

No More Secrets

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No More Secrets

by [sbmcneil](#)

Summary

Hermione has started her new job in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and is handed a case that shakes her world view. Ron and Hermione both learn more about themselves and their assumptions about the wizarding world. * Deals with issues of domestic violence*

Notes

This story deals with the topic of domestic violence and may not be to everyone's taste. I would like to thank Mark for his input and suggestions! Thank you to Steph for her beta work! In this story, Ron worked with George for several years and just joined the Aurors.

The title pays homage to the No More initiative that wishes to 'galvanize greater awareness and action to end domestic violence and sexual assault'. If you are interested in the topic, please Google 'No More' to find out more information. The No More site in the US and Women's Aid site in the UK can provide information and assistance to those in need.

Hermione fumed as she read through the file on the latest case she'd been assigned. She'd only recently transferred to Magical Law Enforcement and while she enjoyed the challenge, she was finding it difficult to read some of the case files. The case she was currently reading was the perfect example.

"What do you think, Miss Granger?" Giles Prentiss asked. Giles was the Senior Council on the case, while Hermione was to assist with research and planning.

"It's horrible! How can a clear case of murder be pled down? Is it because the victim is a Muggle?"

Giles smiled in amusement. "I knew I'd picked the right assistant. It was recommended for a plea deal by the Aurors investigating the case. We investigate the case as well to make sure the charges that are brought are appropriate."

"What do you need me to do?" Hermione asked.

"Talk to the Aurors who caught the case and see what they say. See why they recommended this deal."

Nodding Hermione took the file back to her cubicle. Violence against Muggles was something that really upset her. So many of the pureblood wizards didn't even seem to think it was a crime. When she saw the Auror in charge of the case, her temper climbed through the roof. Of all people, how could he excuse the cold blooded murder of a Muggle?

She marched down the hall to the Auror headquarters. Harry was sitting at his cubicle reviewing some files.

"Harry, I need to talk to you, now!"

Harry looked up a bit bemused. "Sure, Hermione." Standing, he led her into one of the conference rooms on the edge of Auror headquarters. "What's going on?"

"I can't believe you! How could you do this? A witch murders her Muggle husband and you recommend a plea deal and no prison time?"

Harry quickly lost his lazy amusement as Hermione got into her rant. "Hermione!"

That got her attention; she at least stopped ranting at him.

"Did you read the file?"

"Of course I read it," Hermione said indignantly.

"She was abused," Harry said.

"Please," Hermione said. "How can a witch be abused? She has a wand!"

“He could take it away,” Harry pointed out.

She simply rolled her eyes. His gaze sharpened. “You aren’t even considering it as an option.”

“No, I’m not,” Hermione returned. “She’s never been to a healer, she’s never complained about abuse. She probably thought she could bat her eyes and you’d fall for it and fall all over yourself to help her.”

“Excuse me,” Harry voice was ice cold by this point. “Miss Granger, I would like to point out that we are both in our place of work. You have burst into my department, complained about my work, and stated that I don’t know what I am doing. Not only did I interview her at the crime scene, I also worked the crime scene. Her story is consistent with the evidence and consistent with abuse. If you have a problem with her story I would invite you to interview her yourself. If you have a problem with my work you may speak to my superior.”

He stood. “I will go over anything you wish, but you will not approach me whilst I’m at work and scold me like an errant schoolboy. I am a professional and I approach my work that way. I would advise you to review your facts before you come here and accuse me of impropriety.”

Walking out of the room, he left behind a dumbfounded Hermione. She wanted to chase after him, scolding him, but realized she would only alienate him. Slowly she collected the file and walked back to her work space. Harry didn’t even turn to look at her as she walked past.

“Where are Harry and Ginny?” Ron asked as he and Hermione finished up dinner. They had remodelled Grimmauld Place after the war and while each couple had their own floor, they usually ate meals together.

“He’s mad at me,” Hermione said. “I can’t believe him.”

“What did he do?” Ron asked curiously. He couldn’t imagine Hermione doing anything to anger Harry.

“I was assigned a case today,” she began.

“Really – that’s wonderful!” Ron said. “I know you’ve been working really hard.”

She blushed. It was always so nice when Ron was so proud of her. “Thank you. Giles seemed quite pleased with my work. This case should be open and shut. A witch killed her Muggle husband and Harry recommended she be pled out.”

“What? That’s crazy,” Ron replied.

“Exactly,” Hermione said. “I went to talk to him about it and he claimed she was abused.”

Ron laughed. “A witch can’t be abused by a Muggle. What’s he playing at?”

“I don’t know,” Hermione grumbled. “He said that if I had questions about the case I should talk to the witch.”

“It certainly wouldn’t hurt to talk to her, see what her story is,” Ron said reasonably. “Know all your facts, right?”

“I guess, but I don’t see anything that could possibly excuse using magic against a defenceless Muggle,” she grumbled.

The next morning she left for the Ministry without speaking to Harry. She’d hoped to run into him at breakfast, but Kreacher informed her that Master Harry had left early that morning and Mistress Ginny was having a bit of a lie in. She was tempted to go wake up Ginny to find out what Harry had said, but she’d learned from experience not to wake Ginny if she was planning to have a lie in.

