

Candle

by CharmedForce

After losing his best friend during the Battle at Hogwarts, Gregory Goyle must accept punishment for his actions. When he is befriended by a surprising person, he learns that life travels many paths, and sometimes friendship is the only guide. One-shot, Friendship, DH/Epilogue Compliant.

One Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Buckets of beer to my fabulous and temporarily anonymous betas. These ladies helped me around the writer's blocks and gave excellent advice, suggestions and encouragement.

This is a one-shot response to Potter_Place's Anything Goes! Challenge using Prompt #82: Gregory Goyle has lost his best friend in the Final Battle. Who does he cling to now that he is alone?

□

The candle in his hand flickered as the night wind whipped by. It wouldn't be long before the candle gutted, but he would stay until the end. He would stay and watch until the fire took his friend from his sight one last time.

May 1998

It had taken a few days to get the wizarding world sorted after Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix had finally defeated Voldemort and his Death Eaters. The most dangerous and well-known Death Eaters had clung to their failing leader and were subsequently captured, but there had still been a number of lesser-known Death Eaters evading the Aurors. Within a day, attention had turned toward the students at Hogwarts who'd chosen to fight or flee. There were a number of people who had felt that students who'd chosen to assist Voldemort should have been treated as harshly as known adult Death Eaters, but the majority of the wizarding world had understood the dilemma facing the youth, and the Wizengamot had wisely granted leniency to those who had come forward immediately. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy had brought their son Draco to be questioned and had been praised for their willingness to make reparations.

Encouraged by the Malfoys' example, Gregory Goyle had stepped forward to receive his punishment. He had been joined by twelve other students, not limited to just Slytherin House. The punishment that had been assigned to the Misled Ones, as the *Daily Prophet* called them, had seemed mild compared to the imprisonment of their parents, but no one had been going to complain.

For each Misled One, there was a corresponding Rescuer. The Rescuers were a volunteer group of the students who had stayed to fight Voldemort and the Death Eaters that fateful night. It was the hope of the Wizengamot that by pairing a Misled One with a Rescuer, the Rescuer's good behaviour would set an example for the Misled One.

The pair was required to spend at least one full day together each week and maintain contact every other day until the Ministry decided penance had been paid. Any official Ministry events were to be attended together.

Greg was unsurprised to hear that Draco was assigned to Hermione Granger. He felt bad for the poor girl who would so soon be sucked into politics over her head and only hoped that her time spent on the run had toughened her up and encouraged paranoia.

He read the parchment from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Probation Office. He tried to connect a face to the name that now appeared to be assigned to him. Though he had bullied plenty of students at Hogwarts, he never descended to the madness that Vincent Crabbe had. Vinny had often spent time listening to Pansy and Daphne gossip so he would know exactly who would be most susceptible to his cruelty. His attention to events in a person's life would have made him a great second-in-command when he was older, had he not had the fatal flaw of maliciousness. That maliciousness led him to bully and torture students already hurting.

Draco often used to say that Vinny was like a misery-seeking niffler. The House had a good laugh about it until Vinny hexed an upstart fourth-year who dared to call him "Niffles."

Though he was mean to so many people, he never behaved that way with Greg. Friends since birth, the two relied upon each other as much as one could. They learned quickly that it was best to stay quiet and keep their eyes open, particularly when a Malfoy was around. Vinny never spoke up outside of Slytherin, preferring others to hold attention. Greg was painfully shy, tending to stumble over his words when forced to speak in front of people. Vinny protected Greg as best he could, going so far as to hit an upperclassman who dared call Greg a stuttering baby the first day of Hogwarts, earning the two of them the reputation of fighters. The only person Greg could speak to without stumbling was Vinny, and after several years, he could speak privately with Draco. He tried to pay Vinny back for his friendship by being the muscle behind Vinny's taunts and bullying. The least he felt he could do was back up the only true friend he had.

Once Voldemort had control over Hogwarts, Vinny told Greg it was time to get serious. The only way the two could stay safe was by playing Voldemort's rules. They worked hard studying, surprising everyone by their significantly higher grades and earning the praise of the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Carrow. Professor Carrow told Vinny that he believed both boys had great promise and could move up quickly within Voldemort's ranks with some effort. Greg claimed a desire to focus on all aspects of his education, while Vinny accepted private tutoring from the Professor.

