

Matchmaker

by pookah

Jilted by their fiancés, Hermione and Ginny discover some of their acquaintances are betting on who will marry them. How will they get revenge on those who dare to wager about matters of the heart? And what part does the mysterious Headmaster Snape play in all of this?

I Like You, Too, Professor Snape

Chapter 1 of 8

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Disclaimer: Not mine! Hers!

Author's Note:

(Edited November 4, 2008)

The Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge is over, and I can now thank my amazing beta team, Sempra and Chivalric, and special guest beta, Beaweasley2.

Thank you, **Sempra!** You suggest ideas & improvements, fix my commas, point out egregious errors, and brit pick. And you do it all impossibly quickly.

Thank you, **Chivalric!** You helped me plot this thing and continue to help when I run dry on ideas.

Thank you, **Beaweasley2**, my special guest beta, who set this in motion with an idea you casually mentioned in an encouraging e-mail!

This story would not exist without all three of you!

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Chapter One

I Like You, Too, Professor Snape

With four exceptions, the surviving members of the Order of the Phoenix, and most of the members of Dumbledore's Army, had gathered in a conference room in the Ministry building before the sixth annual Victory Day Ball. Conspicuous by their absences were Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Ginny Weasley.

"I don't have to tell you why I called you here, nor why several of us are missing," began Kingsley, who had just entered the room with Molly and Arthur Weasley. "But I do want you all to know the facts of the matter. I know every one of us will be questioned tonight." Arthur and Molly looked at each other and both looked at the floor, unable to meet the eyes of their friends.

"Are these newspaper articles true?" Minerva McGonagall asked earnestly, echoing the thoughts of most of the group.

They had all seen the day's headlines:

Harry and Ron, Heroes Again!

by Montrose Moonstone

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Young Aurors Rescue and Wed Two American Beauties

By Barbara Cuffe

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Perfidious Potter and Waffling Weasley!

Aurors Jilt War Heroines to Wed American Upstarts

By Rita Skeeter

Kingsley shuffled his feet nervously, not usual for a man used to the limelight.

"Ron and Harry have been forced into a situation not of their making," he began. "Walden McNair and Rabastan Lestrage, having escaped from Azkaban last month, decided to kidnap those two American witches at the airport as they entered London via Muggle airplane. They used a terrible and highly illegal love spell on the young ladies."

"McNair and LeStrange hoped that with the rich American girls in love with them, they would be able to escape the anti-international-Apparition spells cast over the British Isles to keep them from escaping to another continent. By the time Harry and Ron arrived there, the spell had been cast, and in less than a minute, the girls would have been irrevocably in love with two Death Eaters had our friends not stepped in."

The group was silent for several seconds as everyone digested this bit of news.

"But still!" protested Neville, "That's no reason to break Ginny's heart! And Hermione's! They're in love, too."

Severus Snape found himself agreeing with the young Herbology professor standing next to him.

"It seems the American girls kissed Harry and Ron, and that passed the love spell on to them," Kingsley continued. "Harry and Ron are now in love with Mary Sue and Carrie Lou Jones, and the Misses Jones are in love with them."

"I thought magic couldn't create true love," asked Charlie Weasley.

"This is more like what is produced by the love potion, Amortentia, only the obsession generally lasts between eight and fifteen years," Kingsley explained. "Coming from you all, the truth of this unfortunate situation may actually be credited. You can give out the information at the ball tonight."

"The boys are not to blame, nor are their wives, who happened to be looking at Ron and Harry rather than LeStrange and McNair when the spell took effect. Although it is very hard on Hermione and Ginny, we could hardly wish two innocent guests in our country to be hopelessly in love with Death Eaters."

"It's a shame Snape and Longbottom weren't there," whispered Michael Corner to Justin Finch-Fletchley and Cho Chang. "The ugliest wizard and the stupidest wizard in Britain could be married to the two prettiest witches in America."

"That's not funny, Corner, nor true," Justin whispered with a scowl. "Neville isn't stupid. Remember seventh year! You were happy enough to follow Neville's orders when it saved our skins! If those girls had married Neville and Professor Snape, they'd have got brave, decent men as husbands. War heroes, in fact, if you care to recall."

Severus gave no sign that he overheard Corner's nasty remark, but glanced casually towards Longbottom, who looked mortified. Severus was much more angry for the slight to the young Herbology professor than for himself. He smirked to see Miss Chang turn sharply and 'accidentally' step on Corner's foot before stalking off, nose in the air, to join Mr. and Mrs. Weasley.

"Excuse me, headmaster," Neville said quietly, "I need to talk to Lavender Brown." Neville hurried across the room to give Lavender a small pot of aloe ointment for her battle-scarred face.

"When did you and Neville grow to be such chums?" asked Kingsley. Severus rolled his eyes.

"Hardly chums, Kingsley, but Longbottom improves with age," Severus said. "Minerva is really the only one of my erstwhile colleagues that I can talk to."

Indeed many of the teachers who had taught before the war were gone now. Pomona had retired; Filius and Albus were dead as was Charity Burbage (Severus still had nightmares). Professors Hooch and Trewlawny were too silly to be borne with any longer than absolutely necessary. Hagrid and Horace could only be tolerated in small doses, and Sinistra, now Head of Ravenclaw, hinted alarmingly at marriage. Several of the new, younger teachers were female, and they, also, flirted outrageously with the Headmaster, once he had been publicized as a 'War Hero and Spy for the Right Side.' Longbottom was a safe companion.

"So he's grown on you?" Kingsley asked.

"Well, he's *grown*," Severus replied dryly. "Age and experience have matured him. And I owed him a chance after all he did in the war."

Kingsley nodded and both men fell into thoughtful silence.

As Headmaster, Severus had not objected when Pomona Sprout asked to take Neville on as an apprentice. He had felt it was the least he could do for the lad who had killed Nagini and fought the Death Eaters so bravely.

'I doubt the boy will ever stand up to a class full of students, but by all means teach him everything you can, Pomona, so he can make his way in the world,' Severus had said. As it turned out, Longbottom made an excellent teacher *and* coaxed plants to grow that had never before been seen in the gardens and greenhouses of Hogwarts.

Severus found that Professor Longbottom was a talented Herbologist with a considerable bit remaining of the courageous fighter he had been in the war. Neville found that Headmaster Snape, although strict and stern, was usually a fair boss who could even change his mind if approached with respect and sound logical reasons.

Not much remained in Professor Longbottom of Neville, the Potions classroom nightmare. There were few remnants in Headmaster Snape of the ostensible Death Eater, although no one would call him an extrovert. Over the past few years, the two had formed a respectful relationship that actually resulted in a camaraderie of sorts.

Lavender Brown hurried across the room, interrupting Severus's thoughts.

"Oh, Professor Snape!" she gushed. "Thank you so much for this!" She was waving the small pot Neville had given her, the latest scar-reducing experiment from Severus's private Potions lab.

"You are more than welcome, Miss Brown. Please do not make a scene," Severus said stiffly. "You may thank Mr. Longbottom; he is the one who insists on continuing the research. I merely produce what he asks for to keep my sanity intact. If I did not make this, he would either blow up the Potions Lab or drive me mad importuning me to help him. Professor Slughorn has made it clear that he is not willing to sponsor Mr. Longbottom's extracurricular efforts after last summer's spectacular failure."

"Well..." Lavender faltered. "Uh... thanks anyway, Professor Snape... I mean Headmaster Snape." Lavender hurried away, nonplused, forgetting that she had intended to ask the Headmaster for a dance that evening at the ball.

"For her werewolf scars?" Kingsley asked.

"Yes, and for Bill Weasley and others. Longbottom insists on working up new formulae with plants he breeds in the greenhouses. He's been crossing Wolfsbane with various healing herbs," Severus said defensively.

"That's well done of you both, Severus," Kingsley said. "You needn't be afraid I'll tell someone you've done a kind deed. Your secrets have always been safe with me."

"Kindness has nothing to do with it," Severus replied testily. "Someone has to do it; Horace refuses. I can't blame him; at his age it's no laughing matter to be blue for two weeks. He walked in on Longbottom as he exploded another cauldron and got some potion on him. Wolfsbane, aloe and lavender base, with Mexican heather. They were both blue for days, and so were the house-elves who cleaned the mess up. I thought I was hallucinating that afternoon when a blue house-elf served me my tea."

Kingsley laughed merrily, certain he had seen the least little smile flit across Severus's face.

"It is hardly a laughing matter that my Herbology Professor cannot tell his asphodel from his elbow in the Potions lab," Severus said sternly, which made Kingsley laugh all the more. Kingsley was aware that Neville was hardly the walking disaster he'd been in school. He'd heard all about the 'blue' debacle and determined, (as Severus had admitted in his accident report to the Ministry) that it was actually Slughorn to blame, introducing cold air into the warm room at just the wrong time. Severus placated Slughorn by blaming Neville publicly, and Neville, not wanting to embarrass Slughorn, took it in good humor.

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At the ball that night, anyone who was known to be a member of the Order of the Phoenix or Dumbledore's Army was inundated with questions, as Kingsley had predicted. *The* topic of the evening was the two young couples and the two jilted fiancées.

A convivial group by the bar was discussing the matter with more than casual interest.

"I bet Dean Thomas is sorry he married that Muggle!" said Michael Corner. "Now that Ginny is free!"

"No," said Seamus Finnigan. "Dean's happy. Look at them." Seamus pointed to his close friends, laughing with another group of party-goers. Dean's wife, Amanda, was standing beside him.

"It's like a new culture is being created," Justin Finch-Fletchley said. "Muggle-borns are gaining power, and Muggles like Amanda Thomas are perfectly at ease in the wizarding environment. Pure-blood just doesn't mean that much any more."

"And Dean's little ones are already showing signs of magic," added Seamus, proud of his little godchildren.

"Cho Chang's kid, too," Justin added. "She's married to a Muggle, and her three-year-old has successfully summoned a toy."

Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott glowered silently. Muggle-borns gaining power in the Ministry was not their idea of happily-ever-after.

"Actually, I'd go after Granger myself, Mudblood or not, if I thought she'd ever marry me," Draco said, which shocked the others into silence. "She's a war hero, she's already moving up in the Ministry, and she's not too bad on the eyes. Whoever marries her will raise their social standing. Weasley was a fool, giving her up for some American tart, no matter how rich or pretty."

No one said a word for a full minute. They all were thinking how Draco had spent three years in prison after the Battle of Hogwarts for letting Death Eaters into the school. Some people thought it should have been longer. Draco Malfoy could certainly use a boost in status.

"I *am* going after Hermione," Justin announced firmly. "She'd make a great wife! She'll likely be Minister of Magic someday, and I aim to be Muggle Prime Minister. What a team we'd make! My family's connections and political savvy, her brains and magic, my money, her fame... a perfect marriage!"

"She'd rather have me," Blaise Zabini said. "My looks, my *magical* family connections uh except for that little problem with my latest stepfather being a Death Eater..." He paused. "But Mother and I had nothing to do with that!" he hastened to add.

"Stepson of a Death Eater or member of Dumbledore's Army?" Justin pretended to ponder. "I wonder which one she'd choose?"

"I've ten times the money you have, Finch-Fletchley!" Blaise continued smugly. "My mother's been widowed by seven of the richest men in Great Britain."

"My parents have been happily married for thirty-one years," Justin retorted. "Your new money can't buy that sort of happiness and stability."

"Well, you two can argue over the Mu...the Muggle-born, Miss Granger," Michael said. "I'm going to try for the Pure-blooded Ginevra. She's almost as much of a war hero as Granger, tons prettier, and a lot more fun. She'd be a terrific asset to my business, and I bet she'd be an animal in bed."

"I know we never got along that well, but I think Ginevra Weasley would prefer me," Draco said.

"You wouldn't stand a chance with her," Michael said scornfully.

"You had your chance and lost her!" Draco retorted. "When I turn on the Malfoy charm, she'll forget our childhood quarrels. And when I shower her with the Malfoy wealth, she won't look twice at you, shopkeeper."

"Perhaps you'd like to wager on that, Malfoy?" Michael sneered.

"You haven't got enough money to make it interesting," Draco replied witheringly.

"Maybe when Ginny marries one of you, the other one has to get down on his knees at the wedding reception and declare his love for the bride," suggested Justin jokingly.

"With a poem he writes himself," added Seamus mischievously.

"Why not really put something on the line?" asked Theodore Nott with a smirk. It was his first contribution to the inane conversation in front of him. "When Ginny marries, the one not chosen has to swear celibacy for two years, in front of the wedding guests."

"Ah, it's not celibacy you're thinking of, Nott," said Seamus helpfully. "It's chastity they need to swear to. Celibacy means not getting married, but chastity, that's not getting any."

"Malfoy's too chicken to do it."

"Corner hasn't got the guts."

Draco and Michael stared at each other, both feeling peer pressure to follow through on their macho posturing.

"What about you two?" Draco asked sullenly, gesturing towards Justin and Blaise. "Are you going to bet?"

Blaise smirked. He was the son of the wealthiest and most beautiful witch in Britain. His dead father had been a popular and wildly successful businessman. His father's family doted on him. He'd always had every little thing he asked for. Certainly he could defeat Finch-Fletchley who wasn't nearly as rich and only had a pitiful Muggle family backing him up.

"Finch-Fletchley won't dare," he taunted.

"See what I dare!" Justin replied, drawing his wand.

"Oh, wands! It's Unbreakable Vows, is it?" Theodore asked to stir up more trouble.

"I think this has gone far enough," said Seamus. "Let's all get some pumpkin juice and cool down. No one wants to be taking Unbreakable Vows. It's all just been teasing, only a joke."

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"That's the first sensible thing any of them have said since they started drinking," Neville Longbottom muttered to his companion. "This hear-everything potion you gave me is brilliant, Professor."

"Thank you, Mr. Longbottom," replied Severus. "I kept it a secret until the war was won. Now I occasionally provide it to a few select teachers who, like myself, enjoy hearing what is going on across a room."

"It must have been invaluable during the war," Neville said admiringly. "Do you think that those idiots will actually go through with the bet? Nott seems to be egging them on."

"And Draco and Blaise both look like they are backed into a corner," Severus added. They watched a disgusted Seamus walk away to join his friend, Dean, after attempting to persuade the others of the foolishness of the bet/vow idea.

"Theodore Nott looks like the most sober of the bunch," Severus continued, "and he seems intent upon causing mischief. I suggest we interrupt this idiocy and hope it goes no further. The situation will bear watching, though." He began walking towards the group at the bar, Neville matching his strides.

"Not an Unbreakable Vow, but a Chastity Vow!" urged Theodore as the professors approached.

"Don't let your mothers see you drunk, lads," Severus said slyly when they reached the bar. Draco, Blaise, and Michael looked around the room nervously. Justin's parents were not in attendance, and he and the sober Theodore laughed at the others' reactions.

"Go get some food, sober up. You're not fit company for respectable professors," Severus said sternly.

