

Pureblood Princess

Astoria entered the Great Hall, her mind still awl with her fortune from earlier. Even now, with the feel of his slightly chapped lips on hers imprinted in her brain, part of her still could not believe it.

She attracted a few looks, as she always did. She was a Greengrass sister, and despite being the second daughter, she was a faithful daughter of magic. And as such, a suitable match for most, if not all.

Her hair was bouncing softly with her movements. She wanted to tie her hair back, so that no one but he could enjoy it. She wanted the looks gone, as proper and respectful of her as they were, the only looks she wanted was his.

But she had to wait. And while patience had never been her strong point, eight months for her greatest dream was not an issue.

And while she was waiting, she could not hide; she would not hide. She would take each day and prove to herself that she was worthy of him.

And yet, reality had intruded. They were still heading toward a war with the abominable monster with the cursed name. And Harry was so very aware of that, more so than any other.

Harry had cast a charm on her, a simple one which hid her connection to anyone, even him. And yet he had kept her connection, proudly.

Even though no one knew who she was, they would all know that a witch had captured his heart and his spirit. The very fact that he was so proud of her Maiden's kiss was another thing that utterly thrilled her.

She wished so very much that she could stand by his side, and show the world how utterly delighted and amazed she was that she, the second daughter of a Pure-blood family, had gained the favour of such a man.

But she would wait.

She daintily helped herself to some food. She ensured she had a filling and balanced meal. She was still growing, and did not want to do anything to jeopardise that. When she bonded with him, she wanted to look her very best, and not like some dyspeptic teenager.

She was going to have to start some exercises – in secret, naturally – to try and encourage her chest a little. She would never be as well-proportioned as Bones, but she hoped to be acceptable to him.

The hall was full tonight, everyone choosing to eat together on this bright Saturday evening. A Saturday that would remain engraved in her memory, for as long as Lady Morgana granted her the gift of magic.

The doors opened, and he was there. He had changed from earlier, when he had been flying, into what looked like new robes. His hair was as unruly as ever, and his green eyes were sparkling.

Whispers started around him, as the more perceptive felt her mark on him, even if they didn't know that it was her mark.

“A Maiden's kiss,” she heard Nott whisper further up the table. “This changes things.”

And it did.

He strode over to the Gryffindor table, fearless footsteps, that seemed to cause a hush to go over the hall, as everyone watched.

He sat, his legs sliding over the bench, so that his back was to her.

“Hermione,” she heard him say, and she surreptitiously cast a listening charm, as did most of the Slytherin table; and as she looked on, most of the Ravenclaw table as well.

There was a feeling in the air, one almost of prophecy; as if magic was telling them that change was upon them.

“How was your day?” Granger asked.

“Pretty good. So, I wanted to ask you something. What's the third rule of Morgana?”

Astoria came as close as she ever had to choking on her food. She calmly placed her fork down, she would not be able to eat and listen to this conversation. Morgana's third rule was simple. It was the rule that had bound her voice earlier, when she had wished nothing more than to reassure him with words that she was his.

Hermione blinked several times. “I've not seen any books that reference them,” she replied after a few seconds of thought.

Astoria knew she wouldn't find the answer in any book, because it wasn't written down. She looked down, so that no one would be able to see her expression. It wasn't written down because witches learnt the rules from their sponsors.

A sponsor that Hermione had rejected out of hand all those years ago.

“Ahh,” Harry said slowly. There was a look of sadness on his face. He'd just confirmed part of

Astoria's earlier statements, and even if the name Malfoy was not mentioned, the very fact Hermione hadn't been able to answer had justified her wards.

"Ron," Harry continued, "Who are your family sponsoring at the moment?"

The youngest male Weasley went red. "Who told you?" he snarled.

"Ron?" Hermione asked, looking surprised.

"Someone told him," Ron said. "Who was it?"

Harry sighed and leant back, at an impossible angle. His magic supported him as his hands went behind his head.

It was a pose of utter nonchalance, of such amazing self belief, that he could appear so unguarded against the face of an upset or angry, and she couldn't quite tell which, wizard.

"Told him what?" Hermione demanded, looking confused.

"You guys are my best friends," Harry said calmly, ignoring the bewildered Hermione and red-faced Ron. "And I've had something dramatic change today; please can you tell me what it was?"

"What are you talking about?" Hermione asked.

"Ron?"

"Someone told you," Ron muttered, looking down at his half-finished plate. "You know."

"Not that," Harry snapped. "Come on, use the gift you have been given."

Hermione and Ron both looked blank.

Harry sighed, and seemed to rise out of his seat. The magic swirling around him in a beautiful cocoon, as it placed him on his feet. The gasps were audible this time, no one, not even she, she who had watched him so much, had understood just how close to magic he was.

He walked down, heading toward the exit; only, he stopped, next to the Hufflepuff first years. He knelt on one knee. "Hi," he said, to a pretty dark haired girl, "Natalie, right?"

The girl turned red, and Astoria could understand that, and nodded.

"You're Muggle raised?"

Natalie nodded, looking even more embarrassed.

"Could you tell me Morgana's third rule?"

In ordinary circumstances Natalie should have refused, but Astoria didn't think that there was a witch

in Hogwarts who would have been able to resist Harry as he was currently.

“A witch will never allow herself to be bound to another, until she is mature enough to deal with the consequences.”

Harry smiled at her. “And, Natalie, can you tell what has changed about me?”

For a second, Astoria had an image that made her heart clench. Harry, kneeling in front of their daughter, teaching her the rules, helping her become a loyal servant to magic.

Astoria looked around; to see many other witches had the same thought. Even Daphne, her cool older sister, was looking at him with a thoughtful and slightly regretful expression.

Natalie nodded. “You’ve received a Maiden’s kiss.”

Harry leant forward and gently kissed her on the forehead. His magic surged around the younger witch, marking her as under his protection, in the familial sense, to all others.

Natalie’s eyes widened and tears ran down her face.

“Your House is your family,” Harry said gently. “But sometimes, that is not enough, so I will be here for you. House Potter has paid for your education until you graduate, as it will for all students who cannot afford school after they have been made orphans by the murderous traitor, Voldemort.”

Natalie dived against his chest, and sobbed, mostly in relief.

Others were looking around, mostly shocked at the amount of information such a short statement could contain.

The major points being that he was the Potter Heir, and was using his inheritance to help others, war orphans in fact, and that he was involved personally. And the second was that he had publically called Voldemort a traitor to magic herself. It was a bold statement, one that called into doubt all that publically supported him.

Natalie sniffled a few times from inside Harry’s arms. Harry conjured a tissue for her, and passed it to her. He placed her back on her seat, and looked to the girls each side of her. “Look after her.”

The command was completely absolute, and both ‘Puffs nodded hard, wrapping their arms around Natalie.

Harry stood, seemingly taller than he had been, and headed toward the senior years at Gryffindor table.

Astoria felt her heart race; her magic ached to support him, to hold him, as did her arms.