Greg read the parchment again, focusing on the last name. After a few moments, a memory from fifth year surfaced.

He was blocking the doorway while Vinny grabbed at the younger witch. She had a Ravenclaw tie on and personalized her uniform further with a necklace made of butterbeer corks and radish earrings. She was holding a giant hat with lion's head on it.

"What's this, Looney? Going to jinx Gryffindor?" Vinny said, pulling the hat out of her hands and pushing her hard against the wall.

"Oh, no, Vincent. Not jinxing. I'm showing my support for the Gryffindor Quidditch team," came the dreamy voice. She smiled brightly at Vinny, as though being ambushed were a normal occurrence. "If you would like, I could wear a special hat for you, too, on the days Slytherin plays. I like to encourage everyone in their hobbies."

"Ten points from Ravenclaw for obstructing the corridor. How thoughtful of Mr. Crabbe to pick up your mess. It is nearly dinner time, Miss Lovegood. Take your hat and get moving now!" demanded Professor Snape, appearing from a staff corridor hidden behind a tapestry.

Greg stepped out the way of the door and watched as the young blonde politely greeted Professor Snape and took her hat back from Vinny. "Thank you so much for stopping to chat with me, Vincent, Gregory. Have a good evening!" She drifted down the corridor and hummed a sweet tune.

"Looney Lovegood," he whispered. "Luna Lovegood," he quickly repeated, correcting himself. He thought more about what he knew of the girl. She was a year younger than him and obviously was rated quite high as a Rescuer to have been assigned to him. Apparently after Vinny died he was viewed as Draco's main conspirator and subsequently had been given to the next highest female volunteer. It was well known that the Weasleys were sequestering themselves with Potter, who was only appearing in public to testify or attend services.

Services. Funeral services. Greg felt his heart clench as he thought of Vinny's service the next day. Though Vinny had been counted as a Death Eater, the Ministry was allowing all families to memorialize their loved ones, not discriminating between Death Eater and Order member. Any loss would be remembered, for the Ministry was trying to be careful to not fuel any more resentment that might lead to another war or rebellion. With Vinny's blood relatives deceased, Greg had received special permission to host the service. As the Fiendfyre had devoured all of Vinny, there would only be a headstone placed in the Crabbe family graveyard with some of Vinny's favourite belongings buried. Greg had spent the last week attempting to gain access to the Crabbe family holdings, just to have this service.

He was mentally checking off all the items he wanted to bury for Vinny when an owl flew in the window. The bird dropped a scroll in front of Greg before turning and flying right back out. Surprised that the owl hadn't waited for a treat, he slowly opened the scroll and began to read.

Dear Gregory,

I hope this letter finds you at a good time. I've told my owl to not nag you, but I don't think I needed to bother. He is rather afraid of pimplypooks that nest in the cracks of window sills and avoids strange houses.

Since we've been paired together, we will have plenty of time to get to know one another. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Luna

"Pimplypooks?" Greg whispered. "What the hell are pimplypooks?" He knew he had to respond to her letter within the next day and thought it best to write back immediately. Who knew how he would feel after Vinny's service the next day? No, getting it out of the way now would buy him at least another two days.

Looney Luna,

Your owl dropped your letter off and immediately left. You'll be glad to know he listened to you.

Sincerely,

Gregory Goyle

It was short, but the one thing the Ministry hadn't dictated was the length of communications at least. With that taken care of, he could finish the final arrangements for the service.

There was a deep chill in the air, as though even Mother Nature had difficulty dealing with the events of the last week. Victory Day may have been just ten days ago, but time had quit on Gregory Goyle the moment his friend gave in to the fire.

Greg saw that there were quite a few people around him, but he couldn't lift his grief long enough to focus on who each individual was. As he stood staring at the freshly covered grave, he heard people murmur their condolences and pat him gently on the back. He thought he saw the blond hair of the Malfoys, but he wasn't able to look Draco in the eye.

Draco. If it wasn't for Draco, Vinny would still be here. If Draco wasn't such a fool, Vinny wouldn't have had to protect him. If Draco wasn't so arrogant, Vinny wouldn't have had to give up his valuable study time to chase after him, and Vinny would have known better than to conjure the Fiendfyre. Greg couldn't yet handle looking at a healthy Draco with his family intact and instead focused on the single candle he held in his hand.