Old habits die hard. Even the Slytherins were off like a shot, leaving Severus and Neville, the respectable (and sober) professors, alone at that side of the bar.

Neville allowed his gaze to wander. As he focused on various people in the ballroom, he heard a rush of voices, none too loud, and each distinct:

"...around Christmas. We're so..."

"...Potter and Weasley..."

"...shopping for these robes. Now you..."

"...very wealthy..."

"Is she an Auror, too?"

"...and so I said, 'The Pride of Portree...'"

"...our Eglantine's new job..."

"Cuthbert met Mrs. Jones at..."

Neville gasped and closed his eyes.

"You'll get used to it, lad," Severus said with a smirk.

"This is how you always knew everything!" Neville said. "Professor Snape, you are brilliant. But why did you share this with me?"

"I had visitors this morning, Longbottom," Severus said. "Draco Malfoy and Blaise Zabini both came by, separately, to ask me advice on wooing the newly available heroines of the war, Misses Weasley and Granger. I advised both of them to give up the idea, but spoiled rich boys are not accustomed to giving up any shiny toy on which they set their fancy. I came here to see if they began to court in earnest, but the ladies are not in attendance. However, now that Draco and Blaise each have a rival, I believe they will begin pursuit immediately."

Severus paused a moment and Neville kept quiet. He had learned that letting the Headmaster tell his tale in his own time, without interruptions, was an easy way of keeping peace in the school.

"I wished to ask you, Neville as a colleague, if you will what your feelings towards Miss Weasley are. If you care for her, you must seize this opportunity. Draco is earnest in his desire to wed someone who was on the winning side from the start." Severus had been keeping his ears open to the conversation amongst the half-drunken lads.

"Listen to those idiots!" he said to Neville. "Nott is offering to help them perform a Chastity Vow. He's fanning the flames. That spell is barely legal." The two professors listened as Neville's classmates argued themselves closer and closer to two very foolish bets.

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The next morning, four hung-over wizards were rousted out of bed by a chipper Theodore Nott, who lured them (with promises of hangover potion) to meet him at the Leaky Cauldron, where he rented a room by the month. The private dining room was empty at that time of the morning, and the young men met in it.

Theodore assisted them in performing spells that would ensure that each would be unable to have sex for the next two years, except with the one woman of their choice. It

was only after he talked them 'round and cast the spells that Theodore distributed the vials of hangover potion. Just after the five young men left the room, (four of them bickering about who would end up married to Hermione and Ginny) there were two distinct pops.

Severus and Neville Apparated to just outside the great gates of Hogwarts.

"They really did it," said Severus morosely. "I had hoped that *my* boys, at least, would have had the sense to pull out when it came to a Chastity Spell."

"How did you know they'd be there, Headmaster?" asked Neville.

"I'll tell you another time," Severus replied mysteriously.

"It is illegal?" Neville persisted gently.

"Yes," Severus said shortly.

"You listened into the Floo system, didn't you? How did you manage? I tried like anything to do it seventh year! Couldn't even listen within the castle!"

"Let us say that I learned more from Dolores Umbridge than she ever learned from me. Now, I suggest we repair to my rooms until this invisibility potion wears off. We have plans to make."

"Why are you helping me win Ginny, Headmaster?" Neville asked.

Severus paused to contemplate why. He actually had to admit to himself that he had a slight, but growing, affection for the young man. Be that as it may, he was certainly not going to admit as much to anyone else!

"I do not wish to see either of those young ladies taken in by unworthy suitors," Severus replied. "I do not wish to see you, my colleague and employee, unhappy. If you wed Miss Weasley, you will be happy, and she will be wed to a worthy man. It seems a good idea and much to my benefit as well as hers."

Neville allowed himself a much wider grin than he would have had Severus been able to see him *I like you, too, Professor Snape*, he thought.

to be continued

Author's Note: This is an AU, 'Epilogue? What Epilogue?' tale in which Snape survived and was reinstated as Headmaster of Hogwarts at the insistence of Professor McGonagall, who serves as his assistant.

(Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge, PROMPT # 2)

For whatever reason, Harry has married someone other than Ginny. Ron has told Hermione that he needs a break. Both Ginny and Hermione vow never to fall in love again. What would happen if bets were placed that (whoever was betting) could make a woman fall in love with and agree to marry him in a certain amount of time? What happens when the girls find out it was only a bet?

I Hate Men

Chapter 2 of 8

Hermione and Ginny are prostrate with grief. They receive callers.

Author's Note:

(Edited November 4, 2008)

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Disclaimers:

Words to "I Hate Men" from *Kiss Me Kate* by Cole Porter. No profit is made from it, and no claim to owning the song is made.

All characters belong to J. K. Rowling, and no money is being made by this fan-fiction.

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Chapter 2

I Hate Men

When Professors Snape and Longbottom arrived at Grimmauld Place, they knocked several times before venturing to open the door, which they found unlocked. Some

music was playing in the basement, and Mrs. Black was cowering in her frame. The reason became obvious when from the kitchen came the sounds of dishes breaking on the flagstone floor. Severus wondered whether they were the good china or the everyday stoneware.

"Thank Morgan, it's the Longbottom boy!" Mrs. Black's portrait cried (addressing the pureblood, of course). "They've gone mad! Please pull my curtains!" Neville and Severus exchanged looks of surprise.

"With pleasure, madam," Neville said as he pulled the curtains. In the kitchen muffled singing started, punctuated by more crashing and banging.

Kreacher slipped out of the parlor and bowed low. "Oh, Friend of Master Regulus, Friend of Harry Potter, the young ladies is prostrate with grief and breaking up the place."

From the basement came the unmistakable sound of something being thrown through the kitchen window.

"We will try to calm them, Kreacher," Severus said.

As the two men descended the stairs, the singing became clearer:

I hate men!

It sounded as if a chair (or two) were being smashed on the stone floor.

They should be kept like piggies in a pen.

You may be wooed by Jack the Tar, so charming & so chipper,

But if you're wooed by Jack the Tar, be sure that you're the skipper.

For Jack the Tar can go too far. Remember Jack the Ripper?

Oh, I hate men!

The sound of what had to be the antique Welsh dresser (and its compliment of crystal goblets and china plates) hitting the floor answered the stoneware/china question. China sounded like this, the other crash had been the stoneware.

Standing outside the kitchen door, Severus and Neville looked at each other with just a little trepidation.

"Inebriated, do you think, Longbottom?"

"No, sir, just angry. Ginny can't sing that well when she's drunk."

"We have faced the Dark Lord, Neville; we can face two angry women."

"Yes, *sir!* Especially since they are not angry at *us!*" Neville grinned, and Severus allowed himself to return a wry smile before they entered the lionesses' den.

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"What makes us both just furious," Hermione said after the ladies had accepted Calming Draughts from Severus, removed to the parlor, and allowed Kreacher to begin fixing the broken crockery and furniture, "is that they didn't come to us honestly! Ron..."

"And Harry!" Ginny interjected.

"And Harry," Hermione agreed, "ought to have come to us and explained it all rationally."

"Neither of us is stupid enough to marry a man who'll obsessively love another woman for the next ten years!" Ginny raved. "But they could have *asked* us! They should have *told* us what happened. Some Gryffindors they are!"

"Imagine!" Hermione continued indignantly. "Kingsley came to tell us."

"And my parents, who'd just been to Ron's and Harry's instant double wedding," Ginny added.

"Oh, but the boys sent *flowers!*" Hermione said scathingly, pointing to two vases of prematurely withered blooms on the parlor mantle. Neville winced a little at the desiccated husks of what he knew had been rare and lovely blossoms.

"If it's any consolation..." Severus began. Although quiet, his voice seemed to cut through the room and demand attention. "I looked at LeStrange's notes on the spell, and I understand that there is a certain *um* urgency for victims of the spell to consummate the relationship. In the Middle Ages, this spell was used on married couples after the wedding contract had been signed."

Severus watched Neville watching Ginny. The lad had probably been in love with the redheaded spitfire for years. In her anger she reminded Severus of her sixth year at Hogwarts while he had been ostensibly serving the Dark Lord. Ginny and Neville had been a formidable team, leading the student rebellion brilliantly. Neville had had a chance, then, to woo her, but had not tried, Severus assumed, because he would not attempt to 'take Harry's girl.'

"Oh! So Harry can take *me* to bed," Ginny fumed, "but this American is too good for that. She's got to be *married* first! But that bastard can shack up with me in this mausoleum for years!"

Actually, for most of the year, Ginny spent most of her time traveling with her Quidditch team. She lived at Grimmauld Place only a few days a fortnight and still kept a nominal home with her parents. But no one felt inclined to point that out just then.

Severus noticed Hermione seemed to be reacting to the dose of Calming Draught he'd offered. Ginny was a good bit taller and more muscular than Hermione, but she ought to be succumbing in a few minutes as well.

"Pushing back the date!" Ginny fumed, not yet calmed by the potion Severus had had the foresight to bring along. "We've been engaged four years! If he hadn't put off the wedding, we'd be married now! I bet he never really wanted to marry me in the first place!"

Hermione sat quietly, feeling the Calming Draught take effect. *I wonder if the love potion will make Ron a better lover to that Miss Jones than he was to me* she mused bitterly. *Or if she'll simply think he is.*

Kreacher crept in with a tea tray.

"Chamomile, I hope," Severus whispered to the house-elf.

"Kreacher's most soothing blend, sir," he replied.

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Professors Snape and Longbottom sat quietly in the parlour, sipping their tea. Misses Granger and Weasley sat together at a small table, gazing into the Pensieve.

"They are physically here, but they see and hear what I saw and heard, and they can, in their minds, move about the ballroom to some extent," Severus had explained to Neville, who had never seen a Pensieve memory before.

"It shouldn't be long..." Neville began when the ladies had been looking into the magical bowl for a few minutes.

"Eeewww!" screamed Ginny, suddenly jerking to life. "That's so disgusting!" She began to stagger around the room, ranting. Hermione sat stunned by the Pensieve, staring silently at Neville and Professor Snape.

"He would marry you," Ginny shrieked to Hermione, "but he knows you'd never have him, so he thinks he can impress me with his money. He thinks he can *buy* me! And I'm only his second choice, too!"

Severus almost laughed out loud at Ginny, but stopped himself when he saw Neville's outraged face. He contented himself with exchanging an amused look with Miss Granger.

"Malfoy is scum, Ginny!" Neville said angrily. "I'm not normally one to be telling tales out of school, but you *had* to know what he was planning."

"Well, I hope you're not thinking of marrying Michael Corner," Hermione said quietly. Severus recognized the quiet voice of someone who was very angry indeed. "Did you hear the tone he used when he called Amanda a Muggle? And he nearly called me a Mudblood! You know, that boy fought on *our* side at Hogwarts! And he still holds on to the old prejudices!"

"I wouldn't marry either of them if ... well... *never!*" Ginny sputtered.

Severus watched Neville's face break into a wide grin. He glanced at Hermione and saw that she noticed Neville's reaction as well. They exchanged another amused look. Perhaps he would have an ally in his matchmaking.

"Actually, Justin is the best of the sorry lot," Hermione said. "We *would* make a great team politically, logistically. He makes a good point there."

"However," Ginny said primly, "we won't be marrying anyone. Not even Justin. Hermione and I have sworn off men. We will be old maids together and never, ever, marry."

Severus looked at Neville and was unsurprised to see dismay written plainly over the lad's face. Neville didn't understand that when someone their age swore off romance, it never lasted. Romance always reasserted itself.

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Teatime

Chapter 3 of 8

Hermione and Severus have tea, but not together.

Disclaimers: These characters and their magical world belong to J.K.R.

Author's note:

Thanks to my betas for ideas, for help plotting, for grammar, and for Brit-picking. Without you I am a mess.

(Edited November 4, 2008)

The Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge is over, and I can now thank my amazing beta team, Sempra and Chivalric, and special guest beta, Beaweasley2.

Chapter 3

Teatime

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Teatime that day found Justin Finch-Fletchley standing nervously in the parlor of 12 Grimmauld Place, waiting for the house-elf to bring Hermione to him. The tiny wizened creature was nothing like the imposing butler who had ruled the Finch-Fletchley home since Justin was a baby.

Justin was hoping his loyalty to Dumbledore's Army would stand him in good stead now, for he had made a terrible blunder.

Hermione entered the room, an unnaturally bright smile on her face.

"Justin! How delightful to see you!" she almost sang. "*Do sit down!*" She fluttered over to a chair and seated herself. "I've asked Kreacher to bring us tea. Will that be acceptable?"

Justin stared at Hermione, who was dressed in many-layered robes of light fabric. The colours ranged from brown to rust to orange, autumnal colours that looked undeniably wonderful on Hermione. But the style was something more like Pansy Parkinson would have worn. Still the result was altogether pleasant and quite attractive.

"That will be fine, Hermione, although when you hear what I have to tell you, you may not want to feed me. You may want to break the teapot over my head."

Hermione forgot her femme-fatale-of-the-manor act and stared at Justin. She certainly hadn't expected to hear *that*.

"Hermione, please say you'll listen to what I have to say," Justin continued. "Say you'll hear me out before you throw me out." He looked at her for a reply, apprehension and discomfort obvious on his face. Hermione nodded, intrigued. Her curiosity was piqued, and she could no more throw Justin out than she could throw out Kreacher.

"A group of us were talking at the ball last night," Justin began, staring morosely at his shoes. "About you and Ginny, and Harry and Ron. And I'm not quite sure how it happened. I admit I was drunk. I think we all were.

"Anyway, I admitted that I was going to court you, now that Ron was out of the picture. And... Look, Hermione, I'm not claiming to be in love with you, but I do respect you. Who wouldn't? You and I could make a great team, my family's money and power in the Muggle world.... Why, I might be Prime Minister someday! But more likely I'll have some stable position of power, behind the scenes. And you well, I *know* you'll be Minister for Magic.

"If you married me, we'd be a perfect blend. We could do something about the prejudices still faced by Muggle-borns in the Wizarding world. We could work for better Muggle-Wizard relations."

"And you'd love my family. They already love you. They know who you are, of course. When I was in hiding with Colin..." A sad look took possession of Justin's face, for he and Colin Creevey had grown to be very close friends as they hid and fought together during the war.

"Anyway, my parents were fighting, too. My mum and dad helped Muggle-born Wizards get Muggle passports and get out of the country, and they...." Justin stopped, not wanting to say his parents had supplied funds for the exiles.

"Justin, I don't know what to say," Hermione said, looking stunned.

"Don't say anything until you hear me out, Hermione. What I've told you is all true, and the offer stands. It'd be like the sort of marriages of state that Kings and Queens used to make. Some of those marriages turned out very happy. And *you are* a queen, Hermione.

"But let me tell you the rest, and then you can throw me out," Justin continued. Hermione nodded, waiting for the next twist.

