

Tempting Fate

by silverdoe

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This was written for blue_paris and the LM/HG 2009 exchange. Her original prompt is posted at the end.

I claim no rights to Harry Potter or any associated characters. I also claim no rights to Ian Miller, Ladykiller XX, Instyle or the 2008 Olympics.

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Her mother had been right. Getting out in the fresh air was just what she needed after the disaster her relationship with Ron had turned into. Her companion for the day was incredible. Powerful. Muscular in all the right places with an easy temperament. He felt good between her legs. It had been so long since she had last done this she was afraid she wouldn't remember how. But like her Muggle friends said, 'It's just like riding a bike.' She had tried once to explain the quote to Ron, but as usual he was too thickheaded to understand. What she had ever seen in him, she would never know.

Her turn for warm-ups approached. She had only been back in the saddle a few weeks, and getting out there in front of a few hundred people was a little nerve-racking. She started with a slow trot around the field, allowing her horse to become accustomed to hurdles, before she began her approach to the low oxer. They flew over the jump, and a feeling of true freedom washed over her. Ron and Harry never could understand how she loved this and yet hated being on a broomstick. Picking up a canter, she headed for the combination. A slip of the reins caused the horse to rub the second fence. Looking back over her shoulder, she saw the rail had remained in the cups.

Glancing at the show ring, she saw the rider before her was still at the gate with another on course. She had another go at the practice fences. This time she managed all three perfectly. She brought the horse down to a walk to cool him for a few minutes before they were called.

Today was a big test for her and her mount. It was her first time back in the ring since before she had gone away to Hogwarts. Competing with people who had been training for years made her uneasy. She had tried to find the time during the school holidays to ride, but with everything that had been going on in the Wizarding world then, it hadn't always been possible. She had managed to find some time during the holidays to take a few lessons just to keep in shape. The last time she had competed, she'd still been in the children's division. To compete at this level was downright daunting.

Today's event would also be the deciding factor on whether or not she purchased this horse for herself. He was a big, bay Holsteiner gelding. Half-brother to In Style, the horse Ian Miller had ridden to team silver in the 2008 Olympics, and great grandson of the legendary Ladykiller xx. She had only been riding him a few months, and she was already in love. His fluid movements and grace over fences made the high price she would have to pay worth it.

'Tempting Fate' was this wonderful steed's name, though she called him 'Lucky'. This would be her chance to do something different with her life than what was expected of the know-it-all from the Golden Trio. It was almost as if the Wizarding world had decided she, Harry and Ron would remain friends forever. Everyone expected her and Ron to settle down just as Harry and Ginny did. She could swear the Daily Prophet had had her wedding announcement to Ron ready to print and place right next to Harry

and Ginny's. They were still all friends, even if she and Ron would never be as close as they once had been. He just couldn't seem to get past the fact she wasn't ready to settle down and provide him with the two perfect children he had always envisioned.

Her mother came up to her as she exited the practice ring and handed her a bottle of water.

"You're up next, sweetie," she said as she gently stroked Lucky's nose. "Nervous?"

"No, not really. I think I am just... overwhelmed."

"You're nervous. Nothing to be ashamed of, love. Just remember, you are here to see if the two of you are compatible enough to make a go of it. Anything else is a bonus."

A bell rang, and it was Hermione's cue to enter the ring. She collected herself and moved into the ring. The course today was fourteen jumps with two triple combinations and a double. Nineteen jumps in all. She made a few circles at a slow canter as she waited for the last rider to exit the ring. The bell rang again, and she headed for the first jump. After clearing the first hurdle, she relaxed and thought only of the jumps ahead. The worries about her job at the Ministry and the end of the relationship with Ron were gone. The only thing on her mind was the freedom this offered her. It was one of the things she loved most about riding: the ability to let everything go and just be.

With the last obstacle finished, Hermione felt the world come back to her. She looked around the field, not surprised to see she had done the round clear. Lucky was breathing heavily beneath her. She leaned over his neck and hugged him, breathing in a scent that was pure horse. After a few words of praise, she gathered the reins and made her way back to the gate. She went back to the stable area where she cooled Lucky down and left him in his stall while she went to watch the rest of the riders and await the results.

Finding her mother in the stands, she sat down next to her. They chatted happily about her round. Hermione knew no matter the results, Lucky would be hers by the end of the day.

"Mum, the man who owns Lucky, will he be reasonable about the price?"

"You like him, do you?" At her nod, her mother continued. "I think he will be reasonable. He is clearing out his barn, switching from Holsteiners to the Selle Francais. He seems to think they are better suited for his needs. That's him on course now."

Hermione's gaze followed her mother's to the man in the ring. 'What a magnificent specimen,' she thought as she watched the horse and rider navigate the course. She always enjoyed watching men ride. It probably had something to do with the tight fit of the breeches they wore. This man was definitely worth watching. His breeches hugged his arse like a second skin.

The beast was impressive as well. She knew little about the breed in general. It was not a traditional breed in that the breed type and bloodlines were all that was important. The horses were graded based on their competition success and the success of their other relatives.