The sky was just turning pink with the setting sun when Greg finally realized he was the only one left. He took a few deep breaths, not willing to break down, alone as he may be. Enough time passed for the sun to fully set when he heard soft footsteps slowly approaching him. Not caring whether it was friend or foe, Greg stood in place. He barely flinched when the person grabbed his hand and held it tightly, leaning faintly against him. Turning his head slightly, he was surprised to see Luna. She glanced up and gave him a weak smile before turning back to face Vinny's grave. He nodded his head and looked forward once more.

The candle in his hand flickered as the night wind whipped by. It wouldn't be long before the candle gutted, but he would stay until the end. He would stay and watch until the fire took his friend from his sight one last time.

One Year Later June 1999

Greg took a few moments to let his eyes adjust to the dim lighting inside the Three Broomsticks before he scanned the room for Luna. His face lit up with a grin when he spotted her half under a table in the corner.

"What in the world are you looking at, Luna?" he asked as he approached the table.

"I thought I saw a Blibbering Humdinger dash under the table."

"Oh, really?" Greg said, trying to hold back a laugh.

Luna sighed as she crawled out from under the table. "No matter now, it's gone. I'll have to be sure to record it though. Humdingers usually keep much farther south than here." She smiled and sat down. "How do you feel, Gregory?"

"Fairly well. This past week has been unusual to say the least." The Wizengamot had declared that Greg had paid his dues and no longer required him to participate in the program for the Mised Ones. It was the first time in a year that he had not seen Luna in more than two days, and he found he missed her greatly. "Did you hear from Granger? How is she handling the news?"

Draco Malfoy had not been fortunate enough to get a reduced sentence. He still had one year left in the program, though he had hoped that with the backing of the entire Golden Trio he would have been granted clemency. The Wizengamot disagreed with the young heroes and felt Draco should be forced to spend more time in the company of Hermione Granger.

"She's not very happy, as you can imagine. Ronald has asked her to marry him, and they are both displeased at having to wait at least one more year before doing so."

"I'm sure Weasley doesn't want another man along for the honeymoon."

Luna flashed a large smile at Greg. "That's just what Ronald said! Well, not quite those same words."

"I can imagine what words Weasley really used. I heard Potter is engaged as well."

"Yes, he proposed to Ginny at her graduation party. You know, Gregory, you don't have to skip these events just because Draco is there. The others have enjoyed the time we've spent with them this last year. Mrs. Weasley was disappointed you couldn't make it. She made those lemon bars you enjoy so much."

Greg stiffened as she chided him. "Luna, I don't want to talk about it. You know how I feel." He looked at his hands folded on the table while he tried to choke out the words. "I can't... it's just... the very thought of seeing Draco walking around happy, healthy and whole with his family together while the rest of us have to flounder alone... while Vinny is..."

Luna reached across the table and slipped her hands into his. "Gregory, I'm not asking you to be his friend again. I imagine it would be next to impossible to forgive him. You can't spend the rest of your life hiding from him. My friends nearly killed my dad and caused his imprisonment in Azkaban, yet I understand that they had to do it. It was war, Gregory. Just because Draco walked away with his family doesn't mean he didn't suffer either. Don't bring yourself more grief over him. You shouldn't give him the power to make you feel this way or any way."

He nodded his head while he squeezed her hands. "It's much easier said than done, Luna. When I see the other Slytherins, the ones who walked away with next to nothing, it's hard to not think about Draco. He was the worst of the bunch, yet he lost nothing. Now he is surrounded with the darlings of the wizarding world the Golden Trio and still he wants for more."

"You need time to process everything. It's been just over a year, Gregory, and no one expects you to be perfectly healed. Now, are you ready to order lunch? Madam Rosmerta said she thinks she figured out the family recipe for Freshwater Plimpey soup, and I'd love to see how close she got."

"Sure. I was thinking of getting "

"Luna? Is that you?" came a soft voice. "Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to interrupt your date."

Greg glanced over and saw a pretty young woman standing to the side of the table. She was taller than Luna with dark brown hair that was pulled back into a pony. Luna smiled and stood to hug the woman.

"It's not a date, Sophia. I'm just catching up with my friend. You're more than welcome to join us," she said, glancing over at Greg. "Sophia, this is Gregory Goyle. Gregory, this is Sophia Fawcett. She was in your year at Hogwarts. Perhaps you already know each other?"

Greg smiled shyly at her, nodding his head. "Uh, h-hi." He walked around to pull out a chair for her.