"Where was I? ... Oh, I told the others I intended to court you. And that berk, Zabini, said you'd rather marry him; he's richer, handsomer, and has lots of Wizarding connections, and my family's Muggle. And somehow (I'm not too clear on this part,) we ended up betting each other we'd be the one who married you.

"Don't throw me out yet, there's more. Micheal Corner and Draco Malfoy bet each other that they'd marry Ginny Weasley. You have to tell her, or I will if you want me to." Justin wasn't too keen on the idea of telling his tale to a woman renowned for her hexes, but he knew his duty. "Malfoy only wants to marry a war heroine, he doesn't really care about her. I can't speak for Corner.

"Hermione, what we did was unconscionable, and if you'll allow me to, I'll see myself out. But if you want to break the teapot over my head, or toss me out on my ear, or challenge me to a duel, I won't even attempt to defend myself."

Justin stood and drew his wand, then walked to Hermione and dropped to one knee, presenting her the wand pointed at himself.

"Any time you wish to call me out or call me to account, I am at your service," he said. "You deserve any satisfaction you wish to take out on me." It was a calculated risk, but Justin knew Hermione's gentle and kind nature and thought she was unlikely to use his wand against him, much as he might deserve it.

Hermione stared at him in shock. She certainly hadn't expected this when she'd received Justin's note this morning, asking if he could call.

Before Hermione could gather two thoughts to rub together, before she could get out another word, a large owl flew into the open window. Hermione thought she recognized it as the Malfoys' owl.

"That's Draco Malfoy's owl," Justin said. "He's not wasting any time. You have to tell Ginny..."

The door to the parlor opened. Ginny came in with an enormous tea tray. "Kreacher told me I had mail coming," she said as she crossed over to the tea table. "So I thought I'd bring the tea in."

"Oh, what a surprise," she added sarcastically, taking the letter from the owl. She acted as unperturbed as if Hermione had lads kneeling at her feet every day. "No response right now. You go fly around to the kitchen. Kreacher has a window open and will feed you before you return."

"Ginny!" Justin declared, fumbling to his feet. "Before you read that, I want to tell you Draco Malfoy is after you. He wants a war heroine for a wife, someone to help his standing in Wizarding society. He doesn't really love you."

"Why, thank you, Justin!" Ginny said with a surprised look. "That's kind of you to tell me. I already knew about it, though. And to think I wasn't even his first choice, Hermione was. I am only a second-rate heroine."

Justin sputtered in amazement that Ginny knew so much already. Had she been listening at the door? But he hadn't said anything about Draco saying Ginny was his second choice.

"Has he told you," Ginny asked Hermione, "about the Chastity Vow yet?"

"Draco's already told you everything!" Justin said. "Oh, that's sneaky, but don't you believe he loves you, Ginny! Don't trust him!"

"Oh, *no!*" replied Ginny. "I hope we know better than to trust Malfoy for our information. But we have our ways of knowing things."

"Justin," Hermione said regally. "I call on your offer of service and swear you to secrecy. You did the right thing, coming to me with the truth. Now don't mention this to a soul, except us, of course, and I won't plot any revenge against you."

"My Queen" Justin said, kneeling down playfully before Hermione and kissing her hand. "I offer my services to plan revenge on your enemies." Hermione giggled at his silliness.

"Seriously," he continued, without letting go of Hermione's hand. "I wish you'd both come to my house sometime soon; we could have lunch and kick around some great ideas for revenge."

Hermione looked over to see Ginny's reaction to the idea.

"Don't you think we should bring our co-conspirators along?" Ginny asked. "May we bring our friends, Justin?"

"Harry and Ron?" he asked in surprise.

"No! Not them!" Ginny said. "They're likely to be on the receiving end! Now, you can't tell where we get our information; it's a secret. It makes us seem more mysterious and all-knowing that way!" Justin nodded his agreement.

"I won't tell anyone about your plans or your friends," he promised.

"Please plan lunch for two more, Neville and Professor Snape. I don't know if Professor Snape will come, but we should ask him."

"That's a kind thought, Ginny," Hermione added. "I don't imagine he gets out much."

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At the same time Justin was confessing to Hermione, Headmaster Snape had a visitor of his own.

"Come in, Circe," he said, opening the door to his office with a wave of his hand before she could knock.

Looking slightly startled (but dressed to kill) was Circe Abernathy, mother of Blaise Zabini.

Circe often dressed to kill, so there was nothing to be learned from her costly robes.

"Do sit down, Circe," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Ah, Headmaster," she said with a smile that bordered on flirtatious. "How do you know I'm not here because I can do something for you?"

"Circe, we have known each other since we were children. And in all that time, I have never known you to dress so spectacularly when you are about to do something for another person without hope of personal gain."

Circe stiffened. "Are you impugning my motives?"

"No," Severus replied, "simply stating a fact. Now what brings you here?"

Circe looked taken aback for a moment.

"I should know that you see through everyone like a window, Severus. So offer me some tea and some of those scones that never taste so good anywhere else!"

Severus waved his hand towards the bell-pull and asked the obsequious house elf who appeared for tea.

"The lady is fond of scones, Lucky," he added. Lucky grinned and bowed deeply to Circe before disappearing with a pop.

"I need your advice, Severus," Circe said without further blandishments. "Blaise went out with Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott this morning and came back an hour later with some magic spell clinging to him. The sensors detected it, but he won't tell me what it is. That Nott boy is a troublemaker. His father was horrible! I never did like any of the Malfoys, and Narcissa has always been jealous of me."

Severus smirked at the unconscious self-absorption that Circe revealed.

Lucky reappeared with a pop, carrying an enormous tea tray loaded with Severus's favourite treats and several varieties of scones. He set it on the tea table and disappeared with a bow and another pop.

"May I pour out, Severus?" Circe asked, like a child asking for a treat. Severus nodded, and Circe sat herself behind the teapot looking quite at home, although he doubted she'd ever been in the headmaster's office before today. Circe rarely felt (and never looked) uncomfortable anywhere.

"Do you still take two sugars with friends, Severus, and black in public?" she asked, holding the sugar tongs ready to do his bidding.

"Yes. Two sugars, only now I take sugar in public as well. I have grown soft in my old age and care less about projecting a frightening image. You always had a good memory, Circe."

"I can recall how one hundred fifty-seven of my friends and acquaintances take tea. It's much easier to remember than all the potions in *your* head."

"As I recall, you were also quite good at Potions," Severus replied. There were rumors about *how* some of Circe's eight husbands had died. Oh, yes, she was quite good at Potions.

She was also quite good at reading people, and she knew that Severus was considering her problem. She would wait patiently for him to speak now, so she merely murmured a quiet, "That's quite a compliment coming from you," and busied herself with a currant scone.

"I know where your son was," Severus began, "and I know what spell has been cast upon him. It is not dark, it is not dangerous, although he may find it... inconvenient."

"Oh, thank you, Severus!" Circe exclaimed. "You are such a good Head of Slytherin. Blaise still looks to you for advice, I know. He told me he visited you before the ball, although he wouldn't tell what he talked about. You're so good to your students!"

Severus paused, wondering how much to tell and how much Hermione would prefer remain unsaid.

"Does this have to do with a lady, a young lady of marriageable age?" Circe asked shrewdly.

"Tell me what you know, Circe, and I will tell you what I know, but I wish you to agree not to tell anyone else."

"Well, Blaise was very interested in the papers the day they reported Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley had dumped their fiancées. He even asked me if I expected him to marry a pureblood and would I be upset if he married someone who had fought at Hogwarts against Cecil.

"I said no, I did not like Death Eaters and would have divorced him after the battle, had he not died."

Severus could see Circe was uncomfortable with the subject of her eighth husband, even six years later. He wondered why, but diplomatically changed the subject back to her son.

"Eat your scones, Circe, and tell me more about Blaise."

"Well, yesterday morning he went to visit you, but wouldn't tell me why. And today he came back after his outing with a spell on him. That's all, really. He broke up with his last girlfriend a couple of months ago. That nice Melinda Button. You know she's descended from Rowena Ravenclaw."

"And how would you feel about Blaise courting someone who is not pure-blooded, Circe?"

"I thought it was the Weasley girl!" she cried. "Her father asked me some very hard questions at my trial... but he was fair, I have to admit. But it's the Granger girl, isn't it? He wants to marry the Granger girl. That would wash away a lot of the stain of not fighting with his classmates. When did he fall in love with her?"

"Circe, now I don't want you telling, or if you do, you may only tell that you believe your son is courting Miss Granger. And don't tell anyone you heard this from me," Severus said solemnly.

You know I can keep a secret, Severus," Circe replied, "I promise." Severus knew she was trustworthy and proceeded to tell her what sort of antics her son and his companions had got up to.

to be continued

Muggle Machines

Chapter 4 of 8

Our Friends enjoy lunch in the Village of Fletcherton.

Disclaimer:

J. K. R. owns it all!

Author's Note:

(Edited November 4, 2008)

The Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge is over, and I can now recognize my amazing beta team.

Thanks to my wonderful betas, Semptra and Chivalric, for all their help. Without them the plot would be heading nowhere, limping along with too many commas!

Thanks to my special guest beta, Beaweasley2, who gave me the idea to use the Muggle Machines in this story.

The prompt follows the chapter.

Chapter 4

Muggle Machines

The following Wednesday morning, Severus received one piece of mail that very much piqued his interest. The sealing wax was impressed with a quartered coat of arms that Severus recognized as almost identical to the one used by one of his students, Elizabeth Finch-Fletchley. The letter was from Sir Thomas's heir, Justin Finch-Fletchley, idiot and future Baronet.

Finch's Nest

Fletcherton,

Lancashire,

England

Tuesday, May 4, 2004

Dear Headmaster Snape,

Hermione and Ginny are coming over to my home on Saturday at noon to plot revenge (and eat lunch). I hope you will consent to be part of the group.

Severus had been surprised enough the day before to receive Miss Granger's note thanking him yet again and informing him that Justin Finch-Fletchley was no longer on the 'list'. At the time, he had imagined, in a few more days, all the desire for revenge would have deserted the notoriously soft-hearted Gryffindor. Now he was led to hope that there was more to the child than courage and kindness. A bit of revenge would enliven his spring.

*It might interest you to see Muggle computers,*the letter continued. Severus felt offended that a young twit who would make such a stupid bet assumed that he, Severus Snape, who had lived through the war by his wits and knowledge, was ignorant of Muggle culture.

I am on the Floo System under the name Finch's Nest. If you wish to Apparate, I have enclosed instructions to the best Apparation point, a private garden behind my home. You can also ask my sister for instructions, as I Side-Along Apparate her quite frequently to the village.

Justin's younger sister was now a cheerful fifth-year at Hogwarts. Minerva said Miss Finch-Fletchley was a ray of sunshine amongst the Muggle-borns. The Muggle-borns fortunate enough not to have been put in prison or a camp were so much less haunted-looking than the ones old enough to recall. Elizabeth Finch-Fletchley, as a Muggle-born already down for Hogwarts, had been marked for imprisonment. Her parents had sent her to live with a sympathetic Wizarding family in the United States.

The Headmaster turned back to his letter.

I planned this for the 8th because next weekend is a Hogsmeade weekend, and you might be busier than usual. Also, if the ladies are planning to do anything to Harry and Ron on their honeymoons, they'd better hurry!

Your Humble and Obedient Servant,

Justin Finch-Fletchley

Severus almost smiled at the thought of some sort of revenge on Potter and Weasley. He glanced over at Neville, fully intending to bring the lad along if Finch-Fletchley hadn't seen fit to invite him. Neville was already looking at Severus and held up his own letter with a huge grin. Severus nodded slowly, allowing himself a wry half-smile for

a second as he gazed into Neville's guileless eyes.

"Minerva, would it inconvenience you if I left the castle around noon on Saturday?" he asked the lady who had sat next to him for so many years.

"Not in the least! Glad to see you getting out, Severus. You spend what little free time you have working on your experiments. You need a life, Severus. And a nice lady-friend wouldn't be amiss."

"Yes, Mother," he said with sarcasm that Minerva recognized (through years of practice) as good-natured and affectionate. Severus smirked, knowing she was curious to know who had invited him to lunch. He wondered how long it would take her to ask.

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Finch's Nest was a large, picture-postcard, English country cottage with a thatched roof and tiny-paned windows of old, wavy glass. The front garden was beautifully landscaped and had flowers that would not be blooming elsewhere in the village for two or three weeks. The cottage had been extended more than once, but the overall effect of the mixture of styles was charming. At least so Misses Granger and Weasley appeared to think. They were getting the tour of the grounds with Neville (who was delighted with the plantings) when Severus let himself out of the walled garden at the back of the handsome domicile.

Severus stood watching the foursome as young Finch-Fletchley led the others around, pointing out interesting plants to Neville, and offering to have some cuttings of a flower Miss Weasley admired sent to the Burrow.

I suppose he's wondering if Miss Granger likes the place, Severus thought. Miss Granger seemed to like the place very much, indeed, if her expression was any guide.

Once she went so far as to begin to praise the beauty of the house and gardens and then suddenly blushed and abruptly ended with, "Yes, very nice."

Severus was amused at Miss Granger realizing that praising the home of the man who wished to marry her might be taken wrongly.

"Ah, here is the Headmaster, just come from the Apparation garden!" Justin said. "I am honoured, sir." He gave his best dancing-class bow.

Severus noted that Young Finch-Fetchley did not know the finer points of Wizarding etiquette as practiced by families like the Malfoys, but by using his own best guess, he did well enough, and he did it without embarrassment. That was the important part; he had the self-confidence of his class. His manners, if not what would be expected of a Malfoy or a Black, were good enough. They were different, but they were acceptable, mostly because Justin was confident in himself.

Severus nodded his head rather formally, as though Justin were still a student.

"I found it difficult to resist so interesting an invitation," he said.

"A little revenge will set me up," Ginny said lightly. "Do you feel the same, Professor?"

"Tom Riddle is dead, Miss Weasley," Severus answered, "but I am at your service in this endeavour."

The tinkle of a handbell calling them to lunch interrupted the young people's laughter.

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The inside of the cottage was as lovely as the outside. It was old and spacious, really almost a manor house. If this was where the son-and-heir lived, Severus wondered what the family home of Sir Thomas was like.

Both servants served a delicious lunch (and gaped a little at the assembled guests). They had read about these people in the *Daily Prophet*. The frequent entrance of one or the other of Justin's servants kept them from discussing revenge, thus the conversation was general and rather pleasant. Each of them talked about his job, and they were able to become a bit better acquainted.

Hermione had been made a member of the Wizengamot, as well as working for the Department of Mysteries. She kept her ears open, though, for any sort of misuse of non-humans, Muggles, and Squibs. Ginny, of course, was a Seeker for the Chudley Cannons. Justin worked in the Muggle Prime Minister's office; the Prime Minister was the only one who knew Justin was a Wizard. He was considered a likely up-and-comer.