Once at work she decided to re-read the file once more before going to visit Cathy Amara. One of the new procedures that had been put into place was to keep the accused in holding cells at the Ministry until their trials. This was to keep only the guilty exposed to the devastating effects of the Dementors. She knew that Harry was working on not using Dementors to monitor Azkaban, but this was a good first step.

Cathy Amara had summoned the Aurors to her house on July 5, 2003. Her husband was found dead in the kitchen, he’d been killed using the Killing Curse. The kitchen showed signs of a struggle and Mrs Amara was bruised and had sustained minor injuries.

Hermione shook her head as she headed down to the holding cells. In the five years since the end of the war, the incidence of Muggle murders had declined, but unfortunately they still happened.

She showed her identification to the Auror guarding the door and sat down in one of the small consultation alcoves. She didn’t have to wait long before another Auror led in a slight, pleasant looking woman. This was Hermione’s first glimpse of Mrs Amara and the woman was nothing like what she’d expected. Unconsciously she’d assumed Mrs Amara was more along the lines of an icy, beautiful, Slytherin witch.

Once Mrs Amara was seated, Hermione introduced herself. “Mrs Amara, my name is Hermione Granger. I have some questions about your case.”

“Of course,” Cathy replied.

“Can you tell me what happened?” Hermione asked.

Cathy sighed. “You have to understand, I love Don. I really, really did.”

“And yet you killed him.”

“You would never understand,” Cathy said with a touch of despair.

“I can’t understand how you could fall in love and marry a Muggle and yet turn around and kill him. I cannot condone using magic against Muggles.”

“Unless you are the one doing it,” Cathy said defiantly.

“Excuse me,” Hermione was incensed.

“Please, Miss Granger. I may have married a Muggle and lived in the Muggle world, but I do keep up with the wizarding world. You performed memory charms on your parents and sent them to Australia.”

“Yes,” Hermione acknowledged. “I did perform memory charms on my parents – in order to save my parents’ lives.”

“So you had a good reason for performing magic on your parents, but I couldn’t possibly have a good reason for performing magic on my husband,” Cathy challenged. “I would bet your parents are still nervous around you. I bet they’re scared that you will use magic against them again.”

“I did what I had to,” Hermione said. “We are not here to discuss me; we are here to discuss your situation.”

Cathy shrugged. “Fine.”

Hermione stared at her. “So can you tell me what happened?”

“Don knew about magic before we married,” Cathy began to explain. “He didn’t completely understand the entire wizarding society, but he accepted that I was different and he loved Nigel completely.”

“Nigel is your son from a previous relationship?” Hermione asked as she made notes. She hadn’t wanted to bring the file, she wanted to start fresh. Obviously Harry’s investigation hadn’t been thorough enough.

“He is my son from my first marriage,” Cathy replied. “My first husband, Justin, was killed in the war. Nigel is magical as was Justin.”

Hermione nodded and Cathy continued, “Everything seemed to be going well at first. I was so disillusioned by the wizarding world that I lived in a Muggle world. I might pull out my wand to speed up cleaning the house or to repair a broken plate, but overall I lived without magic. Nigel on the other hand was performing accidental magic.

“Don didn’t mind it at first, but I think as Nigel got older it worried Don more. When I became pregnant, Don was suddenly overly concerned that our child might be magical. I tried to reassure him. I’m Muggle-born myself so there was a chance that our child might not be magical.

“He started by just making comments. He would call me lazy or criticize my housekeeping skills. Don was very particular about the house and liked everything kept a certain way. I will admit I was a bit nervous about bringing another child into the home. It was difficult to follow all of Don’s rules and keep the house the way he liked it with only one child. I imagined with more than one child it would be more difficult.”

Cathy looked down at her hands and fiddled with her wedding ring. "He hit me for the first time the week after Vivian was born."

"So why didn't you leave him?" Hermione burst out.

Cathy sighed. "I knew you wouldn't understand."

"No, I don't."

"I loved Don and he was always so sorry afterwards," Cathy sighed. "I really didn't know where to go. I've lost touch with my parents and Don managed all of the household funds. I've never worked outside the home. I married Justin right out of Hogwarts and we were so in love. I never thought I'd meet someone else and when I met Don it just seemed perfect."

She stopped talking for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. Looking at Hermione she asked, "May I have some water?"

Hermione arranged for a pitcher of water and two glasses to be delivered to them. Cathy poured herself a glass and drank deeply.

"When Don changed, I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong. I tried harder to make sure the house was clean and the children were well behaved. Don didn't mind the children, but he wanted to interact with them on his own terms. He would play with them on the weekend or he would occasionally read to them, but the day to day caring of the children was left to me.

"That night..." Cathy's voice shook for a moment before she continued. "That night Don had come home from work and he...he was very angry. I could do nothing right. I hadn't made dinner correctly and Vivian was fussy and that was irritating him. I cleaned up after dinner and I even...even performed on him."

Hermione looked at her in confusion. "What does that mean?"

Cathy flushed bright red. "You know." She gestured downwards in a vague manner. "He wanted me to...to perform."

"I don't understand," Hermione said.

"He made her perform oral sex," came a voice from behind both of them.

Cathy looked up in relief and Hermione looked up in aggravation as Harry Potter walked up and joined them.

"Hello, Cathy," Harry said. "You are looking better. Have you been talking to the mind healer?"