"Thank you, Gregory," Sophia said, flushing slightly.

"P-please, call me Greg," he requested, keeping his head down.

"Oh, um, sure, Greg," she said as she flushed even more. "I didn't mean to invite myself into your private lunch."

"Oh, no, it's perfect timing, Sophia. Gregory was just about to tell me about his job."

Greg could feel his face redden as Luna's friend turned to look at him. "I, uh, began app-apprenticing with Josef Natzeret a few months ago. I am s-still working on the general prin-principles of magical woodworking and construction, but Master Josef says I am learning faster than he expected, so he hopes to move into more advanced work soon." Greg squeezed his eyes shut each time he stumbled, embarrassed that he couldn't just speak clearly for once.

"You managed to get an apprenticeship with Josef Natzeret? Congratulations! I've heard he is one of the most selective magical woodworkers. My grandmother has a hope chest that Master Natzeret created for her. It's one of her most treasured possessions," Sophia said.

Taking a deep breath, Greg focused on the words he was saying rather than the person he was speaking with. "He is truly amazing. I think the reason he is so successful is the attention he pays to detail. He always likes to add personal touches to each piece. Just last week we were working on a book case for Potter's new house. I thought

the case looked amazing, but Master Josef kept looking at it, saying something was missing. He sent me out to run errands, and when I came back he had carved daylilies across portions of the case. It was the perfect touch to an already beautiful piece, but it made it come together in a way I never thought of." Pleased he hadn't stuttered, Greg smiled at Sophia. When she returned with a shy smile of her own, he felt his heart leap.

"I do hope he added dogwood to the carvings. I'd hate for the Dossing Deerwigs to eat all the daylilies," Luna murmured as she leaned back in her chair, staring at the ceiling.

"The what?" Sophia asked.

"Dossing Deerwigs. Miniature creatures with antlers like a deer that are attracted to the same plants as deer. Normally they are very lazy, but if they get near any sort of food, they go into a dither. Dogwood would keep those nasty Deerwigs away from the lilies."

"Yes, well, I will be sure to mention that to Master Josef. I know how highly he values your opinion," Greg said. "Which reminds me, Luna: Newt Scamander came in to the shop the other day and made an intriguing comment. I thought you would be interested in hearing that he is looking for an assistant. It seems his grandson has decided to work independently and will not be joining Newt any longer. Perhaps you should speak with him."

"Newt Scamander? Really, Luna, what a perfect opportunity for you," Sophie enthused. "Oh, do say you will talk to him. I'm sure you will impress him and get the position."

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to try. Oh! I can show him the pictures Father just took of the Crumple-Horned Snorkack tracks we spotted on our summer expedition." Luna grinned at both her friends. "Thank you so much, Greg." She stood from her chair and walked over to give him a hug. "I'm just going to run to the restroom. I'll return shortly."

Greg and Sophia watched Luna weave between most of the tables, taking a long, circuitous route to the ladies' room. There was an awkward silence at the table as the two tried to sneak glances at each other, just to be caught, turning away with a blush.

"That was really nice what you did for her, Greg," Sophia quietly said.

"She's my family now. We help each other as much as possible. It was because of her I got my apprenticeship. Master Josef carved a clock for the Weasleys, who had it enchanted by a chronographer. The clock was knocked from the wall and chipped. I happened to be there with Luna and tried to repair it. Mrs. Weasley had Master Josef come check my repair, and he mentioned he would like to retire one day and wants to find someone to take over the business. Mrs. Weasley told him about me, and he invited me to spend a week with him, just to see if we were compatible. He offered me the apprenticeship after three days, and I gladly accepted. If it wasn't for Luna, I wouldn't have been at the Burrow to meet Master Josef."

"And now you can pay her back by offering her dream to her," Sophia said as she reached for Greg's hand. She gave it a squeeze as she smiled at him. "I think that is an incredibly sweet gesture."

Greg squeezed her hand back and smiled. He had a feeling Luna had given him more than just a job now.

Five Years later October 2004

Her feet made little sound as she walked down the corridor and approached the waiting room. She could hear muffled speech and someone's heavy pacing. She turned the corner and smiled. A man was pacing with his left arm across his body, holding his right elbow as his right hand covered his mouth then moved up to tug his hair. The other occupants of the room leaned away each time he stepped toward them, obviously afraid that the large man was going to snap.