Severus watched Hermione and recalled Minerva's comment about a lady friend. Hermione Granger would be someone who was his intellectual equal, although she was shockingly young. She was undeniably good, and she could be amusing, too. She was telling some humorous stories about her work. It was even funny when she ventured too close to secret information, triggering the Unspeakable charm. Suddenly she was unable even to mouth words and could only make unintelligible noises for several seconds. The rest of the young people were laughing uproariously.

Don't be a fool, Severus Snape, he thought. *She's young enough to be your daughter and has younger men practically fighting over her. Richer men than you, too, and far better-looking. She'd never give you a thought. And she was a student of yours. Look here, you're surround by children!*

Just then Hermione looked up from her plate and caught his eye.

"Professor Snape, do tell us another funny story about Professor Slughorn," she asked so sweetly he almost wondered if she was flirting.

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Justin had arranged for his housekeeper and maid to go to the village for the afternoon and leave the cleaning-up for later. Neville saw him slip some Muggle money to each of the women as they left. Then Justin conducted his guests to a pleasant parlour with a lovely view of the wide lawn.

"When any of you get thirsty or hungry, Miss Upton has left plenty of snacks and drinks for us. Just help yourself in the kitchen," Justin said. "Now pray sit down and we can discuss revenge."

The guests were all a little relieved that Justin's housekeeper and maid had left. It was slightly unnerving to be gaped at as celebrities and war heroes by the two as they served lunch (not that they hadn't all had a great deal of attention paid to them for just that reason).

"I thought of something," began Severus, when it appeared no one else would speak first. "It is very mild, but it might serve for partial revenge on Potter and Weasley."

"Oh, tell us!" Hermione cried, bouncing a little in excitement. "I've thought and thought, but can't come up with a single vengeful idea!"

"I am not at all surprised at that," said Severus.

Hermione looked hurt. "I'm not stupid, you know!" she blurted out.

"No, Miss Granger," Severus said solemnly, "and what I said was in no way meant to insult you. You are not capable of vengeful thoughts; that is nothing to be ashamed of."

"Now, Professor Longbottom here has concocted a Healing potion that they use at St. Mungo's," he continued. "It is very mild and safe and has no dangerous side-effects." Neville started laughing.

"If we could convince Potter's house-elf that Potter and Weasley would feel hurt if no one played a prank on them on their honeymoon, we could get him to Apparate to Trinidad (or wherever they are) and place some of this in the taps in their hotel rooms: shower head, bath tap, and sink taps. When they touch the water, the only thing that will happen is that any cuts or bruises will heal." Severus gave the group a wry half-smile.

"Oh, and they will turn blue in about a quarter of an hour," he concluded dryly.

Neville had been trying to suppress his laughter, but now he didn't have to, the others joined in loudly.

"That's a brilliant idea, Professor Snape," Ginny said. "I want Harry to be blue. How long will it be before he changes back?"

"The effect generally lasts about a fortnight," Severus said, pleased at the response his idea received. "The entire skin turns blue, not just the area touched."

"I'm sick of the smarmy newspaper accounts of Ron and Harry and their honeymoon," Hermione said. The others nodded. Every day the *Daily Prophet* ran a picture of Harry and Ron and their wives, swimming or sailing or building a replica of Hogwarts in wet sand.

"I have to admit that sand castle was brill, though," Neville said. Ginny glared at him. "But it is terrible the way the press won't leave them alone," he added hurriedly.

"Well, the press will have a field day if they are blue!" Hermione pointed out. "I want to see *those* colour photos in the *Prophet*!"

Even Severus allowed himself a little smile as the others laughed unrestrainedly. Then a silence settled over the room.

"What about the hotel maids?" Neville objected. "They might come in to clean and run the water."

"I thought of that, too." Severus replied. "Kreacher will be told to stay in the room and warn away the hotel maids. We couldn't do that if it were not at a Wizarding resort. But they will hardly be surprised to see Kreacher there delivering a gift from a well-wisher."

"Merlin! No! We get loads of them every day at the house!" Ginny said.

"Yeah, I need to get a new place," Hermione said. "I'm sick of living at Harry's. Ginny, will you get a flat with me? We could make even a cheap Muggle flat nice with magic."

Justin almost said something but stopped himself.

"Sure, but we came here to talk about revenge!" Ginny stated. "And I want to get even with Malfoy. Simply turning *him* blue isn't enough."

Hermione shrugged; on this subject she knew nothing. Neville shook his head. He had the odd dangerous-but-not-deadly plant that could be sent as a gift, but didn't think Ginny would think them enough of a nuisance.

Severus had potions and poisons. "If someone were to sneak into my unlocked potions store room," he ventured, "and steal some *Veritaserum*, I would not have the slightest idea who had done it."

"That's a great idea," Hermione said. "If we only knew what information we wanted to get out of Malfoy. But I don't think Ginny wants to land him in jail again."

Another silence settled over the room and Justin smiled boyishly.

"The reason I asked you here," he said, "is because when I want to play a joke on my cousins, I find great revenge ideas on the Internet."

"The Internet?" Ginny asked. "How can a bunch of Muggle academic articles and news stories help you find revenge ideas?"

"Of course!" Severus said with a knowing look.

Hermione stared at Justin with dawning appreciation on her face.

"Google!" she and Justin said simultaneously, and they both laughed merrily.

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Justin had set up his large parlour with three computers on desks. "Normally one is in my den upstairs, and these others belong to Miss Richards and Miss Upton, but they have kindly allowed me to borrow them," he said.

"Now I'll just turn them on. The house has wireless internet, although sometimes magic use disrupts it."

"This is like that telly-vision!" said Neville as the computer screens lit up.

"Not quite," said Hermione, seating herself at the second computer. "We go to the Google page and type in 'revenge ideas' and hit 'search.' See, Ginny, I move the mouse here in my hand, and the cursor moves on the screen. I put it over the word search and click the button on the mouse."

"Oh, look, it changed!" Ginny cried.

"Let's click the first one on the list to see what it is," Hermione said. "Voodoo spells, voodoo dolls, revenge and retribution spells, love spells."

"Are witches advertising on this Muggle thing?" Neville asked.

"No, these are Muggles who claim they have magic," Hermione said. "Let me try the next one."

"Oh, this is a business," she said. "Buy the best revenge gifts for your enemies. They can be sent anonymously from our secret warehouses."

"Skulls, dead bugs, oh!" Hermione was amazed and the others fascinated. "Crushed beer cans, cigarette butts, all boxed and gift wrapped. Dear God!" All the others had come over to see this bizarre website.

"Oh, my! It gets worse!" Hermione cried. "It's dog do, cow pat. You can send them road kill. Oh! This is horrible. Road kill? They actually send dead animals?" Hermione closed the window.

"Look, Miss Weasley," Severus said. He had returned to the third computer. "I have found a webpage you might be interested in, *How to get even with your ex.*"

Ginny ran over to lean on Severus's shoulder. He took the chance to speak privately to her.

"Miss Weasley, I will be happy to give Professor Longbottom extra time off if you need him for your endeavors. But it should not become public knowledge," he whispered.

"It won't, Headmaster," she said earnestly.

"Look," he continued in a normal volume, "there are two sides, *if you love him, and if you hate him.*"

"I hate him!" Ginny cried, and Severus clicked that side of the page.

"It changed again!" she marveled. "Oh, let's see!"

"*Ruin his wedding*," she read, "too late. *Make him lose his job*... no, I really don't want to do that. *Underwear and condom revenge*, what's condom?"

"I'll explain later," Hermione said, coming over to hang over Severus's other shoulder.

This was really something he could get used to, attractive, intelligent women women, not students hanging on him, not because he was a 'hero', but in a natural, friendly manner, the way he'd seen them lean on other male friends.

"Besides, Kreacher would never let us tamper with Harry's underwear," Hermione said.

"*Get him arrested*," Ginny continued to read, "uh, no. I don't want to go that far. *Fake Pregnancy revenge*." Ginny and Hermione both began laughing uproariously.

"They'd just die!" Hermione said.

"But if it hit the papers," Severus cautioned. "Would you want that?"

Ginny sobered instantly at the thought of the press.

"Even if we said we weren't pregnant and proved it, people would always whisper that we'd been pregnant and had taken a potion or something," she said. "You're right, Professor."

"Let's try the other side, *if you love him*," Hermione said.

Severus went to that page, and Hermione leaned over his shoulder to read.

"Oh, this is all ideas to help you get him back," Hermione said in disappointment. "We can't get them back. We wouldn't want that. They'd be miserable, and their wives it's not their fault at all. If I was going to fall in love with the person I was looking at in 30 seconds and it was McNair or Ron, of course I'd look at Ron." She turned and hugged Ginny. "Sucks to be us, doesn't it?"

"Maybe we could use that spell ourselves," Ginny said. "And have some blokes madly in love with us, and we'd fall in love with them, and it'd all be wonderful."

Justin looked hopefully at Hermione. "I'm available, and I'd be happy to help out," he said. "At your service, Hermione."

Hermione rolled her eyes but wasn't really offended, thinking, *It's nice to know someone wants to marry you, even if he isn't in love with you*.

"It is a highly illegal spell, Miss Weasley," said Severus. "It is not an Unforgivable because it causes the object of affection to fall in love in return, with the first kiss. So the couples are at least happy. But it's been illegal all over the Wizarding world for decades, and in Britain since sometime in the 18th century."

"Actually, in 18th Century England," volunteered Hermione, "there was a sixteen-year period when it was legal to use this spell on your son or adopted son, against his will but not a daughter or any female unless she agreed to it. And in Scotland it was outlawed entirely in 1692."

"Here's something," Justin said from the computer he was looking at with Neville. "They say to put a sign on the person's car saying it is for sale for 50 dollars."

"You know their automobile. And fifty dollars is dead cheap in America. And it says to say on the sign, 'I'll be up all night, knock.' And someone will knock on his door at 2 a.m. or so."

Ginny ran over to lean over Neville's shoulder towards the screen.

"We could put a sign on Michael Corner's shop, on the door or window, advertizing something dirt cheap. And when people go in and demand it, he'd get upset," she said excitedly.

Hermione began to feel her better nature asserting itself.

Revenge wasn't right. It was wrong. It was petty. It was immoral. It was...

"Bloody brilliant!" shouted Ginny, who had been reading the web page. "Listen to what *this* bloke did!"

Ginny read the description of a prank one person had pulled on an enemy of his.

"I wouldn't do that to Harry," Ginny admitted wistfully.

"Nor to Ron," agreed Hermione. There was a moment of silence as they looked at each other.

"Malfoy!" they said together.

Justin and Neville howled with laughter. Even Severus graced the girls with an evil-looking grin. Each of the three men was grateful that he wasn't on the other side of this war.

to be continued

Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge

Prompt # 2

For whatever reason, Harry has married someone other than Ginny. Ron has told Hermione that he needs a break. Both Ginny and Hermione vow never to fall in love again. What would happen if bets were placed that (whoever was betting) could make a woman fall in love with and agree to marry him in a certain amount of time? What happens when the girls find out it was only a bet?

Sundae Afternoon

Chapter 5 of 8

An amusing and eventful Sunday afternoon

Disclaimer:

J. K. R. owns it all!

Author's Note:

I wish to thank my amazing beta team, Semptra and Chivalric, and special guest beta, Beaweasley2.

Thank you, **Semptra!** You suggest ideas & improvements, fix my commas, point out egregious errors, and brit pick. And you do it all impossibly quickly.

Thank you, **Chivalric!** You helped me plot this thing and continue to help when I run dry on ideas.

Thank you, **Beaweasley2**, my special guest beta, who set this in motion with an idea you casually mentioned in an encouraging e-mail! The idea was that an internet search would turn up many ideas for getting revenge. Brilliant!

This story would not exist without all three of you!

Chapter 5

Sundae Afternoon

"That was fun!" Hermione said, sitting down next to Neville at a table outside of Fortescue's. Neville looked at her expectantly.

"Ginny went in to chat up Michael Corner, and while he was distracted, I put up a sign on his window advertising store sample brooms for five Galleons each. 'Slightly shopworn.' I used a really strong sticking charm on it. Then I walked over here."

"Ginny should be here soon," Neville said, "unless she's enjoying Corner's lame attempts to rekindle the old flame." Neville had been jealous of Michael Corner when he had been dating Ginny, and he still recalled the nasty comment Corner had made about him and Professor Snape last weekend at the Ministry.

"I saw the delivery owl flying into Corner's shop as I ran off. It won't be long," Hermione said. "Neville, I want to know something. You were Wizard-born and raised, not like me. Does it bother you to find out that Justin's maid and housekeeper are Squibs? Ginny tells me that a lot of Squibs are not properly educated in Muggle schools, but are expected to do menial jobs, like Mr. Filch. No wonder he hates the students! He must have *longed* to attend Hogwarts."

"I didn't know they were Squibs, but I don't know, it doesn't strike me as that odd. I mean, Justin is good to them. He keeps an automobile there, even though he obviously rarely needs it. He could call a taxi when he needs one, as little as he would need to go in a Muggle automobile. He lets them use the auto, and they have that nice telly-vision and computers too. He Apparates back to his flat in London. You know he works in the Muggle Prime Minister's office. He only comes to his house two or three times a month usually. But they live there all the time and have that car and a nice place to live and food paid for and all."

"Neville, how do you know all this?" Hermione asked.

"Miss Richards talked my ear off for a while after you left yesterday," Neville said. "She's very friendly, and she knew a lot about my parents. I think she wanted to mother me because she sent me home with some food, even though I told her the house-elves feed us at Hogwarts."

"Anyway, they seem happy there. Miss Upson told me all about how they have the car to use and how comfortable the house is, and the village Muggles are friendly."

"I don't know," Hermione said thoughtfully. "Seems like he ought to have witches working for him or something. I don't know. It's wrong to make Squibs be servants."

"Miss Richards said she can't wait for Mr. Justin get married and have babies," Neville added. "She was eyeing both you girls as likely candidates. Miss Richards and Miss Upton have read about you in the *Daily Prophet*. They both agreed that either one of 'the young ladies' would make a fine bride for Mr. Justin."

"Why not Miss Upton?" Hermione objected. "She's no older than we are, I bet."

"I'm sure she's a nice girl, Hermione. But personally, I have my eye on someone else."

"Oh, Neville!" Hermione began with a big smile. "Oh, here she is! Talk later!" Ginny had appeared on the Apparation Platform by Fortescue's.

"Well, it all went as planned," Ginny said with a grin as she flopped gracelessly into a chair. Hermione noticed that Neville gazed at her as though she were the most beautiful thing in the world.

"That owl from George came in with the package," Ginny continued, "and when Michael opened it, out came a bang and a Stinging Hex! So I offered him my painkiller from the bottle in my purse, the one clearly marked St. Mungo's. Told him I had it for aches and pains after practice, that a nice Healer had given it to me. Told him there was one dose left. I got the bottle back from him, no evidence! I said I'd refill it before next practice. He'll be blue in ten minutes or so."