"Yes, Harry," Cathy said shyly. "Thank you."

"I have something for you," Harry said. Reaching into his robes, he pulled out two pictures and handed them to the woman. One of the pictures contained a pink handprint with the word

Vivian printed neatly underneath. The other was a picture that had been drawn by Nigel.

Cathy teared up immediately when she saw them. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"What are you doing here?" Hermione demanded.

"You are interviewing a suspect," Harry replied calmly. "Normally the case Auror is brought along for any interviews."

"I am capable of interviewing a suspect on my own," Hermione said, her cheeks turning red with anger.

"I will just sit here," Harry pulled over a chair and sat down between the women, but sitting back a little way so he would not block their sight.

Cathy pulled herself together. "I performed for him and I thought he was going to calm down, but...Vivi performed her first accidental magic. She'd been fussy most of the day. I think perhaps she was teething. I'd finally cast a mild numbing charm on her and she settled down. She'd been dozing in her swing in the sitting room. I guess while I was...you know...she must have woken up. She summoned her stuffed bunny."

Tears started pouring down the woman's face and Harry wordlessly handed her his handkerchief. Cathy accepted it with a shaky hand. "Don was so, so angry. I've never seen him so upset. He yelled at me that I'd ruined his life and made his daughter a freak. He started towards her and I don't know what he planned to do, but I started screaming for help.

"Nigel ran in and he grabbed the baby and took her out of the room. Don was still angry. He started talking crazy and I was so scared. I usually kept my wand in one of the drawers in the kitchen. I grabbed it and he started laughing at me. He asked what I was going to do with my wand. He hit me and my wand went flying across the room. He beat me worse than he'd ever done before. I was so afraid that this time he was going to kill me. He threw me on the ground and...and raped me. When he was done I just lay there. I wanted to die. I couldn't believe what a mess my life had become."

Cathy fell silent as she gathered her thoughts. After a few moments she resumed her story. "He grabbed a knife from the knife block and started towards the corridor that led to the children's rooms. I was terrified that he was going to hurt them. I grabbed my wand and I cast the spell. I wasn't even certain that it would work. I was shocked when it did. I sat there for a minute and I even contemplated ending everything, but I heard Vivi crying. I pulled my clothes back on and realized what I'd done so I called the Aurors."

Hermione looked up from the notebook where she'd been feverishly taking notes. "So you claim that your husband disarmed you?"

Cathy simply nodded.

"Why didn't you call for help before you killed him?"

“He had a knife in his hand and he was headed for my children. What should I have done?” Cathy asked scornfully.

Hermione stood. “Thank you for your time.”

Harry also stood and escorted Cathy back to the prisoner’s entrance. Another Auror waited on the other side to take her back to her cell. Once she was on the other side of the door, he joined Hermione.

“Do you have questions for me?”

“Do you really believe her?” Hermione asked in disbelief.

“What don’t you believe?” Harry asked as he leaned against the table around which they’d been seated.

“Her whole story – she never reported any physical abuse, she never sought medical treatment, she never complained to anyone. Isn’t it also likely she killed him and realized that she needed a reason and fabricated her story?”

Harry studied her for a minute. “Why do you have such a hard time believing her?”

“She is a witch. She could perform magic. She could have used a non-lethal spell. She could have left him. She could have done a number of things other than killing him.”

Harry turned away slightly before turning back quickly taking her by surprise. He reached out and grabbed Hermione’s wand from her pocket and blocked her into a small area between the table and the wall. “Now you are disarmed and if I wanted to hurt you, how could you stop me?”

Hermione shook her head and tried to leave. Harry blocked her way again and she lashed out. Quickly he grabbed one arm and spun her around to face the wall. He pinned her to the wall with one arm behind her back. He restrained her other hand.

“I’m serious, Hermione. You are acting as though it is impossible for a witch to be overpowered. I think I’ve shown you that it is not.”

Stepping back, he let her pass by. “That was completely unnecessary,” she hissed.

“You didn’t believe what I said,” Harry replied.

“Okay, but how can he rape her? She’s his wife,” Hermione said. This time she sounded more confused than confrontational.

“Marital rape has been recognized in the UK since the early 1990s,” Harry explained.

“I just don’t understand this,” Hermione said. “I’ve always heard that abuse doesn’t happen in the wizarding world.”

“You’ve always heard Ron say that abuse doesn’t happen in the wizarding world,” Harry corrected. “He’s always seen things a certain way. He’s never seen abuse and he doesn’t seem

to recognize the possibility of abuse. Ask Ginny, she has more of a clearer view.”

“I guess,” Hermione said doubtfully. She looked down at her notes. “What did you find at the scene?”

“Cathy was...calm, I think is the best way to describe it,” Harry said. “She was calm, but she was covered in bruises. Her husband had bruises on his hand that indicated he’d recently beaten someone. Cathy had recently had sexual intercourse and we confirmed the presence of semen in her intestinal tract.

“I spoke to Nigel. He told me that Mummy and Daddy were fighting. He heard Daddy yelling about Vivi and his mum was upset. Nigel was afraid his father was going to hurt the baby so he took her to his room and played with her until we arrived. When I entered his room he was hiding in the closet with the baby and he’d pushed his bed in front of the door to make it harder for anyone to get in the room. That boy was terrified, but he was determined to protect his sister. He was very brave.”