“A first year,” he said in a tone of deep sadness, “A first year from a different house could answer my question. And yet my best friends couldn’t see the most important event in my life.”

It took every part of her will power for Astoria not to race to his side, so that she could support him in his pain.

He turned, before he paused, and headed across to the Slytherin table, the sixth years. They were staring at him, as if they'd never seen him before.

“Heir Nott,” he said softly, “It has been brought to my attention that I performed a service for Merlin and Morgana’s faithful fifteen years ago, receiving an acknowledged debt. I have been very remiss in allowing this debt to continue, and for that, you have my apologies.”

Every Pure-blood’s back straightened, and the looks of distrust vanished completely, as did all other expressions, as they awaited the shoe to drop.

Harry pulled out a piece of parchment. “These trinkets will render all debts fully paid,” Harry stated, as he handed it to Nott. He bowed once, that of the Heir to two ancient and ennobled houses to the heir of a lesser house.

He turned on his heel, not waiting for acknowledgement.

“Ten points from Gryffindor for interrupting lunch with personal issues.”

Harry turned slowly to face Snape. He looked at the professor for the longest moment.

“Harry,” Dumbledore started, looking worried.

Harry waved his hand, his magic reacting furiously. “Severus Snape,” Harry said, his voice cold enough to give everyone chills. “My mother was sponsored in to this world by Eileen Prince, your mother. Despite knowing this, you insulted my mother, calling in to doubt her dedication to Morgana, with the foul pejorative Mudblood.

“House Potter and House Black cannot and will not accept this as anything other than the foulest of attacks, on both the sanctity and honour of my houses, and to magic herself. As such, House Potter and House Black call a blood feud on House Snape and all that support her.”

He snapped his fingers, and his beautiful owl floated in, and landing on his shoulders. He snapped his fingers again, and an envelope appeared in his hand. He tied it to his owl’s foot; she nuzzled him for a second, and then took off.

Harry turned his back on Snape, and walked out calmly, his magic now smooth and calm, and feeling so incredibly deep.

Astoria looked up at the head table, to see Snape with his face expressionless.

Theodore Nott stood. “House meeting,” he said simply. Every Slytherin stood and walked out, down to their dungeons.

Despite being a sixth year, the same as Harry, Nott stood at the front. He was joined by the other sixth

year students. They may not have had the seniority in age, but they did in position, power and influence.

And Harry's dealing with Nott, and not Malfoy, had placed him to the fore.

As everyone was seated, Nott took the floor. "We have several things to discuss. We will do them in order. As always, please raise your hand if you have information.

"First point, Granger: she couldn't list Morgana's laws?"

Malfoy raised his hand. "House secret," he called, calling for the rule that ensured that what he was about to say would not go any further than the people here. And it wouldn't, anyone found breaking the rule, even to parents, would be permanently excluded from the Slytherin house. It was no exaggeration that most students would have preferred death to such a strong stench of dishonour that would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

"House Malfoy, under the standard terms of privacy and secrecy, offered to sponsor Granger. Granger decided that sponsoring was a relic of a past long gone, and that she would find her own feet."

Every witch present hissed in displeasure.

Nott looked at Parkinson. "Is that why she couldn't tell about Potter's pre-bonding?"

Pansy nodded. "Without Morgana's help, you wouldn't even know that such a thing existed."

"And who has he bonded to? I tried to follow it, but got lost."

"He's obscured it," Daphne said, grudging respect in her voice. "No one will be able to trace it."

"Should we investigate, there are only two hundred and eighty six witches in the school."

"Absolutely not," Daphne stated with implacable firmness. "Morgana has accepted both the bond, and the hiding of it. The girl is already feeling bad enough that circumstances has forced her in to hiding; we will not make her feel like a criminal as well. That would be an insult to Morgana. Even if we were as bold as to ignore Morgana, magic would stop the girl from identifying herself."

Nott nodded. "As it has been spoken, so it will be obeyed."

There was a pause of a few seconds, so anyone could challenge the statement. As no one did, Nott moved on. "The first year, who is she?"

A girl at the back raised her hand.

"Speak, daughter of Slytherin."

"Victoria Mosely," she introduced herself. "Second child, first daughter. The girl is Natalie Jones,

first in her family to receive Morgana's gift. She is sponsored by the Heston family. Her parents were killed on the raid last week. Unfortunately, the Heston family do not have the resources to fund her Hogwarts education, so she was looking at moving to one of the lesser schools after this year. Obviously, Heir Potter is now sponsoring her stay at Hogwarts."

There was a general thrum of approval that sounded through the gathered students. Both for Harry's actions, and that the girl was sponsored with a proper, if lesser, family.

"Slytherin house will refrain from offering our condolences, until it will not come across as hypocritical and insulting. However, an anonymous donation from the Slytherin Alumni will ensure that any children that Miss Jones has have a suitable endowment as to ensure that they attend Hogwarts themselves. As it has been spoken, so it will be obeyed."

Again, there was silence, and no one protested.

"Next, this list from Potter. It is strange. I'm sure we all recognise that Potter was offering an olive branch. Malfoy?"

"Yeah?"

"The first item is, "One diary belonging to T.M. Riddle, received with thanks from the Malfoy family four years ago.""

Draco frowned. He shrugged, and reached into his pocket, and pulled out a communication mirror. "Father," he called.

A few seconds later, the unmistakable voice of Lucius Malfoy replied. "Draco?"

"Are you free, father?"

"For a few moments, yes."

Draco quickly gave his father highlights of what they had discussed so far. "So, on Potter's list, is a Diary belonging to T.M. Riddle, which Potter has marked as delivered by the Malfoy Family?"

Lucius did not respond for a few moments. In a voice that Astoria had never heard from the Head of the Malfoy family, he eventually said, "Potter demanded these items in full payment of our debt?" he asked.

"Yes, Father."

"And the diary was the first thing on the list?"

"Yes, Father."

"He understood," Lucius said softly. In a firmer voice, he continued, "House Malfoy and her allies acknowledge the debt, and the leniency given. Draco, please give me the list."

Nott handed the parchment to Malfoy, who read them to his father. “Marvolo Gaunt’s Ring, Salazar Slytherin’s Locket, Helga Hufflepuff’s Cup, Rowena Ravenclaw’s Diadem, the Skull of Nagini the Snake.

“Does he have an obsession with Founder’s relics?” Draco asked as he finished.

There was another pause, and in a voice that suggested that Lord Malfoy was struggling, he replied, “The items were also once in the possession of Tom Marvolo Riddle. I have to go Draco,” there was a much quicker pause. “Stay out of Potter’s way. Do not antagonise him.”

“Yes, father,” Draco responded immediately, before placing the mirror away.

“Who is Tom Marvolo Riddle?” Pansy asked. “I don’t know a Riddle family, and Marvolo sounds made up.”

Astoria took a deep breath. This was time for her to test her acting skills to the fullest.

She stood, and walked over to the side. Carefully conjuring a chalk board she wrote out Tom Marvolo Riddle.

She was aware that everyone was watching her, as she created the first anagram. Loved trim malodor.

