

Dear Mama and Papa,

I have probably been far too lax in writing, but with the Tournament and getting used to new surroundings, and attending classes, it has been hard to find the time to sit down and compose a letter. And then there's the not so small matter of finding something to write about. If I tried to list all the differences between here and Durmstrang, the owl would never get there, so I will save that for summer. I'm sure you don't want to hear about how much the snow has been piling up. But not much else seems worth writing about. Until yesterday, I suppose. I wrote in my last letter about the Yule Ball, and the fact that I would have to find a partner, or be stuck with Karkaroff's choice.

I thought at first that would be preferable. Not too exciting, but safe enough. No chance of her saying no. I practically guarantee he would pick Elena. And we would be fine with that, although, maybe Alexei wouldn't be. He wouldn't say so, though. Right now, they're in one of their "we're not admitting we like each other" stages. Or, maybe if Karkaroff were feeling really adventurous, he would pick Tatiana, because, if anything, she's more quiet than I am, and then I would have absolutely nothing to talk about all night. But I decided to ask someone, instead.

I'm not at all sure I did the right thing, but somehow it seemed right. I know this is going to sound mad, but she's different. Most of the girls around here just giggle and point and do these crazy things, like asking me to sign Potions notebooks in lipstick, and wearing Bulgarian scarves around their waists, and following me around in the library. But she doesn't do any of that. In fact, until the other day, I thought she was glaring at me every time I came in, like she wanted to incinerate me on the spot. Turns out she was glaring at the girls because they were disturbing her reading. At least, I'm fairly sure she was glaring at the girls. Maybe not. But I finally got up the courage to go talk to her, and she seemed nice enough.

I came into the library the other evening, by myself, for once, and she didn't look like she wanted to strangle me. She always reads these huge books that a lot of the seventh years wouldn't even tackle, and she's almost always with Harry Potter. I think she's helping him get ready for the tasks. Which is fair enough, because he's at a disadvantage, being a fourth year. But it just so happened that she was by herself, too. So I took the chance and talked to her.

Not surprising, she's a top student. She obviously loves to read. That Malfoy boy has gone on and on about how she's always besting him in class. Seems to be a real sore spot with him. Frankly, I'm a little tired of him prattling on and on about how this Muggle-born does better in class than he does. Turns out she was in the Top Box during the World Cup, so I suppose that was probably not the best first impression to make. Bruised and covered in blood. But I suppose it could be worse. At least I didn't look terribly surprised when she said she was a Muggle-

born. She told me because she didn't want to get me into trouble with Karkaroff for talking to her.

What else? She's an only child. Her parents are both dentists, which means they work on teeth. She's only in fourth year, but she's got more sense than any dozen other girls I've met here, so far. Growing up in a Muggle house, she's not really followed a lot of Quidditch. For which, frankly, I am grateful. Means she doesn't squeal over the fact that I was in the World Cup. Actually, I can't picture her squealing over much of anything. And she doesn't get a fit of the giggles every time I try to talk to her. She just treats me like a person. But then, I guess she would. She's friends with The Boy Who Lived. What would impress you after that?

I asked her yesterday if she would be my partner for the Yule Ball, and she agreed. We decided to keep it quiet until then, because Karkaroff, to say the least, won't be pleased that I'm taking a Muggle-born Hogwarts student instead of one of the girls from Durmstrang. Or Slytherin. I get the feeling he keeps trying to kiss up to their head of house, Snape. He's dropped hints that I could ask one of the girls from that house Slytherin. Let him think she's from Slytherin. What he doesn't know won't hurt him. Or me. We'll just meet in the entryway. And then Karkaroff can stew all he wants, he can't do a thing about it.

I know it sounds like we couldn't possibly have anything in common, but somehow, she doesn't seem so different. Or maybe she seems a lot different. Different from all those other girls, but not so different from me. And I think I finally understand what you two meant about finding someone you can have a comfortable silence with. I don't feel awkward when we're not talking. And she reminds me of the both of you. She doesn't seem to care what anyone else thinks of her. She just is what she is. Books, bushy hair and oversized front teeth and all. (Although, the teeth don't seem as oversized as they once did, for some reason.) Most people aren't lucky enough to be comfortable in their own skins until a lot later. But she seems comfortable with herself.

I almost didn't ask. But then, the more I thought about it, the more I knew I had to. I would never forgive myself if I didn't ask, just because Karkaroff wouldn't approve. I wouldn't be the mule-headed son you two produced if I let a little thing like the Headmaster not approving scare me off. I'd be lying if I said I didn't wish she were just a little older, or that she had some kind of magical background before coming to Hogwarts, or that she were friends with anyone but one of the Hogwarts Champions, (And why did it have to be Potter? Diggory would have been bad enough.) but I suppose her being British and from Hogwarts would have been plenty strange enough. Plenty of opportunity there for me to put my foot in my mouth, so what's a few more opportunities?

Her name, I can't even pronounce that. Oh, the last name is easy enough,

Granger. Hard g, long a, soft g. I've heard Malfoy go on and on about "Granger" until I've heard it in my sleep, anyway. But the first name. I haven't the foggiest notion how to go about saying it. I kept thinking maybe she would say it during a conversation, but no such luck. I've just seen it on her journals and notebooks. Hermione. I've been hesitant to ask her to pronounce it. Seems so stupid not to be able to say a girl's name. Nearest I can hazard a guess, it would be Herm-ee-yohn. I suppose I'll just stick with that unless she corrects me. I probably won't see her much until the Yule Ball. Might not even get to talk to her again until then.

She just seems so interesting. Alexei will probably think I'm crazy for not asking someone older and more sophisticated, or one of those silly girls that does all that giggling in my wake, but I think you two would approve. Which is saying something. Because, if anything, you two are more picky than I am. I truly think the two of you would like her if you could meet her. Maybe you'll get the chance, someday. And before you go asking if it's wise to do something I know the Headmaster isn't going to like, it's all your fault. You two went and raised me to make up my own mind. And to bother looking past what you see at first glance, and not to worry so much about where people come from, but where they seem to be going, instead. I seem to recall someone telling me that if a girl doesn't bother treating you like a person, she's probably not worth fooling with in the first place. So, there, Papa, when Karkaroff asks why I did it, I can blame it on Mama. And nobody can argue with Mama. Not even Karkaroff. He wouldn't stand a chance.

Take care, the both of you. I'll try to be more diligent in keeping up correspondence. I'm sorry I won't be there for Yule this year, but maybe I can take away something of value from the Yule Ball. A friend, at the very least. Maybe more, if she's half the person I take her for. I love you both and I miss you a great deal. Ridiculous how little good it does you here, knowing how to Apparate.

Love,
Viktor