“So you really think it happened that way?” Hermione asked.

“To me she seemed like an abuse victim,” Harry said.

Hermione rolled her eyes at that statement, but refrained from voicing her thoughts on his assessment of the situation. How would Harry have any expertise in what constitutes an abuse victim?

“Have you had your domestic violence training?” Harry asked.

“Not yet,” Hermione replied stiffly. “Giles didn’t think it was that important. He wanted me to get up to speed and assist with the cases.”

“I think you should take your domestic violence training – sooner rather than later,” Harry said before he turned and walked away.

Giles looked in on her before lunch. “What have you discovered on the Amara case?”

“She’s claiming abuse and Harry seems to believe her,” Hermione said.

“Do you believe her?” Giles asked.

“I don’t know,” Hermione admitted. “She seems sincere, but it seems so fantastic. I’d like to talk to the boy.”

Giles shook his head. “No, you haven’t been trained to interview children. We have a specialized team that interviews children. One of our workers spoke to the boy and, as I recall, his version backs up the mother’s story. You can speak to the case worker, but I won’t authorize another interview of the boy without a compelling reason.”

He contemplated the matter. “Leave the file on my desk. For some reason, the assistant who reviewed the case previously neglected to mention the abuse.” He shook his head. “So many

in the wizarding world discount the validity of domestic violence.”

Harry frowned as he searched through the files on his desk. Standing he walked to door of his office and looked over the room. The Auror department was set up with groups of desks scattered around the room. Ron’s bright red hair was easy to spot.

“Ron! Where’s the report on the Harliss family?” Harry called.

Ron straightened from his desk and looked at Harry in confusion. “The Harliss family?”

“Dad that was reported to have abused his children,” Harry reminded him. “I wanted to follow up on it and I wanted to share it with Hermione.”

Ron continued to look confused for a minute as he walked towards Harry. As he reached his best mate his face cleared. “Oh, I remember. It was all a misunderstanding. I didn’t want to start a file and jam up the bloke. He was a nice guy, a Cannons fan if you can believe it.”

“What?” Harry couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“I think whoever took the report was imagining things,” Ron confided. “Sometimes Muggle-borns will see things that aren’t there.”

“Excuse me?” Harry was rapidly becoming angry. “I took the initial report. I didn’t see things that aren’t there.”

Ron looked discomfited for a minute. “Harry, there is no such thing as child abuse in wizarding families. A kid’s magic won’t let him get hurt.”

“Where are you coming up with this nonsense?” Harry demanded. “Of course there is child abuse in wizarding families.”

“No,” Ron repeated slowly. “There isn’t. A child’s magic won’t allow them to get hurt. If the child is being attacked their magic will react to their fear and it will protect them.”

“What the bleeding hell are you talking about? That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. Is there some age cut off for your magic to protect you? I know that it doesn’t protect eleven year olds – I was hurt when Quirrell attacked me. It doesn’t protect fourteen year olds – I was hurt when Pettigrew cut my arm to resurrect Voldemort. Trust me there was plenty of fear that I’d be hurt and my magic didn’t protect me.”

“That’s different,” Ron said. “You were old enough to defend yourself with your magic.”

“So I imagined that I was hurt?” Harry asked angrily. “Oh, I get it; I’m not strong enough to defend myself. Is that what you’re saying?”

“No, no,” Ron was starting to get flustered. “This isn’t about you. This is about a nice bloke who was accused of some horrid things. His wife never said anything and his kids didn’t complain about anything. I think that sister-in-law was imagining things. I don’t know maybe she has something against the guy.”

“Did you bother to ask her why she reported this ‘nice bloke’?” Harry asked in disgust. He could read the answer on his friend’s face. “Never mind. I guess Hermione’s not the only one who needs domestic violence training.”

It was a rather pensive Ron who returned to Grimmauld Place that evening. Harry had returned to the Ministry with Trevor Harliss in custody for child abuse and now Ron was on probation for failure to take appropriate action. Initially Ron had been furious with his best mate, but after hearing the child protective team discuss their findings he felt ashamed and rather disgusted with himself.

Hermione wasn’t yet home and Harry was going to watch Ginny’s Quidditch practice. He poured himself a glass of Firewhiskey and gulped it down before pouring another glass. He didn’t drink often, but tonight he wanted to obliterate the memories of what he’d heard just a few hours before.

He’d never imagined that a parent would ever hurt a child. The thought that a parent would actually, physically hurt a child deliberately was beyond his comprehension. Sure, he’d taken the required domestic violence course, but honestly he thought of it as a Muggle problem. Surely a wand would even the playing field, right? Robards had called him all kinds of fool for that type of thinking when he’d put Ron on probation. Knocking back another glass of Firewhiskey, Ron reflected how relieved he was that he’d only been put on probation and not fired for his failure.

Ron read Harry’s case summary for the case Hermione had mentioned the night before. It illuminated how easily a wand could be stripped away from someone.

It was early evening by the time Hermione returned home. He could tell on the look on her face that she’d heard.

“I see you heard.”

She nodded. “I’m so sorry.”

“I deserved it,” Ron said morosely. “I really thought a child wouldn’t be hurt. That’s what I always heard growing up. A child’s magic would protect them.”