She scowled and wiped it out, trying again. Immortal lover, odd. She wiped it out, this time starting with the obvious word. Lord. As she did, she put a strike through the letters.

Voldemort was next, leaving just three letters. She shuddered, as she wrote them out.

She could hear gasps of shock and awe as she stood back from the chalk board.

“Well done, Astoria,” Daphne said softly, before starting to applaud.

Astoria bowed, keeping her feeling of being a dratted fraud to herself. Harry had told her about his exploits earlier, and had mentioned the other anagrams; it was hardly quick thinking on her part.

“Yes,” Nott agreed, as the applause calmed down. “Very Slytherin thinking. Well done.”

“Oh,” Tracey said. She had the Slytherin Alumni book in her hand. “Does the self-proclaimed Slytherin Lord profess to be a Pure-blood?”

“He does,” Nott agreed.

“He is a Half-blood. Also, not a Lord.” Tracey frowned. “Which makes his use of extreme Pure-blood doctrine both hypocritical and illogical.”

“Being a hypocrite and illogical is hardly a crime,” Pansy sniffed. “The question here is why these items are important to the Dark Lord?”

“Well,” Malfoy said, “let’s look at the facts. The diary was in the second year, which ties it in to the Basilisk and the Heir of Slytherin.”

“So was the Dark Lord in the castle?” Daphne asked.

“No, he was re-born after the fourth task.” Draco shrugged. “I believe it was some form of possession.”

“A possession that allowed him to pass on the mantle of Heir of Slytherin, if only temporary,” Astoria pointed out quietly. “As I believe the Chamber of Secrets was involved.”

“Very good point,” Nott murmured. “Davis?”

“The first year Slytherin’s at the time noted the female Weasley’s behaviour was a bit strange, even for a Weasley. At first, we thought that Lockhart was playing with her, but that was soon disproved. She was missing during the dealing with the incident, and her family appeared shortly afterward.

“So we believe it was possession.”

“A possession that allowed her access to the Chamber of Secrets?” Daphne asked doubtfully. “It would need a lot more than a simple ghost taking control of someone, unless she was remarkably weak willed, and blood traitor or not, she is still a daughter of Morgana, and is powered as such.”

“So it needed more?” Nott asked, rhetorically.

Astoria had to bite her lip to stop her blurting out that Horcruxes were the answer, evil and foul things that they were.

“Astoria?” Daphne called. “You have a suggestion?”

Astoria cursed herself. “Only one so vile, that I hardly dare even think it.” She felt so mortally embarrassed that she’d had her expression read while in a meeting. It might have been her sister, but she should have better control than that.

It was something she was going to have to work on.

“Which is?” Nott demanded.

“If I am right, it means Heir Potter was correct, and that He is a traitor to magic.”

There were some intakes of breath, as she refused to give Voldemort even an accepted amount of respect.

“Speak,” Nott demanded.

Astoria looked at Nott for a long moment; she did not appreciate the tone he had used. How dare he talk to her like an errant krup?

“Astoria, please,” Daphne said, her tone more conciliatory.

“Horcruxes,” she said bluntly. “And judging by His insights into Numerology, seven of them.”

There was an utterly horrified silence. Draco, his hands shaking, called “Father,” in to the mirror.

“Draco? What’s happened, you look like you’ve seen a Nundu?”

“Horcruxes?” he croaked.

There was a deep sigh from the mirror. “How?” he asked.

“Astoria Greengrass,” Draco replied. “She also worked out that Tom Marvolo Riddle is the Dark Lord’s real name.”

“I shall inform her parents that they should be proud of such a witch,” Lucius Malfoy murmured. It took every ounce of self-control for Astoria not to blush. It had not been her, after all.

Draco took a deep breath, and appeared to wrestle some self-control. “So Potter is going to destroy these?”

“I would presume so,” Lucius agreed. “I have to go, Draco, the Minister is being difficult again.”

Draco nodded, and placed the mirror down after saying his good byes.

“So, Potter was right,” Nott said. “He is a traitor to all of us.”

No one argued with him.

“So, we leave Potter alone. As it has been spoken, so it will be obeyed.”

“Foolishness,” Astoria stated in to the silence.

Nott glared at her, so she glared back. She could feel the tenuous bond with Harry suddenly boost her power a little, and Nott stepped back a pace.

“Astoria?” Daphne called, looking at her in surprise.

“Yes?”

“Please come up here and explain your thoughts?”

Astoria nodded, and headed to the front, stepping on to the small platform. She looked down at the gathered students, and realised that this would be her rightful place in the future. She gathered her courage.

“Slytherin House has suffered under association with the traitor,” she said, addressing the students. “We have a chance to change that, we need to make positive steps to build bridges with the rest of the

school, and with Potter specifically.

“If word gets out about the vile Horcruxes, Slytherin will be forever tainted with the knowledge that we supported such a traitor. Our own loyalty will be called in to question, no matter how unjust and how unmerited.

“And we can make the first step, by dealing with our own traitor.”

“Snape?” Tracey Davis asked.

Astoria nodded. “I cannot support, or accept such a traitor to Morgana having a position of authority over me.”

“Agreed,” her sister said, as the other female Slytherins made sounds of agreement.

“Additionally, do you know what the Ravenclaws are saying about us?” she continued, now on a roll, and taking this opportunity to get some things off her chest.

No one said anything to her rhetorical question.

“That Slytherin doesn’t really count in the House Trophy. With Snape being so biased, we have the reputation of not being able to compete on our own.” Astoria allowed her face to curl into an expression of distaste. “Even Hufflepuffs look down on us.”

No one protested, or even looked that surprised at her pronouncement.

“Snape has caused almost irreparable harm to the reputation of Slytherin House. Additionally, he has come close to driving a permanent wedge between the Noble House of Slytherin, and the Noble House of Potter.

“As an outsider, Snape’s actions have lacked subtlety and far worse, lacked cunning.

“There is also the future to look at. With a blood feud between Houses Potter and Black and Snape, or Prince, any who support Snape will be on the wrong side if Potter wins.” She paused, and allowed herself a small shudder. “If Potter loses, we can claim that we were tricking Potter in the short term, whilst we prepare to escape the country.

“I now call on a member of Slytherin House to defend Severus Snape from the charges before him.”

Astoria stepped back, well aware of what she had just started. She had called for Snape’s expulsion from Slytherin House.

If she could not stand next to her beloved, she would do what she could from the shadows, like a true Slytherin.

Draco stepped forward.

“Unfortunately, Heir Malfoy, familial relationships mean you cannot speak for your godfather.”

Malfoy looked resigned as he nodded, and stepped back.

“As no one else has, I will speak for him,” Nott said eventually. “He has been a loyal servant of Slytherin his entire life. He has made mistakes, but so have most people. I believe the punishment too harsh.”

“I believe that insulting magic, and harming the reputation of Slytherin for an entire generation is unforgivable,” Astoria replied. “However, the very fact that the action will ingrate us with the heir of two of the most important houses gives us an extra incentive.” She paused. “As it has been spoken, so it will be obeyed.”