"Gregory?"

At her quiet question the man jumped and shot a look of desperation at her.

"Oh, Merlin, Luna. You scared me!" Greg rushed over and hugged her tightly. "I'm so glad you came."

"Gregory, of course I would come. But why are you out here? You should be in there with Sophia."

"She kicked me out. She had her mother brought in and kicked me out, saying I was stressing her out. Oh, no, I stressed her out. What if I hurt the baby? I don't want to hurt the baby. Stress hurts the baby and I stressed out Soph and that means I hurt the baby!" he cried.

Luna tilted her head and looked at him. "Did the nargles get you early this year? You know, I brought cayenne seeds to throw over your right shoulder. It keeps the Aquaferals from gathering to drink the blood and afterbirth."

Greg, who had been standing with his mouth open, ready to start ranting, dropped into the nearest chair. "Blood? Luna, I am absolutely terrified. I thought I was ready for this, but I'm not. It's too soon. I'm not ready to be a father."

"It's a bit too late for that, Gregory," Luna said with a giggle. "The baby is on its way out."

He groaned and dropped his head into his hands. Taking pity on him, Luna sat down and grabbed his hand. "What are you so worried about? You will make a great dad, Gregory."

"Don't you remember Hogwarts, Luna?" Greg said, jumping up. "I was evil. I spent my free time doing nothing but torturing kids. Literally I cast Unforgivables on the students! There is a reason they are called Unforgivables." The other people in the waiting room gasped and quickly left the room as Greg named the curses.

"That wasn't your fault, Gregory. You were trying to survive a war. Even before Voldemort took over Hogwarts, you had to fight that war in your home. Those curses are called Unforgivable because it is unforgivable that you were forced to do that."

Luna stood up and wrapped her arms around him. "You aren't going to hurt your baby. Your child is safe with you. You will love and protect your child and you will teach your child to love and protect others. You won't be like your father, teaching how to be mean. You won't be like Vincent either. Vincent had great love for you, but for no one else. Your child will love all."

Greg held her tightly, afraid of the words coming from her. "I don't know how to do it, Luna. I only know how to bully kids. My greatest fear is to be standing on that Hogwarts platform, watching my child knock others to the ground and being proud of it. I can't do that. I can't be selfish enough to bring an innocent child into my life and corrupt it."

"You silly man," Luna said as she pulled back. "You know more than you think. Your father may have set an example for you, but he showed you how not to behave. Everyone has a fear. I am sure even Sophia has had doubts about the kind of mother she will be. You aren't the only one with fears."

Greg scoffed at her last sentence. "That isn't true. I've never known you to be afraid of anything."

Luna appeared to shrink a bit as Greg finished talking. "I have a great many fears. I just don't let them control me."

"What have you got to be afraid of?" Greg asked.

"The prodigal son returned, Greg," Luna said as she hung her head. "Six months ago I convinced Newt to explore Sweden for the Crumple-Horned Snorkack in its native

habitat." Luna's eyes lit up as she described her work. "You should have seen it, Greg. It was amazing. There were fresh tracks everywhere, but we couldn't tell which direction they were heading. Half the tracks went one way, and the other half a different direction. We set off in one direction but weren't having any luck. We started setting food traps to get them to graze so we could observe and " Luna blinked quickly, losing the blank expression she gets when dreaming. "Sorry, I didn't mean to run on about nonsense.

In a quiet town in the middle of nowhere, we ran into Rolf. He was surprised to find us there and decided to stay on for a few weeks. He and Newt took one route while I took the other. When they got back, Newt kept shooting me weird looks. Newt and I left to go to Botswana to research the African Painted Crup, but a few days later Rolf showed up. We've taken three other expeditions since then and each time Rolf has shown up. When I went to tell Newt I was coming to see you, he assured me it wasn't a problem now that Rolf was back." Luna began to sniffle. "So you see, I'm being replaced. It doesn't matter that I've spent the last five years assisting Newt while Rolf went to scratch whatever itch the ungrateful boy had. No, Rolf is a Scamander, and therefore he will automatically get first dibs on all expeditions, even the ones I suggested and researched. I'm losing my dream job and soon I'll be relegated to... to... to the desk!" Luna noisily burst into tears as she thought of her horrible fate. "No more nights under the Flitterbloom vines, watching the Thestrals graze. No more floating across the ocean searching for shrakes. No more magical creatures!"

