it merely reveals a magical presence, living or inanimate. It is also critical to note that the power of invisible magical items can be so intense that the drinker can be blinded just by looking at them! So, take heed! For the blinding effects can be irreversible!” Slughorn crossed the front of the room and called out, “You may begin the task of brewing your potions. I shall work the room to check your progress. The first students to succeed in their endeavors this morning shall receive perfect marks and will be permitted demonstrate the effects of this extraordinary potion to the rest of the class! That said — let’s get to work!”

The reverberation of screeching chairs, the collective shuffling of the students’ feet, and the creaking of the potion storage cabinet doors echoed throughout the room as the students scrambled to acquire their potion’s ingredients.

“Hey, Harry, pass me some Squill,” called Ron.

“Here you go,” said Harry, releasing a small amount of the thorn like pebbles into Ron’s beckoning hands. “Hermione, do you need some?”

“I’ll get my own, *thanks*,” said Hermione curtly.

Harry shrugged his shoulders, retreated to his workspace beside Ron, and proceeded to dump a load of potion’s ingredients into his cauldron, kindling a fire beneath it.

Hermione returned to her station a moment later and took to hovering over her cauldron to block out any surveyors, namely Ron and Harry.

Harry was completely lost, as was Ron, who, out of desperation, had taken to copying Harry’s every move since Hermione had effectively managed to block his view of her.

Meanwhile, Slughorn began making his rounds about the classroom, every so often sneaking quick peaks at the student's progress.

"For those of you who have added all your ingredients, your cauldron should now be emitting an odorless smoky grey cloud and releasing a light hissing sound," he called out.

Harry looked to his cauldron and noted that the color coming from it was a prominent deep orange and the sound was that of a choking, spitting, and retching reverberation. He looked to Ron, who was fanning madly at the flames blaring out from beneath his own cauldron, which was producing a horrible violent purple smog and a muffled shrieking sound. Harry realized that out of everyone in the class, Hermione was the only student who was remotely close to accomplishing the first stage of the brew correctly.

Slughorn instantly took notice.

"Very nice, Ms. Granger," he said as he passed her station. He made a horribly bitter face upon acknowledging Neville's concoction, which reeked lightly of skunk and was shooting off brilliant red fireworks. Then, he passed Ron with a mere shake of his head and a light disparaging tsk, tsk.

Harry squirmed uncomfortably when Slughorn addressed him aloud. "I must say, Mr. Potter, you're off to a bit of an *abysmal* start. Not some of your best work, I'm afraid. You know, I've been quite disillusioned by your efforts this year. No matter. Surely you have an awful lot on your mind these days, being the 'chosen one' and all." He leaned over Harry's cauldron and crinkled his nose at it.

Hermione grinned smugly and murmured softly, "And of course, the *memoirs of the Half-Blood Prince* aren't here to help him out. They're stowed away somewhere in the Room of Requirement, aren't they, Harry?"

Harry grimaced.

A Half hour later, Slughorn's deep voice rang out again, "As mentioned in your text, you will note that the successful completion of your potion will be marked by the sight of a faint cotton pink mist, chased by the sound of a soft high-pitched whistle."

Harry looked to his cauldron and to Ron's. Neither one of them were doing anything close to what Professor Slughorn had mentioned. On the contrary, Harry thought for certain that he would've seen better progress if he had simply stewed his own potion's book, instead.

Hermione sniggered. "Pity. Looks like the lot of you will be receiving *zero marks* for the day."

“Hermione, your potion! It’s smoking *terribly!*” gasped Neville, pointing his fiercely shaking finger in her direction and waving at the ballooning black clouds billowing out of her cauldron.

Hermione’s face took on an expression of utmost shock. Her eyes drew wide in bewilderment as she stuttered out, “B-but, I-I don’t understand it! It was doing just fine only a moment ago!”

Harry and Ron sniggered. Almost instantly, Harry heard a light plinking noise befalling him. It sounded like the tip of a wand tapping hastily against the rim of his cauldron. When the sound ceased, his potion released a light steaming whistle and a delicate spray of cotton-pink vapor. Harry looked to his concoction in bewilderment.

Slughorn whirled around and peaking into Harry’s cauldron, again, he called out merrily, “Why, *you devil*, Mr. Potter! You went about it the long way, it seems, but there you have it, a *faultless* specimen! Well done! I believe that calls for perfect marks for the day! Welcome back, Harry m’boy, welcome back!” He slapped Harry proudly on his shoulders.