As she said the words, she felt magic, Slytherin magic from the school, surround her. There were some gasps and looks of shock. Slytherin house magic rarely intervened, and it was an honour to be supported by it.

No one countered her words. She did not smile, did not gloat, that was not her way. But she was very proud of herself. Opportunities had arisen, and she had taken them.

“How do we tell him?” Nott eventually asked. “Davis?”

Tracey looked in to the book of Slytherin history. “First refusal goes to Astoria?”

Buoyed by her success, and desperately wanting to show Harry what she had arranged, Astoria agreed instantly. “At breakfast tomorrow,” she decided. “I will inform Snape that he may no longer call himself a Slytherin, and inform the headmaster that we cannot accept him as our head of house.”

As she still had the floor, she continued. “We will convene in a week, to discuss exactly how best we can restore our reputation, and to discuss any suggested replacements for Snape.” Astoria turned, and headed straight for her bedroom. She still needed to brush her hair, and needed to use some of her supply of Dreamless Sleep potion, to ensure she got a good night’s rest. She was already nervous about tomorrow.

With her door firmly closed, she changed in to her nightgown, and sat at her mirror to brush her hair. Exactly one hundred strokes and nothing less would do.

“Astoria, it’s me, I’m coming in,” she heard her sister call.

She didn’t say anything, as she continued to brush her hair.

Daphne entered, her sister was taller than her, and had lovely straight black hair; good hair was a Greengrass trait.

Daphne stood behind her, and as Astoria met her eyes in the mirror, Daphne took the brush from her hands, and started to brush her hair. “Congratulations,” her sister eventually said. “Blessed by the house, showing your intelligence, and getting some revenge on someone who insulted you. A good

evening's work."

Astoria had actually forgotten that Snape had insulted her in her first year. She always believed that the best way to deal with something she could not change was to forget about it.

"And," Daphne continued, "Slytherin House approving of you. It's been fifteen years since that last happened. I think a lot of boys will be speaking to their parents about approaching you after your birthday."

Astoria felt her stomach clench at the very idea of someone other than Harry approaching her. "We shall see," she said softly.

"So," Daphne said, a smile appearing on her face, "is there anyone I should encourage?"

"No," Astoria replied evenly. "We shall see what happens on my birthday."

"Okay," Daphne replied as she went silent.

Astoria was content to sit in silence with her sister, with the only noise the steady movement of her sister's hand and the brush against her hair.

As Daphne finished, Astoria turned and hugged her sister. "I do love you," she said quietly.

Daphne's arms tightened around her. "I love you too, my dear sister," Daphne replied.

Astoria walked toward the Great Hall, leading a procession of Slytherins. It was unusual, if not unheard of for a lower-year to do so, but with the House's backing, it was an obvious position for her.

Ahead, she saw Harry, a broom slung over his shoulder, heading outside. "Lord Potter," she called. He turned to her, and she wanted to abandon this charade, if only she could.

"Greengrass, right?" Harry said, walking over to her, and ignoring the entourage behind her. "Astoria?"

Astoria nodded and curtsied deeply, more than slightly impressed with his acting ability. "Are you not joining us for breakfast?"

"Things are rather tense, at the moment," he said equally, "should I?"

"In the spirit of your attempts at conciliation yesterday, I believe you might find it most edifying."

There was an amused cast to his face, as he raised an eyebrow. "Then do not let me delay you any longer," he said, stepping back with a wide sweeping bow, and a grace that must have made several of her male colleagues envious.

Astoria entered the great hall, and stood to one side as the Slytherin contingent entered and took their seats. None of them reached for food. They were the last house to arrive, as she had planned. As it was a Sunday morning, not everyone was there, but enough people were to ensure that everyone would know what happened. Granger and both Weasleys were noticeable in their absence.

Harry walked in, and headed to the Hufflepuff table, where he took a seat next to Natalie. The girl in question looked grateful, and scooted nearer him, much as a child would to a parent.

Astoria did not need a fortifying breath. She knew that, if needed to, Harry would reveal their connection and protect her from any repercussions.

“Miss Greengrass?” Professor Dumbledore asked as she approached them.

“Please excuse my interruption, Headmaster,” she said with a dainty curtsy. “I speak on behalf of the Noble House of Slytherin.” There was a flare of magic surrounding her, from the school, backing up her words.

“Please continue, then,” the Headmaster said.

Astoria turned to his right, and looked at her head of House. “Professor Snape, due to your actions in undermining the honour and probity of the Noble House of Slytherin and your utter failure to follow the Slytherin creed, you are hereby expelled from the records of Slytherin with your name and successes expunged from our history.”

Snape went absolutely white, before cruel fury appeared in his eyes. “Headmaster,” she continued, to the stunned looking head of school. “Professor Snape is no longer capable or entitled to be the Slytherin Head of House.”

“How dare you,” Snape spat.

Astoria looked at him quizzically. She tilted her head. “Because of you, the other houses look down on us, as if we were small children, in need of someone to cheat in our favour. Hardly actions of a Slytherin who prides themselves on cunning. Such blatant disrespect is a potent symbol of what you have done to our once respected House.”

“Isn’t this a bit hasty?” Professor Dumbledore asked.

“If I may respond with a question, why have you allowed such a clearly biased man to call in to question everything that is good about Slytherin?”

Professor Dumbledore frowned. “Professor Snape is a trusted and valued member of staff. He will remain as Head of House. We will discuss this further after breakfast.”

Astoria nodded. “As is your right,” she agreed. “We will not attend a meeting about this situation; our decision is supported by Merlin and Morgana, and by Salazar. Fortunately, we are, of course, quite capable of looking after ourselves. We will not be attending any lessons held by Professor Snape, nor will Professor Snape be allowed access to the Slytherin Common Room or the Slytherin Dungeons.”

All points given or removed by Professor Snape to Slytherin House will be ignored. We shall inform you by the end of today whom we have chosen as a replacement tutor for us in potions.”

She curtsied politely to the Headmaster, and turned her back on Snape. She paused. “Slytherin House would like to start making amends for its behaviour under the previous administration. As such, any who desire may join us with our new instructor of Potions.”

Astoria was well aware that every eye was on her, so she dared not look for Harry’s approval. She returned to her seat, and calmly started to gather some breakfast for herself. As she did, the other Slytherins moved as well, all of them ignoring Snape.

To them, he simply no longer existed.

“Potter,” Snape screamed, in an almost incandescent rage. “It is his fault, he declared the blood feud with me, and Slytherin House reacted.”

“Against you,” Filius Flitwick added. “So, Albus, you are going to leave the Slytherins with no authority in charge?”

The headmaster frowned. “Of course not.”

“Then Severus will be leaving us?”

“Not at all.”

“So he is getting a pay cut?”

Albus blinked. “Excuse me?”

“As he is no longer performing Head of House duties, his pay will be that of a normal teacher, correct? And of course, there is the matter of where he will sleep?”

“What are you talking about?” Snape demanded.