Greg was horrified at the unusual outburst. He tried to think of any other time he had seen or heard of Luna crying but was stumped. He put an arm around her, patting her back gently and leading her to sit in a chair. "Erm, there, there, Luna, everything will be okay. You'll see. It will work out." He spent a few moments comforting her while she calmed down and dried her eyes.

"Oh, Greg, you're bollix at cheering a girl up," Luna teased with a sniffle.

He frowned at her as he thought about her story. "Luna, was Newt with you the entire time?"

"What do you mean?"

"These expeditions you've been taking. Has Newt always been with you?"

"Oh, no, he can't handle some of the more aggressive trips."

"But Rolf has still shown up?"

Luna blinked a few times, trying to figure out where Greg was heading with his questioning. "Yes, he has. Why?"

"Well, don't you think it's unusual that he came even when Newt wasn't there? I mean, if he was truly trying to get back in the old man's good graces, he would have stayed to ingratiate him, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose... but that doesn't make sense." Luna's eyes began to lose some focus as she thought. "Maybe Newt wanted him to keep an eye on me?"

"I think it's more likely that Rolf wanted to keep an eye on you," Greg said, nudging Luna with his elbow. "You said it yourself: Rolf was surprised to see you in Sweden and then pulled his grandfather aside for hours, after which Newt wanted to speak with you privately. Suddenly Rolf is showing up all over the world, wherever you are. Seems to me like he is interested," Greg suggested.

"Interested? In me? No, that's not likely. Rolf is a true academic, living for the research. He would want someone more like Hermione, who is so smart and intellectual."

"Why? Doesn't he like taking off at a moment's notice to go to the Amazon? I seem to recall you doing something similar one year. In fact, you do it often. You are an academic, living the research and surpassing it with your genuine interest in the lives of the creatures, not just the scientific value of the creatures. Why wouldn't he want you?"

Luna appeared deep in thought for a moment before shaking her head. "No, I don't see it. I think he is trying to get back into the company."

"Luna, you may not want to believe, but just keep your eyes open. I bet you would be surprised."

She grinned up at him then bumped shoulders. "You know, I think I managed to successfully distract you from your fears. Perhaps you should check on Sophia now that you are calm."

Greg blanched at her words and began taking short, shallow breaths. "Oh, Merlin, I don't think I'm ready."

He had barely finished his words before his mother-in-law came down the hall.

"Greg! Come quick. The baby is just about here," she called as she motioned for him to follow.

He stood up and looked at Luna who flashed him a big grin and two thumbs up. He quickly ran down to Sophia's room, missing Luna's voice call out behind him. "You forgot the cayenne!"

Two Years Later January 2007

Mr. & Mrs. Draco Malfoy

Proudly Announce the Birth of Their Son,

Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy,

on 10 November 2006.

The proud parents wish to invite

you and your guest to celebrate the birth on

10 February 2007

at the Grand Ballroom of Malfoy Manor.

From a personal note enclosed within the formal invitation:

Greg,

It has been a long time. I cannot begin to imagine how you felt after that year. Any apology I give within this letter for the awful way I treated you and my actions at Hogwarts could easily be brushed aside, however heartfelt and sincere it is. My only hope is that you can find it in your heart to join my family on this happy occasion, share it with us and hear my apology in person. I owe you that much and more for all that you and Vincent did for me.

Please say you'll come, my friend.

Sincerely,

Draco

Gregory,

Sophia has written to me and told me about Draco. She says you won't listen to her and she is afraid for you. I told her that you were probably just suffering from a nargle infestation again. I do hope it isn't nargles, but with Yule just passed you must really be careful.

Why haven't you responded to Draco's invitation? Sophia tells me that you have taken to hiding in your study and staring at it for hours. Please remember to blink. Wibbles, a close cousin of nargles, like to float through a room until they can crawl into a person's eyes. When so many of them have infested, a person can no longer blink. I do hope that isn't happening with you.

Gregory, your beautiful daughter Melania will be at Hogwarts with the Malfoy heir. Do you want her to enter school already disliking a classmate? It seems silly to let a grudge between parents set a precedent for generations.

I know it is hard to face him after all these years, but you have to let go of the anger and blame. Draco did what he had to do to save his family, and Vincent did what he had to do to try to save his friend. It isn't Draco's fault that Vincent lost control of the Fiendfyre. It isn't Draco's fault that Vincent died to save him. Stop pushing your friend away.