"Why *do* they use that if it turns people blue, Neville?" Hermione asked. "I was wondering about that last night."

"Well, don't lose any sleep over it," Neville replied teasingly. "They use it for some people who have reactions to other medicines. No one's had a bad reaction to it yet. Also, some of the children get a big kick out of being blue. Since they are in the hospital anyway, and not likely to cause a scene in the Muggle world, it's a harmless way to give them a little pleasure."

"The package had a receipt in it for one joke Stinging Hex from Draco Malfoy, paid in cash," Ginny continued triumphantly. "So Michael is angry at Malfoy now. In ten minutes he'll be blue and fuming. He'll most likely blame Malfoy for the blue, too. And the funniest thing is that he thinks I feel sorry for him. I said how stupid Malfoy is, so he thinks he's on the inside track now."

"Perhaps we ought to recommend that Michael look up revenge ideas on the Internet," said Neville.

Floean Fortesque the Fourth, daughter of the late, lamented owner, walked up to their table to take their orders.

"I love to see such happy customers!" she said. "And minding your own business, too. I had that Rita Skeeter here an hour ago, nosing around, asking if 'anyone who was anyone' had been here today. As if I'd tell her! People have a right to a bit of ice cream and fun without the likes of her watching their every move. Told her I'd toss her out if I caught her eavesdropping on the other customers!"

The friends ordered hot fudge sundaes and rejoiced in missing Rita Skeeter.

"Neville?" asked Hermione as they ate their sundaes, "since when are you such friends with Snape? When you started as Professor Sprout's apprentice, you said he pretty much ignored you."

"He did, but when Pomona decided she wanted me to succeed her as Herbology professor, he began to take more of an interest," Neville replied. "I found out later that he didn't think I'd be a good teacher, but he gave me a chance, anyway. He didn't argue with Pomona (that I know of), or tell her how to run her classes, and she let me begin teaching the younger students and marking papers. So by the time she left, I'd learned a lot about teaching *and* discovered a few tricks for getting along with Professor Snape."

"Sucking up to the boss, eh?" Hermione teased. "Nothing wrong with that, in moderation," she hastened to add.

"No, you don't understand!" Neville said earnestly. "Professor Snape is... I mean, it's *not* sucking up to the boss."

"Hermione, you weren't there that year," Ginny said. "We know how much we owe Snape. He got us through that hellish war year without a single student death. And believe me, the Death Eaters stationed at the school were not worried if they killed a few of us. In fact they'd have liked it. It would have cowed the rest of us, so they imagined."

"Professor Snape managed to keep the Death Eaters believing he was loyal to You-Know-Who and still keep us alive. And he'd sneak us healing potions sometimes."

"Or pain potions," Neville added. "So I could look horribly bruised and still feel alright. He always had some excuse about needing someone at full strength for something. And he couldn't do it too often, but when anyone was really badly beaten or any bones were broken, Snape always made certain that Madame Pomfrey treated them, or he gave them a potion himself."

"Sometimes he seemed to appear out of nowhere and mislead Mr. Filch or the Carrows as they looked for us. At the time we thought it was just our good luck, but we know now he knew where we were and deliberately misled the others."

"Of course, we didn't know that Snape was on our side," Ginny added. "Every time he gave me a potion, I was certain he was going to poison me. But he made me drink it down right there in his office."

"One time I was in the hospital wing and heard him talking to Alecto Carrow, who had hexed me badly. Professor Snape said, 'You can't kill the children. Discipline them if you must, but you can't kill them. If we kill their children, the citizens will rise up against us, but if we keep them hostage here, the populace will allow us to do anything to the Mudbloods to keep their own children safe.'"

"I thought he sounded bloodthirsty at the time," Ginny continued with a strained look on her face, "but now I know it was an excuse to keep us alive. He couldn't do anything to help the Muggle-borns that were hunted down, except work for the defeat of Voldemort. But he could keep us alive."

"Professor Snape was risking his life to get us out of detentions with the Carrows and into the woods with Hagrid," Neville said. "If You-Know... Tom Riddle had discovered what he was doing, he'd have been dead."

"As if we were in any danger there with Hagrid and the hippogriffs and unicorns guarding us!" scoffed Ginny. "Only the Death Eaters thought we were risking our lives. We all pretended it was horrible to go into the woods. And we'd come out with smears of dirt and torn clothing to make it look like we'd been traumatized."

"That was Ginny's idea," Neville said proudly.

"And we'd beg them not to send us back in there; that was Neville's idea!" Ginny said, smiling fondly at Neville.

"What about the centaurs? They were angry when humans came into the woods," Hermione asked.

"They were angry at first," Neville said, "but when Hagrid explained that the Death Eaters had sent us in as punishment, they left us alone. They said they didn't hurt children and wouldn't hurt Hagrid, as he was only there to protect us."

Hermione was embarrassed that she had forgotten these things because Ginny and Neville and the others had told their tales after Voldemort's death.

"It had slipped my mind, even though I heard a lot of this right after the last battle," Hermione admitted, shamefaced. She realized that every time Neville or Ginny seemed deferential to Professor Snape, it wasn't currying favour or from fear, it was gratitude. If the man wanted to be cross or curmudgeonly, Ginny and Neville would smile through it all, remembering how many times a cross expression and a verbal threat had accompanied an actual healing potion or spell, or a detention in the Forest.

"The way I see it is this," Neville began. "Professor Snape wants respect. He was badly treated in his youth, and now he wants the trappings of respect. Take his Order of Merlin, First Class: he keeps it hidden away, but I think it means a lot to him."

"I call him 'sir' or 'Headmaster' or 'Professor.' Even Professor McGonagall has asked me to call her Minerva, but not Professor Snape. Some day he might, but until then, I don't mind. I'm proud to call him 'sir.' He's old enough to be my father and he saved my life. He saved all of us, actually. We'd never have won the war without him."

"So I treat him with respect, and because it's not spurious, he accepts it. This way, I let him know I realize how much in his debt we all are, but without anything so embarrassing as actually saying it. And he likes it. I think on some level he needs it, but if someone was pretending just to get on his good side, he'd know in a minute." Hermione and Ginny nodded.

A house-elf appeared on the Apparation Platform by Fortesque's and hurried over to their table.

"Professor Longbottom, sir," he said with a bow, "Noble Headmaster Snape is wanting the red crocus bulbs now. He sent me to ask you is it the red bag or the white bag they is in, for the m..."

"Yes, Lucky, let's just talk over here where it's quieter!" Neville said and practically dragged the house-elf over to an empty corner where he cast a privacy spell. After talking to the elf for a minute or so, the creature disappeared with a pop and Neville returned to his friends.

"Sorry, private Hogwarts business," he said.

"You're lucky there are two of us here, Neville," Hermione teased. "If only one of us was here, the one who was here would be *so tempted* to try to get that information out of you. But seeing as we are here together, I have to be good in front of Ginny and she has to be good in front of me."

They all laughed and did not notice a large insect detach itself from Neville's trouser cuff and fly away.

George Weasley wandered up to their table and signaled Miss Fortesque, holding up one finger before he sat down.

"It worked as you thought!" George said. "That house-elf, Kreacher, came in the shop asking for traditional wedding pranks. He told me he remembered that Master Sirius played several such pranks on James Potter when he married, so it was only fitting that Harry Potter have traditional wedding pranks played on him! He got rather maudlin over Regulus Black, saying if he'd lived to marry, Kreacher could have turned him and his bride blue. And he wasn't going to let his new master, Harry Potter, go lacking in any pureblood tradition. He said he would fix it for the Weasleys as well."

"Oh, George, thank you!" Hermione said. "I didn't want Ron to be left out!"

"Hermione drew Kreacher out last night!" Ginny said, "asking him questions about the old days and saying what a good house-elf he was. And she got him talking about weddings, and then about Sirius and his tricks. She's a marvel."

"Well, Kreacher left the shop quite pleased," George said. "I told him he was welcome back anytime, family discount and all."

"Family discount?" Ginny scoffed. "You sold him a bottle of Neville's potion that we gave you. Sounds like pure profit to me."

"I had to pay for the bottle," George said, pretending to pout.

"And we appreciate it, George," Hermione said. "Stop giving the boy a hard time, Ginny, or he won't give *me* a family discount!"

"Always, Hermione," replied George. "You know, Neville, I might want to buy some of that from you. It might end up selling well, for those who want to send more than a Howler, but less than a bomb."

"Not that we sell bombs!" he added quickly, looking around. He didn't want to scare off potential customers.

"Of course you don't sell bombs, Mr. George," said Miss Fortesque with a smile as she served him his ice cream.

"Just think, it's noon here; it's about 8 a.m. where Harry is," Ginny said. "When they go out for breakfast, Kreacher will slip into their rooms and leave them those little presents. Something all four of them can enjoy."

Miss Florean Fortesque the Fourth left the table smiling at the thought that the young ladies were true ladies, indeed. Not a fortnight ago they'd been jilted by their fiancés, and now they were sending them wedding gifts.

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Later that afternoon, Hermione and Ginny were sitting in the kitchen in Grimmauld Place, answering their mail.

A letter lay in front of Ginny, who was penning a response.

Sunday, May 9, 2004

Dear Ginny,

Every day I write you sending you another gift and begging you to see me. And every day you return the gifts and refuse. I know I acted badly towards you in school; now I want nothing more than to make it up to you.

Here is an emerald and diamond necklace to match the earrings, rings, and bracelets I have already sent you. Please say the word and I will return the other items to you. Have you any idea how lovely emeralds would look against your milk-white skin, setting off your fiery hair? Merlin, woman! How can you send these things back to me? Please accept them as a token of my admiration and love.

Your Humble and Obedient Servant,

Draco

Ginny sighed and tossed her finished letter across the kitchen table towards Hermione, who had just completed writing her own.

"Here," Hermione said and gave her friend the letter she had been working on.

She read Ginny's missive:

Sunday, May 9, 2004

Mr. Malfoy,

I must reject this unsuitable gift. No woman can accept so valuable a present from a gentleman. If you continue to importune me to accept these outrageous items, I must assume you think of me as a woman who can be bought! I trust you do not mean anything so insulting.

I believe I have made myself clear to you. Pray do not force me to call you out onto the Field of Honour!

Ginevra Molly Weasley

"Oh good, you threaten to call him out!" Hermione said. "I'll be your second if it comes to that!"

"Such a shame you to have to return these pretties," she added, fingering the incredible necklace the owl had brought. "I know you must, but it would serve him right if you simply tucked this one into your Gringotts vault and pretended it never showed up!"

"Don't think I'm not tempted," Ginny answered with a sigh. "I'll never own anything so grand as this. And it's human-made, so the goblins will never be asking for it back." She picked up Hermione's letter.

Sunday, May 9, 2004

Dear Mr. Zabini,

I am honoured that you have given ten thousand Galleons to the War Orphans Fund in my name. I request, however, that you refrain from any further use of my name in your charitable gifts. People may get the wrong impression.

Gratefully,

Hermione Granger

Blaise is behaving better than Draco, don't you think?" Ginny asked. "Draco thinks he can buy me. Blaise is at least more subtle in his attempts to buy you."

Another owl fluttered in through the open window and presented a letter to Ginny.

"It's Michael Corner, he regrets..." She burst out laughing.

"What? What?" Hermione cried.

"He regrets he can't meet me after practice tomorrow because he is ill," Ginny replied, still laughing. "He is too ill to work at the shop and his mother is nursing him. She refuses to let him leave the house until she determines if whatever he has is catching."

"He's ill?" Hermione said. "He means he's blue. Oh, he'll be blue for a fortnight! I hadn't thought how that would inconvenience the rest of his family!"

Kreacher appeared in the kitchen with a pop.

"Kreacher will be feeding the owls now, young ladies," he grumbled. "Grocery bills is higher with those owls being fed here so much. Young gentlemen should be feeding these owls before they sends them!"

The three owls sat expectantly. They had learned that this household never sent them away without a generous treat. The doorbell sounded, unaccompanied by any shrieks from Mrs. Black's Portrait.

"I'll get the door, it's probably our professors!" said Hermione. "Thank you for taking care of these owls, Kreacher. I'm sorry they're such a bother."

"After Kreacher feeds you, you take this letter to Blaise Zabini," she told the owl.

"And bite him," she added under her breath as she left the room.

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The visitors were indeed Neville and Professor Snape. Kreacher was delighted to serve tea to the group, especially to the old friend of Master Regulus.

"Headmaster Snape sir should be visiting more often," he said.

"Yes, indeed, Headmaster," said Hermione who was pouring out tea. "And when we move to our own place, I hope you will visit us there."

Severus wondered if Hermione was flirting with him, and if so, did he approve of the idea? He rather thought he did.

"I'd be delighted, Miss Granger," he said gravely. "Two sugars, please."

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It was nearly an hour later when Justin arrived via Floo. He stumbled out of the fireplace clutching a shopping bag to his chest.

"It is done!" he proclaimed dramatically and handed the shopping bag to Ginny. "These practice robes were perfect. I looked so dashing strolling into that singles club, dressed like a quidditch player. I looked great, except that I looked like Malfoy." Even Severus smiled at that.

"I posted the sign with the picture of Malfoy. That place was packed! Witches and Wizards from all over the world! They'll all see the advert. Of course most of the Brits will recognize him, and they'll know he's rich."

Justin handed Neville a copy of the ad he'd posted at the singles' club.

"*Looking for someone who will love me for myself,*" Neville read, simpering comically. "*I like romantic walks, fine dining, and showering my beloved with gifts.*"

"Well, that last part is true," Ginny said. "He sent me another piece of jewelry today. It just about breaks my heart to return them." She pulled the emerald necklace out of her pocket and handed it to Justin. The three men all looked at it in interest.

"Those are the Malfoy Emeralds," Severus said. "I wonder if Narcissa knows he sent them. They aren't her favourites, but she'd not be pleased to know they were winging around the country. Did he send you the rest?"

"He sent me rings and bracelets and earrings," Ginny replied. "I sent them all back."

Neville looked appalled. There was no way he could afford to give Ginny even one piece of jewelry like this.

"I expect the tiara is next," Severus said. "Draco must be amazed that you returned them. I am sorry to say he is not accustomed to associate with young ladies of quality."

"Oh! A Tiara!" Ginny wailed. "Emeralds in my hair, it'd look heavenly."

Hermione nodded in sympathetic agreement. "Enough about this jewelry!" she said. "So, Justin, you put up the sign?"

"Yes and 'Draco' got a lot of looks. I didn't stop to chat, but smiled at the interested parties. I could see as I left the club that people were hurrying over to see what I'd posted on the advertisement wall."

"Here is a key to the box I took out in the name of D. M.," Justin continued. "Diagon Alley post office is very convenient to your job."

"Yes, I eat lunch at Susan's most days," Hermione replied. "I'm sure lots of people will write to D. M. We'll pick out the best ones for Draco to meet in person."