“I believe your quarters are in the dungeons?” Filius said lightly. “To which you can no longer access. Not that it matters, there are plenty of standard accommodation suites available.”

“And of course,” Minerva continued, “as you are no longer a Head of House, all points taken and removed will be supervised by the Deputy Headmistress.”

“Headmaster!” Severus complained. “Do something.”

Albus looked up. “Ahh,” he said. “A member of the Board of Governors approaches.”

The door to Albus’ office opened, and Severus was pleased to see it was Lucius Malfoy. He would fix this, and then he’d get his revenge on the Greengrass bint. A mere second-born daughter leading

the house in his humiliation? Preposterous.

Without invitation, Lucius joined the table.

“Welcome,” Albus said cheerfully, and Snape knew he was actually being genuine for the moment.

“Thank you,” Lucius said. “I have heard what has occurred. And was horrified.”

Snape smiled, and then sneered at the disappointed looks on the other three houses.

“Please, Albus, do tell me how you let this biased individual ruin the Slytherin reputation for so many years?”

There was a silence, as Snape gaped at the man he called friend.

Suddenly, it was clear. He was being made a scapegoat. Something had changed, and they were preparing for Potter to win.

Albus didn't say anything; he just gained a resigned look.

Thirty minutes later, Snape was following Malfoy out of Hogwarts, and then they Apparated together to the edge of Malfoy manor's wards.

They walked in silence up the long drive, before entering through the front door. Narcissa was already waiting for them with drinks.

Snape took his, and drowned it. “I'll kill him,” he muttered. “Potter caused this!”

“No,” Narcissa said blandly, “your insult to Morgana caused this. Your problem, Severus, is that you have tried to play both sides, so that no one knows where your true loyalties lie.”

“I am loyal to the Dark Lord,” Snape declared.

“Unfortunately, we're not,” Narcissa said. “It was a mistake to choose you as a godparent. I had hoped that the responsibility would allow you to grow.” She shook her head like she was dealing with a disappointing child.

“What?” Snape demanded, he went for his wand, suddenly scared, only to be hit by a disarming curse from Lucius, who was behind him.

“Goodbye Severus, please do try not to stain the marble.”

Severus coughed; a raucous cough that bent him double in pain. It was poison. He desperately reached for his pockets, for the bezoar he always carried on him.

“Accio Bezoar,” Lucius said in a bored voice. “Portus.”

Snape looked up, as Lucius dropped a napkin on him. The Portkey grabbed him, and when he opened arrived, he vomited. It was cold, so cold. He looked around desperately, to find he was in the middle of nowhere. Everything was white.

He tried to Apparate, but couldn't concentrate enough, and without his wand, he couldn't create a Portkey. Pain wracked through him once again and he coughed. The snow in front of him turned red, and the blood seemed to freeze it before it hit the ground.

His last thought was that he really shouldn't have called Lily that word.

“Lord Potter?”

Harry looked up, to see Malfoy, Nott, Astoria's sister, Pansy, and Astoria standing next to his library table.

As was normal, he squashed the urge to take Astoria in his arms, so that he could love and cherish her, and finally mark her as his.

“Heir Malfoy,” Harry responded to the speaker.

“My father has requested that we inform you that we have procured the trinkets you requested. Unfortunately, the last one caused some issues, and my father is hurrying here at the moment. He will be coming up the main drive shortly.”

Harry shot to his feet. “Accio Sword of Gryffindor,” he called, as he took off, heading out the library. Rather than take the stairs, he dived over the balcony, somersaulted, dropped three stories, then cast a featherlight spell on himself, allowing to land in a crouch with no damage.

He sprinted again, and as he heard a whistling, he grabbed the sword as it came toward him. Dumbledore was near the door, looking at him.

“Harry?” he asked.

Harry didn't stop, brushing past him. Up ahead, he could see Lucius running toward him, and behind him, flying fast, was Voldemort.

“Drop them,” Harry yelled.

Lucius did as he was told, then moved to the side. Harry didn't pause, as he slammed the basilisk enhanced sword in to the first – a cup. It exploded, and Voldemort roared in pain. The second was the Slytherin Locket. Harry opened it, it attacked him, but he was too fired up to do anything but react with violence. It exploded, allowing Harry to move on to the diadem, this one he destroyed immediately. Gaunt's ring was destroyed next, and for good luck, he destroy Nagini's skull.

Voldemort, hovered over to him, looking incensed. “You will pay for your treachery, Lucius.”

“You are a traitor, to those that followed you, and to magic,” Lucius replied evenly.

“Avada Kedavra!” Voldemort roared.

With a deep breath, Harry jumped into the curse.

Astoria gasped softly, as Harry called for a sword and sprinted off. Realising the urgency, she followed him, and dashed to the balcony as Harry dived off it. She looked down, and blinked as Harry landed in a crouch all the way down. Dust exploded from him in a perfect circle, before he was sprinting again.

“I’ve been lucky,” Malfoy muttered.

Astoria turned and looked at him. Malfoy looked like he had just had his whole world shift ten degrees to the right. “Potter’s been allowing me to be irritating,” he continued.

“Now not’s the time,” Nott said, and Astoria agreed with him. Normally, it would never do for a Pure-blood lady to exert herself, but when it seemed like history was in the making, she could be excused.

Her secret exercise was paying off, as she was able to outdistance her sister, Parkinson, and even the boys. She ran out the door, as others started to stream out, and saw Harry in the distance. She paused, and cast a magnifying spell to allow her to see.

Harry was destroying the Horcruxes with the sword. Each one was exploding with violent magic, that even from her distance, seemed foul and disgusting. With each one, Voldemort, hovering further back was roaring in anger and pain.

The last one, the snake’s head had no effect on Voldemort. Voldemort said something, and pointed his wand at Malfoy, who looked like the pure blood Lord he was, stood proudly and definitely.

“Father!” Draco yelled, as the monster cast the killing curse.

To her horror, she saw Harry dive in front of Lord Malfoy, the curse impacting him directly.

Astoria felt herself drift away from conscious. She knew she was still standing, but it was like she could see herself from a distance.

She looked down at Harry, the man who owned her heart.

She inhaled sharply as she was back in her body. In the brief time she had been away, Professor Dumbledore had started to duel with the traitor.

Lord Malfoy had Harry flat on the ground, on his back, and was hovering over him. Harry stood, moving Lord Malfoy out of the way. He walked up behind the distracted traitor, and shoved the sword of Gryffindor through the Dark Lord’s chest.

The spells stopped. Harry said something, before he pulled the sword out and as Voldemort crumbled, Harry removed the traitor's head.

Harry went down on one knee, panting. Astoria joined the others in moving closer. The bond her innocent kiss had created had allowed her to retain her sanity, and now the Dark Lord was dead.

"I told you," Harry panted to Professor Dumbledore, "that doing everything yourself is a waste of resources."

Professor Dumbledore looked stunned.

"Lucius," Harry continued, "I acknowledge the debt for my actions of sixteen years ago has been paid in full."

"Unfortunately, I now appear to owe you a personal life debt," Lucius replied.