“That’s what I had heard as well,” Hermione admitted. She sighed. “I don’t know if I’m cut out for this line of work. I think I always thought the bad guys would be easy to spot and of course they would be completely different from us. I’ve met Trevor Harliss before. I met him at a Ministry function and I thought he was very nice. I never would have suspected him of anything.”

“Me neither,” Ron sighed. “He just seemed like a nice bloke. The things...he beat them for wetting the bed. He held his daughter’s foot in scalding hot water so she’d remember to clean her feet before walking across the room. He healed it in the morning, but he made her lay in bed all night with a burned foot. I can’t even imagine doing some of the things he was accused of doing.”

“Harry was so angry with me,” Ron said in a defeated tone. “He asked if I thought he was weak because he couldn’t defend himself.”

Hermione frowned. “Why would he say that?”

“I don’t know,” Ron replied.

“Put that away,” Hermione fussed as Ron went to pour himself another drink. “You’ve had quite enough. Come on, I’m hungry.”

“Kreacher left a great shepherd’s pie,” Ron said. “I could do with another piece as well. We don’t have to save any for Harry and Ginny. They’re going out to eat after Ginny’s practice.”

“Have something to eat, love,” Ginny Potter said gently.

Harry obediently took a bite of his stew. “Sorry I’m such bad company tonight.”

“It’s understandable,” she replied as she reached across the table and squeezed his hand.

“I can’t decide if I feel badly for Ron or if I want to smack him for his stupidity,” Harry said setting his spoon down. “I knew he really didn’t believe in child abuse, but I thought he’d take things seriously once he talked to them. To find out that he didn’t even follow up on the case...I was horrified. That man could have killed his wife or children.”

“That was stupid on his part,” Ginny agreed. “He’s also being an idiot for believing that crap about a child’s magic protecting them.” She shook her head. “If a child’s magic protected them, no child would ever be hurt in an accident. I fell out of a tree and broke my arm – my magic didn’t protect me. My mum paddled my butt when I misbehaved and trust me it hurt.”

Harry smiled briefly and took another bite when Ginny motioned for him to eat. “It was so horrible listening to those two little girls today. I’m sure that man abused his wife as well. That house...” He shuddered. “It was so oppressively clean. It reminded me of my aunt’s kitchen. The kitchen cupboards were labelled because he didn’t trust her to remember where things belonged. She told me that they had to wait for four years after they married to have children because she was slow and it took her a while to learn all of her husband’s rules.”

Ginny grimaced at the thought. “It is so horrid that women would be so desperate for a relationship that they put up with that. When we were still in Hogwarts, my friend Maura’s boyfriend would always insult her and put her down. He’d tell her she was stupid or too fat. She told me that she just needed to try a little harder. I always worried about her and worried that he would hurt her.”

Harry nodded. “That’s how it starts a lot of times is emotional abuse. Robards told me that when he first started as an Auror hardly anyone believed in emotional abuse.”

“How can you not believe in it?” Ginny asked in puzzlement.

“They thought that name calling never hurt anyone,” Harry said. He shook his head as he looked down into his stew. “It does.”

“I know, sweetie,” Ginny said gently.

“I don’t feel up to facing them tonight,” Harry said honestly.

“I’ve heard there’s a really nice hotel that’s near the water,” Ginny said.

Harry smiled at her. “That would be great.”

After they finished eating, Harry and Ginny walked hand-in-hand down towards the edge of the island. They passed the flats where Ginny had lived when she’d first joined the Harpies and came to the hotel that one of Ginny’s teammates had recommended. It was one of the many hotels near the harbour that led into the Irish Sea. The hotel resembled a Victorian home more than a hotel.

“The owner is a witch,” Ginny whispered as they entered the lobby, “so she might recognize us, but she’s very discreet.”

Harry nodded and they checked into their room. When they entered their room, he grinned for the first time that day and pulled Ginny close. “Mrs Potter, this was a wonderful idea.”

Leaning up she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him into a deep kiss. When they finally surfaced she grinned up at him. “I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling a bit grubby after practice.”

When he looked confused she giggled. “There is a huge, decadent looking tub in the loo. Want to scrub my back?”

His confusion cleared and he nodded enthusiastically. She pulled him into the bathroom. The water was rather cold by the time they were done even after several warming charms had been cast on the water.

Pulling Ginny up out of the tub, Harry cast a warming charm on the towels and wrapped one around her and one around him. Ginny seemed truly exhausted by then so Harry gently dried her off and brushed her hair before carrying her into bed. She snuggled into his arms. He held her tightly. She was the perfect antidote for anything that might have gone wrong in his day.

Hermione left early for work the next morning. She felt so badly for Ron – he’d never meant to cause any problems. He’d interviewed the father and not seen anything wrong. She wondered at the timing, but Ron had told her that Harry wanted to share the case file with her to give her another example of abuse in the wizarding world.

She entered the department and was surprised that so many people were already in. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement was much different than she’d anticipated. She’d imagined helping with the legislation, not so much dealing with the victims. She really didn’t like that part and was already wondering if this is what she should be doing.

She was surprised to see Harry in early. He entered one of the interview rooms at the far side of the department. Curiosity got the better of her and she approached one of the other

assistants, Marcia.