Hermione pursed her lips and scowled while she waved her wand madly over her cauldron in a desperate attempt at calming the disruptive smoke gushing out of it. Well intentioned as her efforts might have been, the only thing they managed to accomplish was the unintended production of a prominent fetid odor.

“As for you, Ms. Granger,” Slughorn feigned a gagging gesture and waved his hand in front of his face to fan away the decaying stink, “zero marks, I’m afraid. So sorry.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped and she shrieked out, “Zero marks! *ZERO MARKS!* I — I’ve never received zero marks on anything, *EVER!*”

Slughorn stuffed his hands in his pockets and mumbled out impassively, “Yes, well, I’ve always said there’s a first time for everything.”

Hermione looked like she was about to faint.

Ron leaned forward and with obvious delight, he whispered, “Psst, Hermione? Maybe you can convince Harry to retrieve the Half-Blood Prince’s potion book for you. It might help you with your form; it’s a little off, you see.”

Hermione’s lips disappeared beneath her angry frown, and she hissed out, “Watch it, Ronald, or I might get the urge to slip some of this rubbish into your afternoon pumpkin juice!”

Ron immediately withdrew.

Harry swore he heard a light familiar snigger coming from behind him. He whirled around to meet the source of the laughter but saw nothing other than empty space, as their workstation was situated in the far back row of the classroom.

“Did you hear that?” whispered Harry to Ron.

“Hear what?” answered Ron, zigzagging his wand over his potion to try to tame the torrid inferno he had managed to make of it.

Harry could barely see him through the veil of thick, billowing smoke spewing out in every direction. There came a steady tapping noise from behind the smoldering chaos, the same sound that Harry had heard earlier just before his own potion went right. Next, the smoke mysteriously dissipated and Ron’s potion emitted the same light steaming whistle and delicate spray of cotton-pink vapor that Harry’s potion had mere moments earlier.

“Excellent work, Mr. Weasley!” called Slughorn with a start, looking truly amazed. “The best I’ve seen from you since I’ve started teaching here! You, too, shall receive perfect marks for the day!”

Hermione looked to Ron aghast.

Ron hadn’t a clue what had just happened, but he wasn’t about to contest the gift of perfect marks, particularly since Hermione received none. So, he did what any proud student would do; he gloated.

Slughorn hovered over Harry and Ron, and waving his hands to bring the class to order, he called out, “How about we have our two outstanding students of the day test out their potions, for us? I’ve managed to magically conceal some items throughout the classroom.” He handed Harry and Ron each a large silver ladle. “So, I’ll ask for the two of you to go on and have a sip of your potions, then collect the invisible articles and hand them over to me.”

“Right,” said Harry, dipping the ladle into his potion and taking a sip of it.

Ron followed suit.

“Whoa,” said Harry, looking out at the room and noting the instant appearance of several bluish purple glowing rings surrounding their hazy looking invisible subjects. Slughorn was right; Harry couldn’t quite distinguish what exactly the invisible articles were, yet he was able to note the location of each one, all of which remained invisible to the rest of his classmates.

“Wicked!” exclaimed Ron, pointing in the direction of a series of columns lining the left side of the classroom. “Hey, Harry, take a look at the tall, shiny looking thing in the corner over there. Wow, it’s really bright! Hey, it’s waving at me!”

“Huh?” said Harry, turning to face the direction in which Ron had pointed. “Where? What are you going on about? I don’t see a thing.”

“Wha-wait a minute!” said Ron, rubbing his eyes and blinking heavily, straining to see the subject that had suddenly vanished. “It was just *there*, only a moment ago!”

Slughorn let out an indulgent little chuckle.

“Yes, well, Mr. Weasley, this potion has been known to cause moderate hallucinations in those who struggle with *delusional* tendencies,” he said.

“That would be Ronald,” said Hermione wryly in corroboration.

But, Harry didn’t believe for a second that Ron was hallucinating. Ron was persistent. He started pointing insistently in the direction where he had seen the figure.

“No, I swear, there was something right there — *right there!*” he said insistently.

“*Ron!*” rasped Harry harshly while tugging sharply on Ron’s robes and nodding his head at him in dissension.

“What?” whispered Ron in bewilderment.

“*Shhh,*” said Harry hushing him subtly out of the corner of his mouth.

“Why are you shushing me?” whispered Ron.

Harry leaned into Ron and in a hushed tone, he said, “Because, that thing you said you just saw...I think it was Hannah.