Harry stumbled to his feet. He stretched. "Dying sucks," he muttered. "Fine." He straightened. "Lord Malfoy, in payment of your debt, I expect you to continue your work in the Wizengamot with the honesty and probity that your reputation pertains. And I look forward to working with you in the future."

Astoria felt herself go cross-eyed as she tried to decipher what Harry had asked for. She blinked, as the answer came to her.

"Astoria?" Daphne said. "Please explain."

"Lord Malfoy will be acting as Lord Malfoy," Astoria said.

"What does that mean?" Draco asked.

"Lord Malfoy is an honest and upstanding member of the community, who gives generously to charities, and conducts himself with honour and respect at all times."

Draco still looked confused.

"That clever little git," Tracey exclaimed, "that's going to change things."

Astoria walked forward a few steps. "My Lord Malfoy," she called, curtsying.

"Astoria," Lucius replied. Astoria could feel Professor Dumbledore looking at her, as well as Harry's blank gaze.

True to his word, Harry had engaged in no dalliances while they waited, and had moved himself into a neutral position, no longer with his friends, or making new ones in opposite camps.

She'd hated him being lonely.

“Draco informed me that you discovered the location of the Diadem,” Lucius continued.

She stole a quick glance at Harry’s eyes, and for the briefest of seconds, his absolute pride in her was visible. It was gone before anyone else could notice it.

“You honour me, my Lord,” she said, deflecting the praise. “It occurs to me that with the traitor being in two parts behind you, that not only do you owe a debt to Lord Potter, all people who were unfortunate enough to be branded by the monster owe both of you a debt for all that you have done today. And that the others should be given the opportunity to live up to the standards you set, my lord.”

Lucius looked at her for a very long moment. “It will be a very lucky young man who ends up bonded with you, Lady Greengrass.” He turned to Harry. “Lord Potter, do you agree with this proposal?”

“I do.”

Lucius smiled coolly. “I shall take great delight in informing my colleagues of their opportunity. Now, I do wonder where the Aurors are, it has been close to five minutes since Lord Potter defeated the traitor.”

“They are on their way,” Professor Dumbledore announced. Astoria looked to her right, to see Minister Fudge, Umbridge, Madam Bones, several Aurors, and some members of the press.

Fudge drew to a halt, and then paused, and looked at the downed Voldemort. He gulped. “Why look, Cornelius,” Harry drawled. “Voldemort, dead, obviously.”

“Yes, yes, good work,” Minister Fudge said. “They’ll be an Order of Merlin in it for you.”

“Excellent,” Harry said cheerfully. “And for Lord Malfoy, of course. I couldn’t have done it without his assistance.”

“Yes, yes,” Fudge agreed merrily.

“Lord Malfoy,” Harry continued in the same cheery voice. “What do you think about launching an investigation in to the Ministry’s handling of the whole affair?”

Lucius looked at Harry for a long moment. “Why yes,” he purred, “an excellent idea. Madam Bones, would you mind investigating your ministerial colleagues?”

“I would be delighted,” the monocle-wearing woman replied, looking surprised at the offer.

“Oh, I’m being rude,” Harry said, “Delores Umbridge. Your actions, while legal, were nothing short of an insult to House Potter and House Black, as such House Potter and House Black call a blood feud on house Umbridge, and all who support you.” He snapped his fingers and presented the document that appeared in his fingers to Madam Bones, who took it, unfurled it, and read it briefly.

“Oh, and the press,” Harry said, and handed them the some paper as well. “As you can see, it was

sanctioned by Cornelius himself.”

“W-what?” Fudge asked.

“Minister, why did you sanction the torture of our children?” one of the journalists demanded, and the others surrounded him and Umbridge, shouting more questions. The Journalists split into two groups, with a third around the Minister and his Undersecretary. The others kept close to Harry and Lord Malfoy.

Harry moved away from him smartly, Lucius did as well.

“Lord Voldemort is truly dead?” Madam Bones asked the junior and senior Lord.

“Lord Malfoy, were you invited to Voldemort’s Ennobling?”

“I’m afraid not, Lord Potter,” Malfoy replied.

“But your family traces its roots back over an eon, surely one of your illustrious ancestors attended such an august ceremony?”

“Again, my Lord, my family has never seen the ennobling of anyone called Voldemort.”

“What about Tom Marvolo Riddle?”

“I believe Riddle was a Muggle name, and that his mother was a Gaunt, a penniless house, so inbred that they could no longer call their own blood pure.”

“Surely they were ennobled?”

“I’m afraid not.”

Harry shook his head. “I’m sorry,” he said to Madam Bones, “but I know of no person named Lord Voldemort.”

“My apologies,” the head of the Magical Law Enforcement at the Ministry said with a barely concealed grin. “Voldemort?”

“Ahh yes, the self-given pseudonym of Tom Marvolo Riddle – he who is in two parts over there. Yes, he is very dead. He cast many, many dark rituals on himself, giving himself a cheap form of immortality. He bound himself to seven items to flee from death. Professor Dumbledore realised this, and once he did I realised that I had one inside myself, after that, it did not take much work for me to interrogate the part of him inside me, and learn what the items were.

“From there, I passed Lord Malfoy a list. He found, with assistance, the items in question, and today, I destroyed them, and then found a way for Riddle to destroy the one in me. Whilst Professor Dumbledore had Riddle distracted, I used the sword of Gryffindor to kill him. And now that he is dead,” Harry looked at Riddle’s body. “Incendio!”

Astoria had to step back at the sheer savagery of the flames that erupted out of Harry's wand and totally disintegrated Voldemort, and his wand.

Harry cut of the spell. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I was studying in the library when Riddle interrupted my day." He gave his sweeping bow that was just short of mocking, and walked off.

Astoria watched him go, and felt the love that had been a part of her for so long swell. He'd not just killed Voldemort, but he'd gone a step further and neutralised most of the rabid Pure-bloods. Of course, Lord Malfoy would continue to push his agenda, but his vow would ensure that he had to do so fairly.

"So, Professor Dumbledore," Madam Bones said slowly. "Would you care to explain why the head of the Wizengamot failed to pass on vital information to the Aurors?"

"Yes, Albus," Lucius said, jumping on to the opportunity, "Please do tell."

Professor Dumbledore gave a sour look in the direction Harry had left.

Astoria turned, and faced the other professors and students, who had been watching in a stunned silence. "Tom Marvolo Riddle, traitor to magic, also known as Voldemort, is dead. I believe this calls for a celebration. Never again will we allow magic to be subjugated by one individual. Lord Potter and Lord Malfoy have proven what can happen when a Slytherin and a Gryffindor can work together, and if they can put aside their differences, so can everyone else in this school."

Without waiting for the response from the school, Astoria headed back up the path to school. She would not be joining in the celebration. Not for another forty eight days, when she would finally hit her birthday, and be able to claim and be claimed by Harry.

Until that day, she had nothing to celebrate.