"It isn't a dive at all," Justin said. "Really an elegant place full of attractive Witches and Wizards from all over. They hand you a translation amulet when you enter. And it has great Muggle-Repelling Charms. It isn't until you get inside the first doors that you can see the sign with the club's name..."

He grinned mischievously. "*Gay Britain.*"

to be continued

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(Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge, PROMPT # 2)

For whatever reason, Harry has married someone other than Ginny. Ron has told Hermione that he needs a break. Both Ginny and Hermione vow never to fall in love again. What would happen if bets were placed that (whoever was betting) could make a woman fall in love with and agree to marry him in a certain amount of time? What happens when the girls find out it was only a bet?

Sweet Circe!

Chapter 6 of 8

Hermione and Ginny plot revenge on Draco and make a new friend.

Disclaimer:

Not mine!

Author's Note:

Many thanks to my beta team, Sempra and Chivalric. This story is so much better because of them. Any badness is mine alone.

Also thanks to the special guest beta, Beaweasley2, who casually offered me the gemlike concept of searching the internet for revenge ideas.

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Chapter 6

Sweet Circe!

Hermione's string shopping bag held a baguette of bread, some squash, tomatoes, and a number of letters. Kreacher took the bag, removing the food, which he began to prepare for dinner.

"Kreacher is thanking Miss Hermione," he said. "Those owls have been eating all the leftovers, and Kreacher needs to make a nice casserole." Ginny and Hermione seated themselves at the far side of the large kitchen table, giving Kreacher the room he needed to fix dinner. He would not admit it, but he had become attached to the young ladies and enjoyed it when they chatted in his kitchen.

They dumped out four letters addressed to D. M. Ginny grabbed the first one and read it aloud.

Dear D. M.,

I am a Muggle-born wizard from America. You would love to take walks in my beautiful country. I own a small home with a large yard and the adjoining wooded area of close to fifty acres. I operate a wizarding business, a small apothecary shop that carries other wizarding items as well. We have a friendly wizarding community, and Apparition licenses and Portkey licenses are not hard to come by. You wouldn't be lonely.

I enjoy walking, and in the winter, cross-country and downhill skiing.

Enclosed is a picture. You can see by the headline of the newspaper that it was taken last week, not 20 years ago, as some people do. I am visiting London now and would be happy to meet you sometime.

Sincerely,

Wilson Webster

Keene, New Hampshire

(currently residing at Bertram's Hotel in London)

Enclosed was, as promised, a photograph of a perfectly normal-looking man about ten years their senior. He was holding a copy of the London Times, which he unfolded from time to time and held up to the camera to show the date and headline.

"Wow, he sounds too sane!" said Hermione. "I feel like writing to this bloke and telling him the truth so he won't be hoping for a reply.

"You know when we started this," she continued, "it never occurred to me that by getting revenge on these fellows, I'd be affecting other people as well. But Michael Corner's family has to pull double shifts because he can't work as he's blue. And now we've got these people wanting to meet Draco, and they don't know Draco's not gay and that we placed that ad. It seems wrong!"

"It won't hurt them to fall in with our plans for one afternoon. Once they visit Draco at his house, they'll get the idea that he's not gay. If it makes you feel better, we can write to everyone after this is over and tell them it was a joke or a mistake," Ginny said soothingly. "We can even send them some money to cover their owl expenses."

I still have Harry's Gringotts key and am still listed on his account, so he can pay for it she thought. *I won't tell that to Hermione, though; she's in one of her moral moods.*

"Do you think they'll all be that sane and nice sounding?" she asked.

"I don't think so," Hermione said. "Listen to this."

"Dear D. M.

Does D. M. stand for Dungeon Master? I'd love to play in your dungeon any day.

Reply to:

GH

Box 472

Diagon Alley Post Office"

"And he sent a picture! What is that he's wearing?" asked Hermione.

"I don't know," replied Ginny. "It looks like it's made of leather, what there is of it."

"This Webster fellow sent a much nicer picture," Hermione said primly. "And this one has the added benefit that he can safely take it home, and it looks like a typical tourist photo outside of Buckingham Palace. He could send it to his mother."

The third letter was another sane, normal letter, this one from a British wizard who did not pretend to own more than a car. He did have a decent job and rented a flat in Birmingham, but made no claim to being rich or dashing.

"This one sounds as sane and friendly as the Yank, but not so well off. They'd both make nice people to meet," Hermione mused.

"Except Draco's not gay," Ginny pointed out.

"Oh, that's right!" Hermione grimaced comically. "These letters seem so normal, except for Mr. Dungeon Guy, that I hate to hurt their feelings."

"This last one's a flyer for the Leaky Cauldron," Ginny said.

"New in London or Long time resident?"

Don't forget the Leaky Cauldron at the entrance to Diagon Alley for all your needs. We serve food and beverages anytime, rent rooms for long or short stays, and perform a valuable information service for visitors to London as well as residents. Don't forget our private dining room, available for parties!"

"Susan must have an agreement with the post office that whenever someone rents a post office box, they deliver a flyer," Hermione said. "Clever idea!"

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During dinner an owl arrived with an expensive looking roll of parchment addressed to the ladies.

Monday, May 10, 2004

Dear Miss Granger and Miss Weasley,

Pray excuse the informality of this request, but I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet both of you. Would you do me the very great honour of coming to Abernathy Hall for coffee and pudding this evening around eight? You will meet your friend, Professor Snape, here, and he can introduce me to you ladies.

Your Humble & Obedient Servant,

Circe Abernathy

Post Script:

The Floo address is 'Abernathy Hall'.

"Oh, Abernathy Hall!" Ginny cried. "It's supposed to make Malfoy Manor look like a cottage! My dad reckons Miss Abernathy is the richest witch in the world."

"We don't even know this lady!" Hermione protested. "We'd better contact Professor Snape and ask him if he's really going there tonight." Ginny looked at her skeptically.

"Eternal Vigilance, you know!" Hermione explained.

"Well, it wouldn't be bad to let someone know where we're going," Ginny agreed, "in case she's really a Death Eater in disguise. But she was judged innocent of any wrongdoing in the war by the Wizengamot. My dad questioned her at her trial."

"So you know her?" Hermione pestered.

"Well I know of her, and so do you; she's Blaise Zabini's mother."

"Oh! I can't go see her!" Hermione protested. "Blaise sent me all that money! I mean, not me, but he sent all that money to those charities in my name. She..."

"She probably hasn't even missed it," Ginny said dismissively. "My folks say she gives a lot of money to charities, anyway. They don't know if she does it for show or out of real compassion, but it still does a great deal of good."

"But to set your mind at ease, we'll send Kreacher to ask Professor Snape if he really is going to Abernathy Hall. I had no idea he was friends with Circe Abernathy."

Hermione nodded absently, her mind was already on another subject. She picked up the flyer for the Leaky Cauldron and read it again.

"Don't forget our private dining room, available for parties!" she read aloud. "And Draco Malfoy could be the guest of honour."

"That would be better than sending them to his house one at a time!" Hermione continued. "We'll arrange to have them all meet him somewhere with a private dining room we rent for the evening. And we can be there to stop any mayhem... I hope!"

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Two hours later, Hermione sat in the most sumptuously appointed room she'd ever seen, sipping a cup of coffee and watching as Circe poured Professor Snape's tea. She dropped in two lumps of sugar before catching his eye, winking, and dropping in a third. Hermione was surprised and looked to see Professor Snape's reaction. He gave Circe a tiny, indulgent smile and then returned to his typical solemn expression.

Hermione smiled; this Circe seemed to be alright. She had greeted them almost like royalty, which had made Hermione glad that Kreacher had insisted upon accompanying

them to the house and brushing the soot from their clothes before retiring to the kitchen to visit with the Abernathy house-elves. Kreacher said it was proper etiquette for young ladies to be accompanied by a servant.

Circe Abernathy sat behind the silver coffee and tea service looking like a princess from a fairy tale. Hermione was grateful that Ginny had insisted they wear dress robes. Yet now that the formalities of the first introduction were over, Circe ("Oh, do call me Circe, my dears!") sat chatting as though she had known them for years.

"So you are Blaise's choice for a wife," Circe said as calmly as if she were discussing the weather. "I must say he could not have chosen better. Still, I would not press you to marry without love! I certainly would not have you rush into something you might regret later."

"And that goes for you, too, Ginny," she continued. The girls had imitated Miss Abernathy's request and asked her to call them by their first names, too.

"I understand Draco is courting you," Circe continued. "He could not have found a lovelier girl, nor one from a finer family. Your father was perfectly fair to me during my hearing, although I had feared he might wish to retaliate against any available target, as some of the Ministry officials had done. But your father saw that I had a fair trial, and I understand he did the same for everyone, regardless of the charges against them. He makes a fine member of the Wizengamot."

Ginny fairly glowed hearing her father praised.

"Now, dear Hermione," Circe continued smoothly, "I understand you are the youngest member of the Wizengamot ever."

"Well, ma'am," Hermione replied. "The youngest since 1353 when the Great Plague took so many members that they had to induct a seventeen-year-old and a nineteen-year-old to seat a quorum."

"Really?" Circe asked avidly. "I didn't know that!"

"Yes," Hermione replied enthusiastically. "Professor Binns told us that was the year the age of majority in the wizarding world changed from twenty-one to seventeen."

"Oh, it's much more interesting to hear you tell it!" replied Circe with a little laugh. "I never could take in more than half of what old Binns was saying."

Hermione laughed delightedly, amused that this fairy-like creature had been bored by their History of Magic professor.

"Ron and Harry always said the same thing!" she said.

"I'm in good company, then," Circe said, "figuratively and literally." She looked around and bestowed a sweet smile on each of the girls.

"I think the age of majority ought still to be twenty-one, for boys at least!" Circe continued. "Perhaps even higher, maybe thirty. Johnny Zabini was nearly thirty when I married him, and he was still only a great boy about some things."

"You're right!" Ginny said. "I have six older brothers... five, and sometimes I think I'm more mature than any of them."

"I know them all; she's telling the truth!" Hermione added quickly to keep the tone light. Professor Snape actually smiled at that comment.

"My son, Blaise, for instance," Circe continued gaily, "I love him more than anyone in the world, but *what* am I going to do with him? Honestly! Making a bet about who will marry Hermione here! How silly of him!"

"Not that I wouldn't be thrilled if he did marry you, my dear. But don't let all this blind you to that fact that marriage should be based on love. I wish there was some way to get through to Blaise that he must not play games and make bets about so serious a matter as one's life partner!"

"Well, you could help us wreak revenge on him!" Ginny said. "We wouldn't do anything really mean, just booby-trap his room a little, if you'd let us in!"

Circe began to laugh a musical laugh so infectious that soon the girls joined in merrily, and even Professor Snape had to smile, although he took pains to give himself a supercilious air.

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Later when the young ladies had Flooed home, Circe sat comfortably with her old friend.

"Thank you for introducing me, Severus," she said. "I like those girls. They're fun. I see why you enjoy their company."

"I don't..." Severus began to protest.

"Oh, nonsense. What man doesn't like a sweet young thing treating him kindly? So, are you going to court Miss Hermione yourself? She's a dear, though not as vivacious as her friend."

"Really, Circe! You ask the most outrageous questions!" Severus complained.

"I think she suits you, Severus; she's so clever, and she can be as serious as you about facts. I don't think her lack of vivacity will be a defect in your eyes."

"Miss Granger is quite vivacious enough for a woman her age. She is not a child that one expects to go dashing around the room and bouncing on the furniture."

"No, of course not, Severus," Circe said, bouncing a little on the sofa in delight. "Blaise wants me to have you over for dinner soon. Please let me know which day would be convenient for you. I hope you can get away."

"Minerva will reschedule the tides if she thinks it will get me out of Hogwarts and courting someone. She has made her will clear to me."

"Well, she and I are in agreement. I'd like to see you courting Hermione. She's a delightful girl."

"A girl, indeed," Severus protested.

"Severus," Circe said, "why do you treat Professor McGonagall as if she is your employer? You are the Headmaster of the school, after all."

"Minerva should have been Headmistress; she would do a better job than I," Severus said. "After the Battle of Hogwarts, when I was offered the position, this time legitimately, I refused and told them to give it to Minerva. It should always have been hers."

"She declined the offer. She's never completely recovered from being injured by Umbridge's henchmen. I offered to do anything in my power to make the job less arduous, but she still refused, and in the end, there I was."

Severus was not going to relate Minerva's main reason for rejecting the post of Headmistress, her superstition that, unlike other Wizarding portraits, the magical ones that appeared at the death of a Headmaster actually captured the soul of the newly departed ruler of Hogwarts.

'I want to meet my Robert in the afterlife, Severus,' she had confided in him. 'I am not entirely certain that being Headmistress will not prevent that from happening.'

Severus thought that he, too, had a loved one he wished to see again. But, unlike Minerva, he was not certain that he would be greeted with any sort of affection by Lily. He

could risk the (unlikely) entombment of his soul in a headmaster's portrait.

"That's all very well and good, Severus," Circe persisted, "but it doesn't explain why you treat her like royalty."

"I like her, Circe. I admired Dumbledore, was grateful to him...at times...worked for him, spied for him. But I actually love Minerva McGonagall. She was kind to me when I was a student; she has always been kind to me. It hurt her deeply during the war, when she thought I had betrayed her trust. I can never make that up to her.

"In my eyes, she is Headmistress of Hogwarts and my dearest friend."

Circe laid a graceful hand on his arm and looked affectionately at him, silently inviting him to continue.

"I suppose, as all the principals in question are dead, except me, and the secret I was sworn to protect is known by all, I may as well tell you the story. In confidence, you understand." Circe nodded solemnly.

"You know that Remus Lupin was a werewolf," he began. "In my sixth year at Hogwarts, Sirius Black lured me into the place where Lupin had been confined for the full moon. I could easily have been killed or bitten."

Circe gasped. Whatever she had been expecting to hear, it had not been this.

"In all fairness," Severus continued, "I do not believe that Lupin had any part in this incident, although for many years, I believed he had planned it with Black." There was no need to mention Potter at all; Potter got quite enough press as it was.

"I escaped with my life, unbiten, and went to Dumbledore, certain that Black would be expelled. Instead I was sworn to secrecy about *poor* Lupin's condition and told I would be in trouble if I mentioned the incident to anyone. Black was given detention, I think. Dumbledore always maintained Black had no idea of the very real danger he put me in."

"Oh, Severus," Circe breathed.

"Professor McGonagall stood up for me, against her own students," he continued. "She pressed Dumbledore to suspend Sirius Black at the very least, to hold him back a year, and transfer him to Ravenclaw, thus separating him from James Potter, his frequent partner in crime."

"Oh, I hated those bullies!" Circe interjected. "Sirius Black used to hex me in the halls and James Potter threw water balloons at me. And they were horrible to you!"