“What is Harry doing here?”

“Harry Potter? He’s interviewing the little girls from the Harliss case,” Marcia explained.

“I thought he interviewed them yesterday,” Hermione said in confusion.

“It’s not unusual to interview a victim more than once, especially a child. They can’t take long periods of interrogation.”

“Wait, Giles said that special training was needed to interview children. Why is Harry allowed to interview the girls?” Hermione demanded.

“Harry is wonderful with child victims,” Marcia almost gushed. “He puts them at ease and is one of our best investigators. We always request him if children are involved.”

Marcia could see this was news to Hermione. “If you want, you can watch at the window. It’s charmed so we can see in, but those in the room can’t hear anything.”

Her curiosity piqued Hermione headed over to the window. To her surprise, her boss, Giles, was already observing the interview. He looked up when she approached and gestured for her to be quiet.

Looking through the mirror, Hermione saw Harry was seated in a very small chair around a child sized table. Sitting with him at the table were two little girls, both of them blonde with their hair in pony tails. Hermione winced to see the bruises on the girls’ arms. The room obviously had been set up with children in mind.

She was rather shocked to see how well the little girls had taken to Harry. Each little girl was holding a little stuffed bear and had a tea cup sitting in front of them. She listened in amazement as her shy and rather buttoned up friend skilfully put both girls at ease. He asked about their bears and he actually listened to their answers.

Hermione was rather getting a bit impatient, but realized that Harry wasn’t. He was perfectly content to talk to them and listen to their rather rambling answers. Somehow he managed to get a coherent story out of them. It was rather impressive.

As Hermione watched a well-dressed, pretty, professional looking witch approached the area and Giles hurried over to talk to her. Hermione wondered who she was, but that question was soon answered when she overheard the conversation. This was the aunt of the girls. She was the one who had first contacted the Ministry with her suspicion that the girls were being abused.

“Thank Merlin that Harry Potter showed up,” the witch was saying. “The last idiot the Ministry sent out ended up talking to Trevor and thinking he was a great bloke. He spoke to Miriam for all of two minutes and didn’t even see the girls.”

Hermione flushed when she realized the woman was talking about Ron. She thought that was a bit unfair, but kept quiet.

“How is your sister doing, Mrs Dalton?” Giles asked.

Mrs Dalton sighed. “She’s scared and confused. He’s had her so...so brainwashed for years she doesn’t know what to think anymore. That piece of dirt – he told her that she was stupid, fat, and worthless. He made her wait to have children until she could ‘prove’ that she could maintain a household ‘properly’. He labelled everything and she had to maintain the cupboards exactly how he dictated. Once he ‘allowed’ her to have children things got even worse.”

“How so?” Giles asked.

“He would put her down in front of the girls all the time. I know they’re too young to understand and they love her to pieces, but it was awful. He got upset when the girls cried – he would take it out on her. Obviously it was her fault that the baby cried-”

Hermione blushed at the phrases the woman used to describe her brother-in-law. It did sound like a horrible situation, but when Ron had gone to the house everything had seemed in order. The wife didn’t say anything so how was he supposed to know? Harry had known a tiny voice reminded her.

“I am so sorry that your sister and her children had to live like that,” Giles said soothingly. “We have enough evidence to sustain charges of child abuse against your brother-in-law. Was your sister given information about our domestic violence counsellors?”

“Yes,” Mrs Dalton replied. “I am taking her to them this afternoon after we visit a divorce lawyer.”

The door to the conference room opened and Harry exited carrying the younger girl. He stopped when he saw Mrs Dalton and Giles. Mrs Dalton smiled at the three.

“Hi, Lucy,” the witch smiled at the girl Harry was carrying. As Hermione watched she greeted the other girl whose name turned out to be Annabel. Both girls seemed thrilled to see their aunt.

Harry knelt down and put down Lucy. “Why don’t you two go play in our playroom for a few minutes while I talk to your aunt, okay?”

“Okay,” both girls replied with smiles. They both hugged Harry before running into the playroom.

“How are they?” Mrs Dalton asked anxiously.

“They’re a bit scared and confused, but they are both healthy, happy little girls,” Harry said reassuringly. “It seems he stopped at physical abuse.”

“Thank God,” Mrs Dalton said.

“They both love their mother and I think they’ll be fine in a loving environment,” Harry said. “I would recommend they continue working with the therapist. Hazel is really good and she’s used to working with kids who have been abused.”

“I will make sure they continue,” Mrs Dalton promised fervently. “Thank you, Mr Potter.”

“You’re very welcome, I’m glad I could help,” Harry said sincerely.

Hermione watched him leave without stopping him. This was a totally different side of her friend that she’d never even imagined he might have. How did Harry learn to work with children so well? Hermione knew that he spent time with Teddy and even Bill and Fleur’s daughter, Victoire, but she hadn’t imagined he’d be so patient and good with them.

She would readily admit that she could not have been so patient. Children made her a bit nervous to be totally honest. She’d never spent much time around them and didn’t feel comfortable around them. Harry and Ginny would both crawl around on the ground or play games with the kids. Hermione had a hard time letting herself be so...undignified.

“Robards said I have to attend domestic violence training and I have to perform community service hours in one of the domestic violence shelters here in London,” Ron explained to Hermione that evening. “I also have to develop and present a class on domestic violence to the Aurors – and he said that I can’t have you help me.”