On the day of her birthday, Astoria awoke early. She bathed, and then washed her hair carefully. It took an hour to dry and style it the way she wanted. She was fortunate that today was a Saturday, so she did not have to wear the formless robes.

Once she had completed her hair, she slid in to some lingerie. Not that Harry would get to see them until they were bonded, but it made her feel closer to him.

Her dress was stunning; its cost was so much that she had needed to borrow some money from her sister.

She held it up and examined it. It was made of the finest Acromantula silk; it was a deep Slytherin green, with a silver threaded bodice, made of real silver. She pulled it over her head, and wiggled into position. Her exercise, eating well, and puberty meant that she actually needed the built in bra now.

She straightened the dress by her ankles, and before stepping into the matching slippers. She grabbed her wand, and used it to tie the bodice up behind her back.

Finally, she looked in the mirror. Her hair was, as always, her best feature. The curls seemed even more radiant today, and she had allowed them to grow so that they now tumbled over her shoulders, and past her chest.

Her eyes were bright and clear, and she didn't need to use any charms to hide any blemishes on her skin, as she had none. She suspected it was the clean living that had helped her.

She looked as good as she ever had. She might not have Daphne's legs, but she shared the same genes, and the exercise had helped sculpt them into very nice examples of the genre. She may not have Lovegood's hips, but her own were perfectly suitable for giving birth to the first generation of Potter-Blacks. She may not have Bones' breasts, but she was reasonably confident that she was going in the right direction, and that Harry would be more than pleased when it was the right time. She may not have a twin, but she no longer felt that she needed someone else to help her look after Harry. She was more than capable of giving him the love and affection he deserved.

As she had a few seconds left, she allowed her thoughts to wander once more to Harry. He had faded into the background a little, after the defeat of Riddle. He to, hadn't joined in the celebrations, but he had very much been gossiped about.

While there had been no need for Harry to continue to hide Astoria, it had taken merely a glance for them to agree to wait.

It would have been a thousand times worse if everyone knew they would be together, but couldn't at the moment.

Harry continued to stand alone, whatever had happened between him, and Granger and Weasley was not known, which was quite a surprise in Hogwarts. It had driven some of the senior Slytherins half mad, trying to work out what had happened.

A lot of people had tried to work out who Harry had received the kiss from. Some girls had ruled themselves out, such as Bones and Lovegood, and it was known that Daphne wasn't. Other girls hadn't. The current theory was that it was a girl from another school, with the part-Veela sister of the tri-wizard champion from Beauxbatons as the favourite.

Madam Bones' initial investigation had been enough for Cornelius to become the first Minister ever to leave in disgrace. Umbridge had mysteriously vanished from her office one day, and no one wasted any time searching for her.

The charges against Professor Dumbledore were never brought; he had announced his attention to retire as Supreme Mugwump shortly afterward.

Astoria stood, checked herself one last time, and left her room. She was now a senior Slytherin, respected for her mind, and her cunningness. Even Draco had appreciated the way she had ensured a

level playing field for his parents.

And all of this because she had reached out desperately to Harry, to save herself, and everyone that she cared about. He had given her so much in return, not least the confidence in herself to not hide the fact that she was smart.

Tracey whistled slowly as she stepped out. “Sweetie, I hardly think that you, of all people, need to advertise that it is your birthday today. I’m sure your parents are being utterly inundated with owls this morning, requesting permission to talk to you.”

“Indeed,” Daphne agreed. “You do look good, Astoria.”

“Thank you,” Astoria replied, allowing a small smile to appear on her face.

Together, the girls entered the main Common Room, and she was gratified to see some of the boys do a double take. She reassured herself that after today, no one would look at her like that again, except for the one man she wanted to.

She joined the students moving at the back, with her friends.

She entered the doors to the Hall, and paused, before moving to the side. Harry was standing at the front before the Professor’s table. He had some space between him and the first rows of tables. He was wearing the nicest robes she had ever seen him wear. His hair was, as always, completely unruly, and the dark robes emphasised his shoulder and his trim waist. The robes were inlaid with silver, in intricate patterns. His eyes stood out, because he wasn’t wearing his glasses. They were gleaming with power and ability. His magic was swirling around him in eager anticipation. He was a breath taking sight.

“We’re going to see the lucky girl then,” Tracey stated. The last of the students trickled in, and the rest of her friends started toward their seats.

Astoria took a breath, and then broke away from the group.

“Astoria,” Daphne hissed, “Do not interfere, don’t ruin the bridges you’ve helped build between us and Potter!”

Astoria looked over her shoulder, at her sister, and smiled gently at her.

“You clever little bitch,” Tracey gasped. “You’ve won, you’ve fucking won!”

“What?” Daphne demanded. “What do you mean, Tracey?”

“Watch,” Tracey replied.

Astoria continued to move, aware of the eyes on her now, most not understanding yet why she was approaching the front. Some perhaps thinking that it was a repeat of her dénouement of Snape.

She stood in front of Harry, and then curtsayed deeply, this time careful not reveal her ankles to others who might see.

“My Lady Greengrass,” he said, and his magic swirled around her, removing the spell that had hidden their connection. “Astoria.”

She enjoyed the gasps, the sounds of disbelief, and she enjoyed the tendrils of his magic running up and down her own.

“Lady Margaret bade me give you this,” Harry said, and Astoria gasped herself, she had always coveted the ring he was holding. The silver ring had always been on her mother’s hand, a gift from her father to her mother.

The very fact that he had it, and that he gave her mother’s name, meant that he had her mother’s full approval. Astoria almost felt faint! She opened her clenched her right hand, all but the finger that the ring needed to rest on. He knelt in front of her and slid the ring on to her finger. There was another flare of his magic, and the ring changed to fit her smaller finger.

“Astoria, would you care to walk with me today, to Hogsmeade? Your mother has agreed to chaperone.” Out of the corner of her eye, Astoria saw her mother and father standing next to her sister, watching. Her mother was looking proud, as was her father.

“Yes, oh so very much so, yes,” Astoria replied as fast as she could.

“After breakfast, then?”

She nodded. “Please, My Lord, will you not join us for breakfast?”

He smiled. “I would be delighted, My Lady.” There was such a delicious undercurrent of passion and pride as he subconsciously emphasised the *my* .

“Of everyone, you should call me Astoria,” Astoria said lightly.

“But you are My Lady.”

“I am,” she agreed. Astoria frowned as she looked at the benches. It was hardly fitting for her parents to sit on them, and now that she thought about it, Harry deserved more as well. Before her eyes, the benches in front of her split, and formed two new chairs, one each side of the table, before the rest remained as a bench.

Harry hurried around the table, managing to look calm and collected. He paused, and held out the opposite chair for her mother. Her mother smiled, and sat, as Harry eased the chair in. “Father?” Astoria called, offering the other chair.

Her father smiled, and a second later, Astoria found herself seated in the seat, while her father took the new end of the bench.

“Your grace?” Harry asked in surprise.

“I am Clarence Greengrass, fourteenth Duke of Pembridgeshire. Your actions, Lord Potter-Black, have more than given you the right to call me Clarence, Harry.”