Accept that invitation, Gregory.

Love,

Luna

Luna,

I wish you had been here. This was one of the most difficult things I have ever done, but I did it.

Draco had the Grand Ballroom prepared with a room to the side where the baby was resting. I made sure to come late enough to miss the greeting line. I wanted the first meeting to be in private.

I spoke with Astoria first. She was sitting in a rocker chair next to a floating cradle. The newest Malfoy was happily swaying to his mother's spell. She spoke to me like the oldest, dearest friend she had. It felt almost like I was speaking with you. Of course, she is a bit sharper around the edges. Slytherin in war-time does that to a girl.

It wasn't long before Draco came up. We walked to a private study just off the baby's resting room. I had no idea what to say to him and what to do, so I just stood there. Finally Draco started talking. He started listing every time Vinny had stuck up for him, and every time I had helped him. Then he apologized and said he couldn't think of a single time when he had helped me. You know what? I couldn't either.

Suddenly it didn't seem so wrong that Draco was alive. He has to live with the knowledge that people died just for a spoilt brat like him to survive. How does that wear on his conscience?

I surprised myself by saying that out loud. He said that he has that thought every day, and every day he gets up and makes the decision to live that day as if he was being judged at the end of the day for his actions. If he couldn't end each day satisfied that he had made a positive contribution, he didn't honour the memory of those who died.

He told me that his son has no godfather. He wouldn't give the child a godfather who wouldn't be there to help him the way Professor Snape was there to help Draco.

He wants me to be Scorpius's godfather.

Draco wasn't expecting an immediate answer, but just asked that I consider it and let him know if it would be possible at some point to begin a true friendship.

And you know, I never stuttered with him, Luna. I feel more comfortable with this man than I did with that harmless boy.

Thank you for encouraging me to go.

All My Love,

Greg

Fifteen Years Later December 2022

"Sydney! I told you to quit chasing your brother. Now look what you have done," a distressed voice called out just after an almighty crash echoed through the house. "Not everything can be fixed with a *Reparo*, you know. Now calm down!"

"But, Mum, he keeps pushing me!" the girl called out with a whine.

"Sheldon, get over here," Greg called. "How many times have I told you it is not proper to taunt girls, no matter if they are your sisters." He grabbed the boy by the neck and pulled him out the back door. "If you are so interested in pushing, load up the cart with firewood and bring it to the hearth. Everyone will be here soon and the fire needs to be strong."

Sophia was busy levitating various dishes out of the room and into the next to be placed on the dining table. Greg stood behind her and slipped his hands around her waist, dipping his head to kiss her neck.

"Happy Christmas, Mrs. Goyle," Greg said with a suggestive voice.

"Happy Christmas, Mr. Goyle," she replied in kind before quickly kissing him on the lips, then smacking his shoulder. "Now get out of my kitchen, you big oaf."

A young boy's voice suddenly called out, "Eeeew! Mommy, Uncle Greg and Auntie Sophia were kissing. Make them stop!"

Greg and Sophia turned to see the petite blond boy standing next to his twin, both with identical looks of disgust on their faces.

"Ew? Did you just 'ew' me? I'll show you 'ew.' Come here and give your auntie a kiss!" Sophia flung her arms out and began chasing after the five year olds.

The boys' parents walked in after dodging the chase and tossing a quick greeting to Sophia. Rolf easily stepped up to give Greg a one-armed hug before setting down the

bowl he was levitating. Sophia returned as Greg greeted Luna, and soon the room was filled with the smaller children running around. Directing everyone into the dining room, Greg realized there were still two empty seats and walked to the stairs.

Casting *Sonorus* on himself, Greg called up the stairwell. "Melania! Colette! It's time to eat. Get down here!"

Helping get the younger children settled took a few minutes, by which time the two older girls had joined. The conversation quieted as Greg led the families in grace. As soon as he was done, the noise began again. He looked around the table at each of the diners.

He was sitting at the head of the table, looking to his right at his youngest daughter, Sydney. Her twin brother, Sheldon, sat next to her with Luna on Sheldon's other side. Next to Luna was one of her five-year-old twin sons, Lorcan. The other twin, Lysander, was seated next to Colette, Greg's sixteen-year-old daughter, on Greg's left. Rolf and Melania, Greg's eighteen-year-old first-born daughter, were seated at the far left.