“That’s not nice,” Hermione fussed.

Ron shrugged. “He’s right. I royally screwed up. I realize now that I never really took Harry seriously. That’s part of the problem. I was looking at him as my best mate, not my superior. He’s been doing this for five years and I’ve only just finished my training. I think maybe I thought...I don’t know what I thought honestly. I didn’t really listen to Harry when he tried to tell me what it was like being an Auror.”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“I thought more about the raids rather than the hours of investigating. I don’t know how good I am at investigating. I’ve been so used to relying on you and Harry that I didn’t even notice little things. Harry notices so many little things that I don’t.”

“I don’t think so,” Hermione objected.

“He does,” Ron said. “I never realized how many little things that Harry picked up on. Yesterday when he was reprimanding me – he really called me on it. I went out to the Harliss house assuming I was going to a house with a nice family. Mrs Harliss was very quiet, but I didn’t think anything of it. I didn’t see the girls – I didn’t think it was necessary. Mr Harliss played right into my prejudices.”

“You don’t have any prejudices,” Hermione protested.

“I assume that the wizarding way is correct and the Muggle way to do anything is backwards. If I don’t understand something Muggle I just figure I don’t need to. It was really hard today, Hermione, hearing those things and realizing how blind I was. Do you realize that I never ask you to explain any Muggle machines? I didn’t want to be like my dad so I’ve gone completely the other way.

“Ginny is perfectly comfortable in the Muggle world now. We’ve had the same amount of time, but I just assumed the Muggle world had nothing to offer while Ginny learned everything she could.”

Hermione was shocked to see tears in Ron’s eyes as he talked. “Ron.”

He shook his head. “Did you know that Teddy asked Harry which side I fought on in the war?”

“What?” Hermione was shocked.

“Have you noticed we haven’t seen as much of Harry and Ginny lately? Besides eating together, when have we seen them recently?”

Hermione realized how long it had been since the two couples had spent a lot of time together. Ron must have been watching her face and saw her realization. “I didn’t notice that he kept giving me excuses for not getting together or they’ve been out. Teddy didn’t want us around. When he tried to tell me about his football team, I dismissed it out of hand and told him how much better Quidditch was. He’s only five – I should have listened to him and told him what a good job he was doing. I never realized how often I tease you about ‘Muggle nonsense’ to me it’s just teasing you, but Teddy honestly thought I didn’t like Muggles.”

“Why didn’t they say anything?” Hermione asked.

“Harry did, but I...I didn’t realize he was serious,” Ron admitted. “When he got on my case for not being supportive of Teddy, I didn’t take him seriously and he knew it. He made the decision to limit our contact with Teddy. Can you imagine?”

“He never said anything to me,” Hermione protested.

Ron shrugged. “I don’t know why he didn’t say anything to you, but I think that maybe because I wasn’t taking him seriously he didn’t even bother to talk to you. You don’t usually have much to do with Teddy anyhow.”

Hermione sighed. “I just realized today how uncomfortable I am around children. I watched Harry listen and play to those two little girls and realized that I could never do that.”

Ron smiled. “I think you could. You just like being proper. Ginny doesn’t care if she’s a mess or acting stupid or whatever.”

“That’s true,” Hermione agreed.

She sighed. “What do we do? I feel like we’ve both made a mess of things.”

“You haven’t done anything wrong,” Ron objected. “I feel like a complete idiot. I don’t know if being an Auror is what I really want to do, but I realize I need to take it seriously. I went from working for my brother to working for Harry. I’ve come in late and not done all my paperwork and didn’t think anything of it because it was only for Harry. I didn’t take him seriously as a boss and I need to do that.”

Hermione left her domestic violence seminar with her mind in turmoil. She had never really considered child abuse as something she would ever confront. It was other types of people who abused their children, not the kind of people with whom she associated.

As she entered Grimmauld Place she found Ron in the kitchen. "Is Harry here?"

Ron shook his head. "He had something to do, I don't know what. Why?"

"Do you know what I realized during my seminar today?"

Ron shook his head. Hermione started pacing. "They were talking about the characteristics seen in children who've been abused. Shyness, wariness of physical contact, reluctance to return home, attempts to hide injuries, unsuitable clothes, and weight below normal. Who does that sound like?"

Ron's jaw dropped open when he realized what she was trying to say. "Harry? You think Harry was abused?"

"Yes," Hermione said simply. "All the clues were there. Why didn't we see it?"

Ron groaned. "The bars on his windows."

"What?"

"Remember when my brothers and I rescued him after our first year? He was locked in a room with bars on his windows. His relatives were hardly feeding him."

"Oh no," Hermione moaned. "I always thought you were exaggerating. I didn't realize you were being literal."

"So now you know."

Ron and Hermione whirled around to see Ginny standing in the corridor.

"Ginny, what do you know?" Hermione demanded.

Ginny shrugged off her cloak and hung it up. "Hermione."

"Ginny, this is serious. Do you realize what long term child abuse can do to someone? He needs to talk about this. He needs to tell us what happened," Hermione said shrilly.

"No, Hermione," Ginny said firmly. "He doesn't need to do anything. Just because you have only just realized what happened to him doesn't mean he needs to explain anything to you."