"Come along. I will introduce you to Mr. Benedict," her mother said, not noticing the way Hermione's face began to flush.

They met up with the man as he exited the ring. He dismounted and handed off the horse to a groom. He took off his helmet and passed it off to yet another groom. Underneath, his long, blonde hair was braided and pinned up. He took a minute to let it down. As he ran his hand over his hair to smooth it, Hermione felt a twinge of unease run through her. There was something familiar with the man in front of her. She was about to grab her mother and pull her away when she called out to the man.

"Lucius."

Hermione cringed. Her mother had just confirmed her fear. This was the man who had tormented her in her youth. She was horrified to realize she had just been admiring the way this man looked. No, not admiring, lusting after him would be more appropriate. She had the sudden urge to Apparate away and probably would have, had there not been so many Muggles around. She reached for her wand, realizing too late there was no pocket for it in her breeches. Lucius turned towards them, a look of surprise on his face.

"Monica. Good to see you again," he said as he held out his hand towards her. She placed her hand in his, and he brought it up to kiss the back of it.

"Ever the gentleman."

"Always, my dear. I saw my horse performed splendidly earlier. What do you think? Will he become the first of many in the Wilkins' stables?"

When Hermione had retrieved her parents after the war, she had found they enjoyed the anonymity their new identities had provided them so much that when they came back to England, they had kept the names and lifestyle. They had sold everything the Grangers had owned and had become the Wilkins. An upper middle class couple, living off investments and enjoying life, one day at a time.

"Well, I can tell you my daughter has fallen for him. I would like you to meet her. Hermione dear, come here."

Hermione had been trying to avoid looking at Lucius and had hoped she would get away without being introduced. It seemed that was not going to be the case. With a sigh she turned and held out her hand.

"Mr. Benedict, it's good to see you again."

Lucius didn't say anything, but he did take her hand. Her mother did not notice the slight shift in his eyes when he saw Hermione for the first time.

"Oh, good. You two know each other. Did you meet him at the barn, dear?"

"No, Mum. I went to school with his son."

"It's been a long time since you went to primary school, Hermione. I am sure he probably doesn't recognize you."

Hermione took a deep breath and looked at her mother. "Not primary school, Mum. Boarding school."

"But, that would mean..."

"Yes, Mum. That is indeed what that means."

"I, I had no idea you were, well..."

"A wizard," Lucius finished for her.

"Well, yes."

"It's not something which normally comes up in conversation," Lucius replied.

"No, it's not."

Lucius turned back to Hermione.

"Miss Granger, it's good to see you again. I imagine you are as surprised to see me here as I am to see you. Please call me Lucius. I have been friends with your parents for a few years now."

"Hermione. Hermione Wilkins. I have not been Granger since I returned to the Muggle world a few months ago."

"Hiding from your friends? How unlike a Gryffindor."

Hermione had expected there to be malice in his voice or a sneer on his face. In truth, she only heard a hint of amusement and saw a smile in his eyes.

"No, not hiding. I keep in contact with Ginny and Harry. I just needed a break from the Wizarding world after everything that happened with Ron."

"Yes. I had heard rumors of a nasty break between the two of you. I have also distanced myself from that part of my life."

"No offense, Lucius, but I find it hard to believe. I have seen you at several Ministry functions over the years. I am having a hard time imagining you living like a Muggle, let alone being friends with them."

"Yes, I have attended every one and will continue to do so. It is part of my rehabilitation program. I am required to be there. Just as I am required to be seen every three months in Diagon Alley. As for my involvement in the Muggle world, it is something which could not be avoided."

"I thought the Wizengamot had let you go with time served. There was no mention in the Prophet about any restrictions."

Before Hermione and Lucius could get too lost in a discussion on politics, her mother interrupted. Her voice had finally managed to break through her disbelief.

"Hermione, is he... Lucius, you're one of those Death -- you... you're an evil wizard?" Monica asked. She kept looking from Hermione to Lucius, trying to make sense of what she had just heard.

Lucius didn't answer her; he merely inclined his head a bit.

"I see. Mr. Benedict, if you will excuse us. My daughter and I have places to be this afternoon. We will see to it the horse is returned to your barn this afternoon. I believe we will find someone else to do business with in the future," Monica said coldly.

"Monica, I am not that person any longer. I haven't been in over ten years. I only want to live in my nice, little cottage and try and forget my past mistakes."

"I am sure you think you have changed, but I will not do business with a person who wanted both me and my family dead at one time. Good day."

She grabbed Hermione by the arm and walked away. Hermione looked back and saw Lucius was still staring at them with an unreadable expression on his face. Once they were far enough away, Hermione pulled her arm from her mother and forced her to stop walking.

"Mum! That was incredibly rude."

"That man and his... friends were the reason you spent your last year of schooling living in the woods. The reason you broke numerous laws to protect your father and me. Not to mention change our whole lifestyle. How can you say what I did was rude?"