As Greg watched his family, the family by blood and the family by choice, he realized how blessed he was. Melania was the first Slytherin Head Girl at Hogwarts since before Greg had attended, and Colette was the Chaser for Hufflepuff. Sydney and Sheldon would be starting Hogwarts the following school year, and Greg feared he had more Slytherins on his hands.

Lysander and Lorcan were Luna's pride and joy, having come after most of her friends had already sent their own kids off to Hogwarts. She had taken a few years off of her exploring to be with her sons. This past summer was the first time the boys got to go on an expedition with their parents and great-grandfather. It was Newt's last expedition before formally retiring and turning over all his research to Luna. He died just a few weeks after returning.

Glancing up at his wife, he saw her chatting quietly with Melania. He spent a few moments reflecting on his life since he had met his beautiful wife. He had been so depressed with Vinny's death until one day when Luna had grabbed his hand, squeezed it gently, and told him that one day he will get to spend forever with Vinny, but for now he should enjoy his life.

He reflected on all that Luna had taught him and given him. Remembering how they'd met, he moved his eyes to Luna and was surprised to see her looking at him. She gave him a serene smile and nodded as if she knew what he was thinking. He smiled back at her before turning to Rolf and asking him to pass the dish nearest him.

One day, he thought, one day I will know exactly how to show her how much I appreciate her

Fifty-Nine Years Later February 2081

There was a deep chill in the air, as though even Mother Nature had difficulty dealing with the events of the last week. The happiness and joy of Valentine's Day may have been just 10 days ago, but time had quit on Gregory Goyle the moment his friend gave in to the fire.

Greg saw that there were quite a few people around him, but he couldn't lift his grief long enough to focus on who each individual was. As he stood staring at the freshly covered grave, he heard people murmur their condolences and pat him gently on the back. He thought he saw the blond hair of the Malfoys, but he wasn't able to look Draco in the eye.

The sky was just turning pink with the setting sun when Greg finally realized he was the only one left. He took a few deep breaths, not willing to break down, alone as he may be. Enough time passed for the sun to fully set when he heard soft footsteps slowly approaching him. Not caring whether it was friend or foe, Greg stood in place. He barely flinched when the person grabbed his hand and held it tightly, leaning faintly against him. Turning his head slightly, he was surprised to see the blonde girl. She glanced up and gave him a weak smile before turning back to face Luna's grave. He turned his head and looked forward once more.

Several minutes later, her voice rang clear in the still air.

"Papa Greg? Is it okay if I am here with you?"

"Of course it is, Celeste."

"You... you don't mind me here?" There was a quiver in her voice that broke Greg's heart.

"I love having you here with me, Celeste. Why would I mind?"

Celeste choked back the tears as she tried to speak. "Mother keeps crying when I walk in the room. Grandfather Scorpius says it is because Mother is so upset at losing her last grandparent, but Grandmother Sydney always said that I look just like the pictures of Nana Looney when she was at Hogwarts."

Greg turned to look at his great-granddaughter. As he studied her face, he could recognize parts of his family. The white blonde hair came from the side of the family that provided her with a last name. Malfoy blonde was still recognizable in the corridors of Hogwarts. The way Celeste held her shoulders back, square and proud, was a Goyle trait. No doubt Celeste's father got that from his parents, Scorpius and Sydney.

But the eyes that was where Celeste most resembled Luna. Lysander's only daughter had married the only son of Scorpius and Sydney and had managed to produce this beautiful child, this mirror of Luna. The eyes were wide and trusting, given to staring at nothing yet appearing to see everything.

"You are just as beautiful as Nana Looney was at your age, Celeste."

"Papa Greg?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"Did Nana Looney at least find the Heel-Spurred Snorket she was looking for before the fire slug...?"

Choking at the hesitancy at the end of her sentence, Greg put an arm around her shoulder and tucked her head under his chin. "Yes, sweetheart, she did. There was a roll of film in a spell-protected case with pictures of it."

"Oh, good, Papa Greg. I'm glad she found it."

"Me too, sweetheart."

Celeste reached out and put her small hand around his, helping hold the candle. The flame flickered as the night wind whipped by. It wouldn't be long before the candle gutted, but he would stay until the end. He would stay and watch until the fire took his friend from his sight one last time.