"But Dumbledore refused," he continued, "probably from the desire to keep Sirius Black on his side in the war, and gave the bastard a slap on the wrist. Minerva was furious."

Later, when Severus joined the staff, Minerva had confided that she had refused to speak to Albus for weeks in anger over his handling of the situation. Severus had wondered, still wondered, whether he would have ever taken the Dark Mark had he gone to Minerva with his problems, instead of following Lucius.

Circe was silent for a moment, searching Severus's face, before voicing her thoughts, "Of course, I always respected Professor McGonagall," Circe said solemnly. "She was always so even-handed. But what you tell me makes me admire her all the more! I'm glad you have such a loyal friend."

to be continued

AN:

I have deliberately not described Circe except to say she is fairy-like, extremely beautiful, well-dressed, etc. This leaves each reader to imagine his own version of (arguably) the most beautiful witch in the world.

Next chapter, truth and lies in the *Daily Prophet*!

Tuesday's Children

Chapter 7 of 8

Ginny and Hermione get some help with their revenge. Hermione's picture is in the paper.

Disclaimer:

Not mine!

Author's Note:

Many thanks to my beta team, Semptra and Chivalric. This story is so much better because of them. Any badness is mine alone.

Also thanks to the special guest beta, Beaweasley2, who casually offered me the gemlike concept of searching the internet for revenge ideas.

(Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge, PROMPT # 2)

For whatever reason, Harry has married someone other than Ginny. Ron has told Hermione that he needs a break. Both Ginny and Hermione vow never to fall in love again. What would happen if bets were placed that (whoever was betting) could make a woman fall in love with and agree to marry him in a certain amount of time? What happens when the girls find out it was only a bet?

Chapter 7

Tuesday's Children

Blaise Zabini stepped out of his shower Tuesday morning, in a hurry to write his daily love letter to Hermione. He was surprised not to see Scooter there with a large bath towel, but occasionally the house-elf had other duties. He walked into his bedroom, expecting to see his bed perfectly made and the clothing he'd selected the evening

before laid neatly out on the bed, but the bed was still a mess, and no clothes at all were laid out.

Blaise stomped over to his chest of drawers to look for some underwear. The drawer was empty! He threw open the other drawers and they were all empty, too. Blaise dashed to the wardrobe to grab a robe to put on, but the wardrobe was empty.

"Scooter!" Blaise called. No answer. "Libby!" he yelled. Again no answer. Taking his wand from the bedside table, he transfigured his bath towel into a bathrobe. It wasn't a job that would have made McGonagall proud, but it would cover him as he hunted down the two house-elves.

"Mother!" he shouted as he ran down the stairs.

"How nice to see you up early, dearest," his mother said from the breakfast room. "Come have breakfast with me. Scooter's outdone himself. Try these scones."

"Mother, my clothes are gone!" Blaise cried.

"Well, go put them on, dear, and hurry back down," Circe said placidly. "I've got your plate under a warming charm."

Meanwhile in Blaise's bedroom, Kreacher was handily re-appearing Blaise's entire wardrobe. He heard Blaise thundering up the stairs, calling for his mother to hurry.

"I don't see what the rush is, Precious," came Circe's languid reply. "If they're gone, they're gone. We can't catch them now by running." With a smirk, the house-elf disappeared.

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Tuesday, May 11, 2004

In the *Daily Prophet*

Gossip Girl

By Glinda Gadabout

Your Gossip Girl has been gathering some pretty tidbits today.

Last Friday we published a photo of Arthur Weasley lunching with a fabulously beautiful blonde woman young enough to be his daughter! It turns out the lady in question is his niece, Winnifred Prewitt. Is she a true blonde, as she claims? Or is she really a redhead, like all the other Prewitts?

--O--

On Sunday, Hermione Granger was seen on a date with Professor Neville Longbottom. They were spotted at Fortesque's, flirting and holding hands. Miss Granger, a notorious heartbreaker, is showing her usual pluck, not wasting any time after being dumped by Auror, Ron Weasley.

--O--

Also on Sunday, there is rumoured to have been an attack by Cornish Pixies at the Quality Quidditch Supplies, Diagon Alley. A crowd was forming there, attracted by a sale on broomsticks, when a large Cornish Pixie terrorized several customers and bolted from the shop. A few other sightings of this maniacal Pixie were reported Sunday, but he seems to have moved on, probably to terrorize vulnerable innocents far from the protection of the crowds of Diagon Alley.

No one has any idea where the enormous Pixie came from, but an employee of Magical Menagerie denied that they have ever sold Pixies there.

--O--

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Michael Corner threw down the paper in disgust. *He* had been the giant blue Pixie in Diagon Alley! He was home now, bright blue and unable to help out in the shop.

He walked over to his desk and began to write:

Dear Justin,

Have you seen the Daily Prophet today? Hermione is dating Neville Longbottom now! And wait'll you hear what Malfoy did to me!

I was in the shop chatting with Ginny on Sunday, and she'd agreed to meet me after practice, and a package came in from Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes. It had a stinging hex in it, and it turned me BLUE!

My skin is blue, and I can't work in the shop. I had to call off my date with Ginny! The folks at Mungo's just looked at me funny and said it should wear off in a couple of weeks. In the package from Weasleys' was a receipt for one stinging hex paid for by Draco Malfoy.

We should work together. Your girl is seeing that idiot Longbottom, and Malfoy is hexing me. Isn't that against his probation or something?

A fellow member of Dumbledore's Army,

Michael Corner

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OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER's lowliest assistant

10 DOWNING STREET

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

Hello, Michael,

(it's me, Justin)

I have to work late tonight, but can I call you after work? I should be home by eight. I'd be happy to come over, or you are welcome to come to my flat. It's hooked up to the Floo so you needn't be seen in public. The stop name is 'Justin Finch-Fletchley.' (Imaginative name, eh?) Don't say 'Finch-Fletchley,' or you'll end up at my parents' house!

Your brother-in-arms,

Justin Finch-Fletchley

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"Yeah, I saw it at work, Gin," Hermione said dismissively when Ginny held up the newspaper photo of her and Neville chatting amiably at Florean Fortescue's. "Everyone was showing me that damn picture today. Those that aren't allowed into the Department sent me memos! Including your father!"

"But Dad's allowed down there. Besides, he was in the paper himself!" Ginny protested.

"Well," Hermione replied sheepishly, "I *might* have teased him about it on Friday when they published that picture of him with your cousin.

"He got me back today, sent me two memos and wandered down to the Department just to say hello, newspaper under his arm!"

Hermione was trying to sound stern, but she ended up laughing merrily. Ginny joined in.

"So did you pick up the mail today?" Ginny asked, still grinning.

Hermione pulled several letters from her briefcase.

"Good! To work!" Ginny cried, grabbing the first letter that came to hand and reading it.

"Dear Sir,

I am appalled! You are a sinner! You should steer clear of Gay Bars and read your Bible (Start with Leviticus!) so you would learn Homosexuality is a Sin! You should go to St. Mungo's and ask them to Oblivate you entirely, so you could Start Life Anew with a Clean Soul!

Sincerely,

Mr. Willie Gaylord"

Hermione and Ginny gaped at each other for a moment.

"You realize," said Hermione, "that Mr. Gaylord had to go into Gay Britain, a homosexual meeting place, to see the flyer Justin posted there. What was he doing there if he hates gays so much? Preaching to them?"

"Very weird," agreed Ginny, placing the letter on the 'yes' pile.

"Ginny, wrong pile," laughed Hermione. "We don't want this guy to arrange a meeting with Draco."

"I do," muttered Ginny as she slipped the letter into the 'no' pile to placate her friend. "Wait, I have an idea!" Ginny picked up Mr. Gaylord's letter and grabbed a quill and parchment.

"Dear Mr. Gaylord," she dictated to the enchanted quill, "*Thank you so much for your letter. It has changed my life.*"

"I picked up my bible and began to read, as you suggested. When I read Leviticus, I realized that I was a sinner and I dropped to my knees to beg God's forgiveness. Now I am never going back to that Den of Iniquity, (capitalize that) except to remove my advert posted there. After I get my sign down (and destroyed) I am going to church to pray for my soul.

"I know it will make you happy to know that You Have Changed my Life!(capitalize that) I am very grateful to you and God for giving me this second chance!

Sincerely,

D. M.

"End of dictation."

"Ginny," Hermione said, "I'm not sure if that's a wise thing to do."

"Oh, you're no fun!" Ginny complained as she dropped Mr. Gaylord's letter, and her response, on to the 'no' pile.

"Hermioneeeee! Ginnieeeee!" sang an unmistakable voice from the Floo. "It's Circeeee! May I come through?"

Ginny gathered the letters up and dropped them willy-nilly into a basket that held a few onions near the sink. Kreacher took Hermione's robes and briefcase and disappeared with them as Hermione called, "Certainly, Circe, come right through!"

Circe stepped gracefully out of the Floo, a vision in shades of spring green and emerald green. She was immediately followed by a neat house-elf who dusted her robes off and waved a hand around the kitchen, removing any soot they had brought with them.

Circe looked around the room. "I haven't been in this house since Regulus's funeral," she said solemnly. She shook her head as if to dispel any unhappy thoughts.

"Let me tell you what happened!" she said excitedly.

Kreacher reappeared in the kitchen and bowed low to the guest.

"Noble friend of Master Regulus should be stepping through to the parlour, and Kreacher will serve tea," he announced in a voice that would brook no opposition.

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Once settled in the parlour, the three ladies had leisure to chat.

"As soon as Blaise began to shower, I called Libby and Scooter and sent them on an errand I had arranged yesterday. Then I called Kreacher through the Floo system you were both already gone to work and he came over and made all of Blaise's clothing disappear.

"So my son came downstairs in a dreadful-looking bathrobe I suppose he transfigured he ought to work on his transfiguration! and he made me follow him back upstairs to show me that his clothes were all gone. By the time we got upstairs, Kreacher had returned the clothing to its rightful places and made Blaise's bed to boot.

"Blaise was shocked, and I told him it must have been a dream that his clothes were all missing."

Hermione and Ginny both laughed delightedly.

"Clever lad," Circe added fondly. "He said, 'Mother, if the house-elves are both gone, who made my bed?'"

"Well, he had me there! I told him we'd ask Libby and Scooter when they returned.

"Of course, when they returned, all they could say was that I had asked them to go pick up some items I'd ordered at a number of shops. Neither of them had made the bed."

Circe gave the girls a mischievous smile. "I haven't had this much fun in years!" she said.

"We really appreciate your help, Circe!" said Hermione, still grinning widely.

"Yes, thank you, Circe!" Ginny added, "and we ought to do something for Kreacher, for all his help!"

Hermione beamed happily at Ginny for caring about the house-elf. "I found a picture of Regulus in the attic and had it framed. I was going to give it to Kreacher for helping us!" she said. "It'll be from both of us, of course!"

Circe watched Hermione, noticing how the girl's face lit up when she smiled. And such a thoughtful girl, wishing to do a kindness even for the house-elf who was bound to serve. It cost her a twinge of regret to know that Hermione would never marry Blaise. Whatever girl Blaise might marry, how could he find the equal of Hermione Granger?

"So Hermione, are you really dating Neville Longbottom?" she asked. "I saw the paper!"

Hermione entertained her two friends with tales of the teasing messages that had swooped in on her at inopportune moments during the day.

Circe was happy to hear that Neville and Hermione were merely friends. She still wanted Hermione to marry her old friend, Severus. Hermione could match Severus in sheer brainpower and would understand (as many women would not) when he needed to be alone. Hermione really was the ideal wife for Severus; she understood what the poor man had been through better than most.

"I'm so glad I met you girls," Circe said. "I hope that we can remain friends after this revenge thing is over. I really think you're nicer than most of my friends. I don't have a lot of close women friends." The reasons was obvious: Circe was acclaimed as the most beautiful witch in the world, and a lot of women hated her for it.

"But you two are not shallow; you won't dislike me for being pretty. And I certainly don't dislike you two for being brave and good and famous! And you're ever so much fun!"

Professor Slughorn claimed that not everyone in Slytherin was evil or unpleasant; Hermione thought, and look at Circe Abernathy; she's proof! Along with Professor Snape, of course.

"Well, certainly we want to be friends with you; you're loads of fun!" Ginny said.

Hermione looked at Circe and gave her a warm smile.

"As long as it won't upset Blaise, I'll be proud to call you friend," she said.

"Blaise does not allow me to choose *his* friends!" Circe said with a proud toss of her head. "So why should he pick mine?"

to be continued

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AN:

In case anyone was wondering...

As a leading member of the Wizengamot, Arthur Weasley is allowed down in the Dept. of Mysteries. He is not a senior member in number of years served, but having fought at the Battle of Hogwarts & having been in the Order of the Phoenix, he was promoted, not only to mere member but to senior member. (There were quite a few vacancies when the Death Eaters and Voldemort sympathizers were kicked out.)

Hermione is a 'mere' member since she is so young. But everyone expects her to rise in the Ministry and certainly in the Wizengamot.

What Happened Wednesday

Chapter 8 of 8

Draco gets in trouble with his mom. Severus and Hermione conspire.

Author's notes:

thanks to my wonderful beta team:

Sempra, who is invaluable in every way,

Chivalric, who continues to help me plot this out,

and special guest beta, Beaweasley2, who gave me the idea of trawling the Internet for revenge ideas.

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I have made Susan Bones the proprietress of the Leaky Cauldron in this tale. I should have checked! I thought I was remembering the information from the post DH

interview, correctly, but it is Hannah isn't it?

Well this is AU, anyway! So in this world, Susan runs the Leaky Cauldron and Hermione eats there a lot. I suppose I should do something nice for Hannah in this story, since I have deprived her of both her inn and her professor-husband, Neville. We'll have to see; there are certainly a few eligible bachelors running around in this tale.

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Chapter 8

What Happened Wednesday

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Wednesday, May 12, 2004

In the *Daily Prophet*

No Word From Potter or Weasley in Over 24 Hours

by Barbara Cuffe

(on assignment to Trinidad and Tobago)

Harry Potter and Ron Weasley and their brides, Mary Sue Jones and Carrie Lou Jones, have apparently fallen off the face of the earth. Vacationing in Trinidad and Tobago, they have been seen everywhere, at Muggle as well as Wizard venues, enjoying the beauties of this island nation. But no one has seen them since Sunday morning when they returned to their adjoining luxury hotel suites after breakfast.

"They have had room service delivering their meals," said Jenny Martin, the manager of the Wizard's Cove Hotel. "But since Sunday lunch, all meals and their mail have been left outside their doors, as Mr. Potter instructed. No one has seen them."

I am certain all my readers hope that this is a trifling indisposition and that soon Britain's Darlings and America's Sweethearts will be back enjoying their honeymoons again.

Get well wishes can be addressed to Wizard's Cove Hotel, Tobago.

Draco tossed down the paper in disgust, nearly upsetting his glass of pumpkin juice. Even when Potter *wasn't* in the paper, he was in the paper!