"He needs counselling," Hermione countered angrily.

"Why do you assume he's not received it? Because he didn't tell you? He doesn't owe you an explanation," Ginny returned fiercely. "Yes, his relatives were horrible abusive creatures and yes I've known about it for years. You will not ask him a million questions or demand he explain anything to you. You will not scold him for not telling you or make him feel badly in

anyway. Just because you've suddenly realized what happened to him doesn't mean he needs to relive it so you can feel better. Do you understand?"

Ron and Hermione watched in silence as Ginny headed upstairs. Hermione turned to her boyfriend with tears in her eyes. "We are such horrible friends. She's right – I was ready to scold him for not telling us. How horrible is that?"

The couple sat down at the large kitchen table. They were both lost in their own thoughts.

Hermione rose the next morning after a rather sleepless night. She'd had to take a hard look at herself and she wasn't entirely happy with the way she had behaved. She would admit she was disappointed that it was Ginny who'd gotten Harry to open up and it was Ginny who'd noticed there was something wrong.

That was probably what bothered her the most. The signs hadn't been hidden or even all that subtle, but she'd never put it together. She'd thought his relatives weren't nice to him, but she'd never dreamed they had abused him. When he said they were starving him, she assumed he was being dramatic – she'd never dreamed he was being literal.

After a quick shower, she headed downstairs. To her surprise she could hear voices as she neared the kitchen. Entering the kitchen she found Harry and Ginny eating breakfast. It was unusual for both of them to be up so early.

She wanted to rush to Harry and smother him in a hug, but Ginny caught her eye and she restrained herself.

"Good morning," Harry said pleasantly.

"Good morning," Hermione replied. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I have to be in early and Gin was nice enough to get up with me," Harry said as he smiled at his wife. Ginny grinned and leaned over to kiss him.

Hermione had to smile as she watched the two of them. Wandering over to the counter she found a big platter of eggs and bacon. She helped herself and brought her plate over to the table.

"Is Ron okay?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked up in surprise. "He's fine."

"I'm sorry that it was my actions that led to his probation. I'm not sorry he was put on probation, but I'm sorry it was me who caused it."

"Harry, I can tell you honestly that he does not blame you at all. Neither of us knew much about domestic violence and we both bought into the myth that it doesn't happen in the wizarding world -"

“Hermione, it’s okay,” Harry said with a smile. Standing he pulled Ginny up next to him and held her close. Dropping a kiss on the top of her head, he lost his smile. “I know that you know, but...I’m not going to talk about it.”

He shook his head when it looked like she was going to speak. “You and Ron were my first friends ever. When we first met I didn’t say anything because I didn’t think you would want to be my friend if you knew that...” He broke off for a minute and Ginny comforted him quietly.

“I didn’t think you’d be my friend if you knew how my relatives treated me. Once I realized that you would still be my friend, I didn’t want to talk about it at all. You and Ron helped me through without ever realizing it. I needed and depended on our friendship. I thought my past was behind me and I didn’t need to ever think about it again. I realized that wasn’t true and Ginny was there for me. She helped me work through things.”

He offered her a tentative smile. “You are one of my best friends and I love both you and Ron dearly, but to work through everything I needed Ginny. You can understand that, can’t you?”

Hermione nodded as she wiped tears away. Harry shook his head. “I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“I know,” Hermione laughed as she hugged him. “We both love you. I want to apologize to you. When I got Mrs Amara’s case, I behaved very poorly. I did come after you and scold you like an errant schoolboy and I want to apologize. I forget sometimes that you grew up too. Ron and I both have a tendency to fall back into our old patterns. I scold and nag you to get your work done and Ron tries to distract you with games. I think in the excitement of all of us working in the same area we both forgot that you have worked your way up in the department and we need to respect that.”

“Thank you,” Harry said. “I won’t say this hasn’t been stressful, but some good can come out of it. I think the whole department is more aware of domestic violence and some of the old myths are being dispelled. Ron is taking things more seriously as well.”

Glancing at the clock he said, “I need to get going.”

Hermione averted her eyes while Ginny enthusiastically kissed her husband goodbye, but she couldn’t help but smile at the whispered ‘I love yous’ the couple exchanged. If anyone deserved love in his life, it was Harry.

A short while later she found herself walking into the Ministry. She was walking through the atrium when she saw a family standing by the fountain. It took her a minute to recognize Cathy Amara. She was holding her daughter and her son was throwing a coin into the fountain.

“Mrs Amara.”

Cathy turned towards Hermione. “Miss Granger.”

“Mrs Amara, I want to apologize for my unprofessional and rather uncaring attitude that I’m afraid I showed you during our interview. I honestly didn’t understand how things like that could happen and I...I’m sorry.”

Cathy smiled. “Thank you.”

“What are you going to do now?” Hermione asked. She had heard the case had been ruled murder in defence of another. Cathy Amara was free and reunited with her children.

“I’ve re-connected with my parents and they are thrilled to be spending time with their beautiful grandchildren. I’m undergoing counselling and things are going well.”

“I’m glad,” Hermione said. As she watched the Amara family walk away, she felt that she’d really learned something. Maybe things weren’t as bad as she’d been thinking and maybe she could do this after all. She headed to her office with a renewed sense of purpose.

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