Harry inclined his head. “My thanks.”

“And you must simple call me Margaret, and drop the Lady,” Astoria heard her mother say. “We are equals here, are we not?”

“I think that I have many years before I could truly call myself your equal, but I more than appreciate the welcome.”

“It has been a while since I’ve sat here,” her father said with a chuckle. “Of course, as I did, I spent most of my time staring longingly at this pretty little Gryffindor.”

“His dithering meant that I almost agreed to walk with someone else,” Margaret added.

“Which,” her Father continued, “was why I was so amused to see you drop by for a formal visit last night, and then ask for permission to court Astoria at exactly four seconds past midnight.”

Harry chuckled. “I had to draw my courage first, or I would have hit the one second mark. I could not take the chance of someone else getting there before me.”

“Never,” Astoria interrupted firmly. “My heart has belonged to you since I knew what it was for. Even when I broke protocol to beg you to save everyone I loved and cared about, you forgave my impudence, and never once asked for anything in return. And how could I not fall even deeper for you, when you bore my mark with such pride, whilst circumstances and the traitor forced me to hide mine!”

Harry smiled at her, and his look pierced her heart. “That maybe so, but I will never take a chance with your affections.”

Astoria turned to look at her father, and when he met her eyes, she raised an eyebrow, and then darted her eyes to Harry.

“That should be done in private,” her father pointed out with an amused sigh.

“Clarence,” Margaret scolded lightly.

“Lord Potter,” her father said, with just a hint of an eye roll. “Do you wish to enter negotiations for the hand of my second daughter?”

Harry nodded firmly. “I do.”

“While Astoria is a second daughter, I think that her actions over the past few months have more than proven her worth as a loyal daughter of Morgana, so I believe that a fair bride price would be a

thousand galleons.”

Astoria held her breath. She couldn't believe her father was asking for so much for her. He should have placed a token figure on her, so that Harry would accept her instantly.

She was going to commit patricide; it was that simple.

“Oh, no,” Harry said, and Astoria felt her heart pause. “If the aim is for me to compensate you for the value that I will get from having Astoria by my side, then the very least I could offer is this.” And casually, as if it was nothing, he placed a diamond in front of her father. She looked at it, and blinked, and then looked at it again.

The diamond was huge, about as big as an egg, and heart shaped. It had a steely blue colour, matching the glinting caused by the flicking candles.

Astoria actually felt faint. She couldn't move, if she did, she would surely fall apart. She flicked her eyes at her mother. Her mother was normally calm, pristine, and a true lady. Her jaw was also open, and her eyes glazed.

With a force of will, she moved her eyes to her father. He was stationary, completely stationary. He stared at the large diamond in complete and utter disbelief.

“H-H-Have you had this valued?” her father stuttered the question.

“By the goblins,” Harry said casually. “It is worth around fifty million Galleons.”

There was a thump up the table, and Astoria managed to move her eyes to look up. Pansy had passed out, while the other girls had looks of complete jealousy and shock on their faces.

“H-H-Harry,” her father said, “this is too much, for anyone.”

“It is a mere fraction of the worth that I place on Astoria being with me.”

As every single one of her internal organs melted, her mind whirled. She was a loyal servant of Morgana, and she had to follow the rules. But... Suddenly she blinked. Follow the rules. She smiled. “Mother,” she said formally, “Lord Potter has asked for my hand, and has offered a bride price. Do you agree that the price is sufficient?”

“Yes,” her mother whimpered; her eyes still on the blue diamond.

“Father,” she continued, “Lord Potter has asked for my hand, and has offered a bride price. Do you agree that the price is sufficient?”

“I do,” he said, like his wife, his eyes were locked on the diamond.

“Do you endorse and accept this offer?”

“I do,” he said again, almost absently. His entire being was still staring at the diamond in shocked disbelief.

Astoria held out her hand, across the table. She was aware that her hand was trembling. Harry reached out and took it, before leaning in and kissing the back of her hand, gently.

She pulled back, and took a deep breath. “Lord Potter,” she said loudly. “I find your courtship as fulfilling as I dreamed.” She took another deep breath. “Mother, Father, Lord Potter has proven himself a king amongst men, our courtship has fulfilled the guidelines set down originally by Morgana. As such, I request permission to proceed with our bonding.”

That was it. She had announced her intentions, and she hadn’t been struck dumb. She took that to mean that magic found no fault in her plan. She met Harry’s eyes, and felt the excitement in them burn her. She was turned to her awe-struck parents.

“Mother?”

“Yes?” she asked.

“Father?”

“Yes?”

She smiled. She had received permission. Admittedly, it was in the form of a question, and one could perhaps argue that her parents were distracted by the diamond, but that was hardly her fault. Now, she just needed Harry to do one last thing.

She looked at him across the table hopefully.

He tilted his head, and looked at her, his eyes showing he was deep in thought, trying to understand what she was asking. She almost groaned. Of course, there was no way of him knowing that she was following the absolute minimum. The history of courtship was obscure to start with, and no one who hadn’t studied it intently would know how little was truly required.

She had broken protocol once, so surely he would not mind her doing it one more time. “Ask me,” she mouthed as subtly as she could.

He blinked, and she could see the question in his eyes. She nodded firmly. He vanished, and appeared less than two seconds later, on her side of the table. She turned in the glorious chair he had created.

“Astoria, My Lady Greengrass,” he said. “Will you marry me?” She looked down at the ring in his hand, and it was all she could do to nod her approval. The ring was subtle, and not at all ostentatious like the diamond egg. A small square sapphire bracketed by two smaller emeralds. All three stones were set in a tiny diamond frame.

The symbolism of her eye colour surrounded by his was not lost on her. Once more he was promising to protect and love her.

She offered her left hand this time, with her ring finger out, and he slowly slid it on. She slid off of the chair and on to her knees. Suddenly it had felt so very wrong to have him kneeling to her. She should be kneeling to him, not the other way around!

“When?” he asked simply.

She quickly checked her memory. There was absolutely no guidance on how long one had to wait, once engaged. She had the ring on her finger. Therefore, she was engaged. “Four weeks?” she asked.

He raised his eyebrows. “Eager?”

“I will be able to relax when my ring is on your finger,” she replied. “This will give enough time for the banns to be posted; I’m sure that you, my lord, can arrange everything else required in the time.”

“I can,” he agreed.

“In which case, let us break our fast, and then spend the day planning?”

He smiled and retook his seat. Her parents – everyone – were still spellbound by the trinket. Astoria felt that she understood her fiancée enough to understand the diamond. To him, it was nothing but an inert rock that was so expensive that there was no one who could possibly purchase it. To his way of thinking, he was no poorer from giving it away, and it made a statement of his intent to her.

She looked up and revelled in the ability to finally meet his eyes and smile whenever she wanted. And soon there would be cuddling, and kissing, and everything else that being affianced entailed.

She reached out and took his hands. She was fifteen now. She was a daughter of magic. She could finally say the words that had been locked inside her for so long.

“I love you.”