An owl flew in through an open window and dropped a small package into Draco's breakfast. It was wrapped in green paper and had a flowery scent emanating from it.

Draco opened up the package and found a ceramic potpourri holder. Inside was a little card with 'from Ginny' written in a feminine hand. The flowery scent was cloying and rather strong, but would soon disperse. The important thing was not the gift itself, but the fact that Ginny Weasley had seen fit to send him something.

Perhaps she was regretting returning the emeralds, and this was a hint for him to begin sending her jewels again. Draco smiled happily, his appetite for breakfast renewed at the thought that the youngest Weasley was just as susceptible to wealth as the rest of her sex.

Perhaps he ought to send Ginny the emeralds again. Perhaps he ought to send her something else; there were some pearls his mother was tired of. She'd said so just the other night. 'I'm tired of these pearls, Draco. I've worn them twice this spring, already.'

Narcissa Malfoy, unaware of her son's intention to raid her jewel boxes (again), entered the house with a few packages.

"I'm glad I went to Madam Malkin's for these new gowns. No one else can do that really fine embroidery like she can!" Narcissa said. "How are you this morning, Draco?" She sniffed. "That's a bit strong, isn't it?"

"Mother! Ginny Weasley sent me this!" he replied excitedly.

Narcissa looked at the the potpourri and the card. It was certainly not a costly gift; as an object of beauty it was laughable, but it held great value in that Miss Weasley was attempting to please her son.

"Draco, if you can pull this off, our star will rise again!" she said. "It might even get your father out of prison early. And at least she is pure-blooded. My grandchildren would be pure-bloods, even if they do have red hair." Narcissa paused in thought. "There must be a charm..."

"She seems to have forgiven me for sending her presents," Draco said. "Do you think this means I ought to send her more jewels?"

"Jewels?" Narcissa gasped. "You sent her jewels? Great Merlin! How could you be such an oaf? Sending a woman jewels is an insult."

"Books! Flowers! Candy!" She ticked the items off on her fingers. "Those are safe. Nothing that she'd be required to return if the romance ends!"

"But, Mother, she sent me a present! She *was* angry, but now she's forgiven me."

"Well... if she's forgiven you... that's lucky," Narcissa said. "What did you send her? A locket with your picture? An amber heart? A girl can keep an amber heart... in *some* families."

Draco didn't respond, and Narcissa's look grew shrewd. "What did you send her?"

"I sent her some emeralds," Draco muttered.

"MY emeralds?" Narcissa demanded furiously. "You sent her MY emeralds?"

"They're the Malfoy emeralds," Draco protested. "That makes them as much mine as yours."

"You never wear them, do you? They're mine! *Mine!*"

"You never wear them, either. You always complain if Father asks you to wear them."

"But they are mine, and they are worth a fortune!"

"Well, she sent them back, anyway!"

"It looks like she has forgiven you," Narcissa admitted begrudgingly, relieved that the girl has sent them back. "But that scent. It is a bit too much."

"I just opened the package, mother. It'll die down in a few minutes."

Narcissa called Toddy, the house-elf, to open the window. Once the Weasley girl had married Draco, Narcissa would teach her a few things about taste and elegance. It

wouldn't do to have the Malfoy and Black families connected to someone who probably thought her brother's joke shop was the height of elegance.

Draco continued to devour his breakfast with new appetite. Ginny Weasley was like any other woman, couldn't resist the Malfoy millions. Life was looking better.

Narcissa sat down and began to toy with a piece of toast.

"I think you had better let me help you write to that Weasley girl, Draco," she said. "If you've been sending her jewels, I hate to think what you've written! No! Don't tell me. I don't want to know."

'I don't want to know' had always stood Narcissa in good stead and had helped her in her trial after the Dark Lord's fall. Between Potter's testimony and her insistence under *Veritaserum* that she knew only the vaguest of details of Voldemort's plans and that she was an unwilling participant in such crimes as had been proved against her, she had managed to keep herself out of prison.

Narcissa clapped her hands for Toddy and called for paper and a dicta-quill. She composed her thoughts until the items were brought to her, when she began to dictate:

"Dear, most dear, Ginny," Draco rolled his eyes.

"Thank you for such a lovely and thoughtful present. I am grateful that you have forgiven me for my impetuous gift of jewels. I meant no disrespect to you. Once we are married, you may have all the jewelry you can imagine! Everything shall be as you wish."

Mother wants to give you the emeralds as a wedding gift. You'll look so lovely in white robes with the Malfoy emeralds; rather than adorning you, it is the jewels that will be brightened by your beauty.

Your adoring suitor,

Draco Malfoy"

"Now!" Narcissa said smartly with a clap of hands to attract her son's attention. "I want you to copy this over in your own hand. And you must go into town and buy flowers, books, candy. Can you remember that?"

She snatched the quill up and wrote *Books, Flowers, Candy*, on the bottom of the letter.

"If you don't know what books she likes, send her copies of the classics, expensively bound. Send her an empty spellbook, as expensive as you can find. Or better yet, order a fabulous one, finer than any in the shop. I hear she is quite the witch, and every witch can use a spellbook for her secrets. Or for a diary."

Draco's face took on a crafty expression.

"No," his mother scolded, "don't hex it so you can read what she writes. Merlin! A witch with that kind of power would see through that in a moment. She has those demonic brothers who play tricks. You don't think she'd spot something like that?"

"Now, I suppose a magazine subscription would be another nice present that you could ~~properly~~ give her. Easy enough to find out if she has a subscription to something, and we can ask if she buys anything at the shops.

"First thing, we'll Floo the flower shop and have something lovely sent around for her."

"Shall I send something to her friend, as well?" Draco asked.

"No. The Mudblood can be jealous of her betters, for all I care," Narcissa said coldly. "If we can break up the friendship between Miss High-and-Mighty Granger and Miss Weasley, it will be that much easier for you to convince Poor-but-Proud to marry you.

"It's a pity about that bit of torture here at the Manor. Miss High-and-Muddy would be an even better match for you, politically speaking. But I daresay the Weasley girl will be more easily fooled and more easily bought."

"Mother," Draco said. "I am thinking, Weasley had that trouble with a diary in my second year at Hogwarts. Maybe a blank book isn't such a good idea."

"I don't want to know about any trouble, Draco, but if it will bring up unpleasant thoughts, then stick to the classics." Narcissa paused to think. "You can always send her a box. A jewel box, as long as you do not send jewelry.

"Oh, and take that horrid cheap little smelly thing to your room. It's *your* present after all, and it's cloying without being in the least pleasant. I'll be certain she never brings anything that tacky into this house once she marries into the family."

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"Miss Granger," said Professor Snape as she joined him in the Leaky Cauldron. "You are probably wondering what wicked, vengeful plot I have come up with to ask you to meet me here for lunch on such short notice." Hermione smiled when she noticed him wordlessly cast the *Muffliato* spell, but did not mention it.

"I assume it must be something devilishly clever, sir," she replied playfully, "to bring you out of your castle stronghold."

"Well, it is not revenge, but perhaps it might be classified as mischief," he replied, almost smiling at Hermione's arch manner. "You know that young Longbottom spends a great deal of his time annoying me and complicating my life. I was thinking, as he seems quite taken with your friend, Miss Weasley, and as she is now un-betrothed, if she were to marry my employee, it would make him happy. And I believe he could make her so."

Hermione bestowed a winning smile on Professor Snape, catching the attention of *Daily Prophet* photographer, Bozo, who was watching with great interest from another table in the crowded dining room.

Granger had Flooed into the pub with a serious expression, but shortly after sitting down, she had graced the Headmaster with such a dazzling smile that Bozo wondered what the old bat had said to make her so happy.

"Oh, Professor Snape!" She leaned forward excitedly. "I was thinking the same thing! Ginny and Neville, they're such good friends, and they seem so well suited for each other."

"I rely on your confidence, Miss Granger." Hermione nodded, willing to keep whatever secret the Headmaster wished. "I happen to know that Longbottom is in love with the girl. I believe he has been since they were in school together.

"Oh, I wondered," Hermione said, "the way he looked at her, especially since Ron and Harry – dumped us."

"Well, I need not convince Mr Longbottom of anything, so much of this will fall on your shoulders, Miss Hermione. You must encourage your friend to care for my... friend."

There, Professor, Hermione thought. *It's not so terrible to have friends, and no one laughs when you admit to it.*

"I will do my best, Headmaster," she replied earnestly.

"And I will be happy to give him extra time off if you – and especially, Miss Weasley – wish to invite him to come visit."

"You're welcome to come, too, you know," she replied. "You should get out more, stop working yourself to death. I know you enjoyed our visit to Justin's cottage. You are an invaluable plotter in our little war of revenge. What would we do without you?"

"I have a great deal of work to do," Professor Snape replied rather more sternly than he intended. He noticed the disappointed look on her face and added, "Miss Granger, you would do perfectly well without me. You are brilliant enough to make up even for your lack of viciousness."

"But you are more brilliant, still, Professor, and I do love having someone smarter than I to talk to."

"Miss Granger, I'm flattered. You're an Unspeakable. You work with the brightest people in the Wizarding world."

"Not ALL of them, Professor Snape," Hermione said pointedly. "And some of *them* are not exactly delightful company, for all their brains."

Hermione hoped that Professor Snape didn't classify her as a big brain but 'not delightful company,' for she was beginning to value his more and more as she got to know him.

The professor himself did not know what to think of this and was grateful to see Susan Bones arrive to take their orders for lunch. After she left, he asked Hermione's opinion on some of the magical issues of the day, and they both enjoyed a lively conversation about the latest Magical theories.

They were still discussing time travel when a chime sounded. Professor Snape looked around, puzzled to see a number of witches and wizards hurrying out of their seats or quickly finishing their meals.

"Susan's a clever girl," Hermione explained. "She sounds a chime at ten to one to let us know it's time to finish up and get back to work. A lot of us who work at the Ministry eat here regularly."

Hermione finished up her chocolate mousse and gathered up the work robes she'd draped over the chair next to him. An orderly line of people was forming next to the huge fireplace at one end of the room. They were Flooing back to the Ministry of Magic.

Hermione pulled her money pouch out and began to lay some money on the table, but Professor Snape stopped her.

"Please allow me, Miss Granger, since I asked you to join me, and since I am asking you to do this favour for me."

"Thank you, sir, but remember, I want Ginny and Neville to be happy and have been plotting the same thing you have. You must take care to see he comes to visit us often, even if you have to bring him yourself."

"I dine with Circe and Blaise soon and will bring you news when I can, Mr. Longbottom in tow." Severus said as he laid a few coins on the table.

He walked beside her to the fireplace and gave her a small formal bow.

"Thank you for your help, Miss Granger. I know Hogwarts can always count on the Ministry."

As he walked towards the door that opened toward Diagon Alley, Severus was amused to hear a voice asking, "Ooh! What was Pefessor Snape needin' your 'elp with, Miss Granger?"

"Now, Miss Dobbs, you know I can't discuss my work with anyone but another Unspeakable!" Hermione replied merrily as he left the pub.

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Later that day, Narcissa, Draco, and Toddy Apparated into Malfoy Manor after a fruitful shopping expedition.

They had discovered that Ginevra Weasley frequently bought *Quidditch Quorum* from Lucy's Booth, a small newstand, and so had ordered a subscription in her name. Narcissa insisted they go into Magical Memories, and there she selected a beautifully carved wooden trinket box. Then she ordered an expensively bound set of Jane Austen's novels at Flourish and Blotts.

"Now remember, Draco," Narcissa said as they popped into the parlour, "from now on, I will approve all gifts you send to Miss Weasley." She drew breath and gagged.

"Oh! What is that?" she cried. "Clean it up, Toddy!" Narcissa Disapparated, leaving Draco and Toddy gasping for breath. The house smelled like a hundred dung bombs had been set off inside.

"Toddy is wondering," said the tiny creature as he waved his hand at the windows, opening them. "Where is the gift Master Draco received this morning?" Toddy was clever enough to suspect that the newest thing in the house was making this new smell.

"In my room, but my girlfriend sent it to me," Draco said. Toddy popped up to Draco's room and found that the ceramic potpourri container now held something that smelled disgustingly like dragon dung.

After disposing of the offending item, the house-elf Apparated into the parlour again. "Master Draco had better leave while Toddy cleans and airs the house," he said. "It was the ceramic pot. Toddy has destroyed it, sir."

Draco Apparated back to Diagon Alley without a word of thanks.

"Whoever sent it was not Master Draco's friend," Toddy muttered as he opened the windows and set ventilation spells to disperse the magical odor.

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Later that evening, Justin and Michael were enjoying pizza and beer in the Corners' lounge.

"I reckon George doesn't ask a lot of questions when it's a trick to be played on Draco Malfoy," Justin said. "Because he took my money and even signed his own sister's name to the card."

"He told me that Malfoy's been sending his sister expensive jewelry," Justin continued. "And she's sent every bit of it back with nasty letters. She finally had to challenge him to a duel to get him to leave off!"

"I wish I wasn't blue," complained Michael. "I'd go tell Malfoy to leave Ginny alone. That's a lot of nerve, sending her jewels, like she was some scarlet woman. I'd never be so disrespectful."

You couldn't afford to be that disrespectful, thought Justin, recalling the spectacular emeralds Ginny had showed them. He was too polite to say it aloud, though, and took a bite of pizza instead.

"I'd challenge him to a duel, myself," Michael boasted, "only he couldn't accept, could he? Wouldn't that be in violation of his parole? There's an idea! Get him to duel with

me, and then he lands back in prison. And Ginny is available."

"Oh, that's not fair!" Justin protested. "He served his time."

"Never thought I'd see the day you defended Malfoy."

"I never would have thought it myself," Justin agreed with a laugh, "but there it is! We can't send him back to prison for courting Ginny."

"Well, anyway, that stinky potpourri was a great idea, Justin," Michael said, reaching for another beer. "This stuff is good, by the way. It's Muggle?"

"Yes, and the pizza, too. It's Muggle refreshments night. I know a wonderful pizzeria, Luigi's."

There was a menu from Luigi's taped to one of the pizza boxes, and Michael glanced at it. "There's one near Diagon Alley; I'll have to go there. It's better than the pizza they serve at O'Hara's, even though O'Hara's is a Wizarding place."

Justin felt a surge of satisfaction that Corner, who so easily assumed Muggle inferiority, would recognize that Muggles could do some things better than Wizards. *Maybe he's not a total waste of skin*, Justin thought, reaching for another slice of 'Luigi's famous three cheese.'

to be continued

Potter Place Anything Goes Challenge

prompt # 2

For whatever reason, Harry has married someone other than Ginny. Ron has told Hermione that he needs a break. Both Ginny and Hermione vow never to fall in love again. What would happen if bets were placed that (whoever was betting) could make a woman fall in love with and agree to marry him in a certain amount of time? What happens when the girls find out it was only a bet?