"He was exonerated. Yes, he was a bastard. Yes, he made the wrong choices, but in the end he decided not to help that monster. After the war, there was so much rebuilding to do, there wasn't time to hate anymore. I forgave him and his son a long time ago. We all did."

"He suffered just as much as the rest of us at the hands of Voldemort. He had to watch his wife and son be tortured by a mad man for an entire year. His wife never recovered. Did you ever ask him how she died? No? Let me tell you how she died. The curses caused her nerves to begin to shut down. She lost the feeling in her limbs first, followed by muscle paralysis. Once the cranial nerves were affected, she lost the ability to chew or swallow. Then her lungs began to shut down. It was a slow process, and there was nothing the Healers could do to stop it."

Hermione did not stay to hear her mother's response; she turned and walked back to where they had left the man standing. He had turned away from them and was quietly talking to one of his groomers.

"Mr. Ma... Benedict. I apologize for my mother's behavior. She still doesn't quite understand how people can be on opposite sides of a war and later learn to get along with one another."

"There is no need to apologize. I can understand her anger. It is one of the reasons I choose to spend my time away from the rest of the Wizarding world. Too many people can't see beyond the man I once was."

"I will admit, for a long time I was one of those people. After a few years, I began to watch the way you interacted with people at the Ministry functions. Most of them avoided you, but you never let it bother you. You showed up to every event, even the one just a few days after your wife's death. It was then I realized the courage you had to possess to put yourself through that time after time."

Hermione saw the way his eyes darkened at the mention of his wife.

"I'm sorry. I did not mean to bring up painful memories."

"Don't apologize. I often forget how the mere mention of Narcissa still causes a stab of pain even after all these years. As for the ball I attended after her death, I really didn't have much choice. The Ministry demanded I attend and so I did."

"Demanded. Why would they do that? I mean even Harry has been able to beg off a few. It's not like they force us to attend or anything."

"Maybe they don't force the heroes from the war, but I am the only Death Eater left not sitting in Azkaban. They can and do expect me to be there."

"Wait. You said something earlier about being required to be at the events, just before my mother made her little scene. Why does the Wizengamot have you under restrictions?"

"I really shouldn't be talking about this --"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I should learn not to pry," Hermione interrupted before he had a chance to finish.

"I was going to say we shouldn't discuss this here. Perhaps you could join me for lunch? My home is just beyond the barns."

"I, uh, I don't think it is such a good idea. I mean no offense. I just... I didn't realize the show grounds were on the Manor property. I can't. I don't think I can go back there, not after..." Hermione struggled with her thoughts. She really did not think she could face going to Malfoy Manor. She had not been there since she'd been tortured.

"Miss Gran... Wilkins, yes, the show grounds are on the back part of the property, but the Manor is no longer my home. My son and his family reside there now. I live in a cottage I had built a few years ago. I can assure you, you will be perfectly safe."

Hermione was still uncertain if she could trust him, but she could not resist mysteries. It was part of her Ron had always hated. Her need to solve every problem or learn all she could. Lucius was a mystery. Not just because of whatever restrictions the Ministry had forced on him but also the way he had changed so drastically. It wasn't like him

to be friends with Muggles or to live in a cottage or for him to talk to her without contempt in his voice. Her brain was so busy trying to work out different theories on why this man had changed, she barely noticed she had nodded and agreed to have lunch with him.

The cottage was charming and not at all what she had expected. She had imagined his definition of a cottage would be vastly different from hers. She was wrong. It was two stories but not very large. A large, airy kitchen and living room occupied most of the first floor. The master suite and a small study were on the second. It was, she decided, very cozy and quaint.

It seemed the only extravagance she could find was in the bathroom. A large claw foot tub was the centerpiece of the room. Upon closer inspection, Hermione was surprised to see it was outfitted with air jets. The shower was an exercise in modern art. Beautifully crafted from large slabs of green and black marble. There were no shower heads, but what looked like metal grates on the ceiling and walls. She had a strong desire to strip down and climb in. Instead, she finished freshening up and went back downstairs to the kitchen where Lucius was preparing lunch.

As she hit the last step, she could have sworn she heard the beep of a microwave, but dismissed the thought. She entered the kitchen and found Lucius had the food prepared and was waiting for her. He pulled a chair out for her, and she nodded her thanks.

"So, what do you think of my house?" he asked as he set the salad and bread on the table.

"It's delightful and the bathroom is heavenly."

Lucius chuckled and then said, "It is. The bathroom was my one indulgence when I had this place built. Some days are better spent relaxing in a nice bath."

"I agree. The shower was very nice too. I didn't see any shower heads. Does it work by using magic?"

"No. The water comes from the metal tiles, something my contractor called Ambient Rain. It's almost like standing naked outside in a pleasant downpour. Maybe you would like to try it some time?"

Hermione found herself blushing at the mental image she had just had. Luckily for her, Lucius did not seem to notice as he was once again gathering things for their meal from the counter. She was quite certain his offer was just meant to be polite and not an invitation for her to join him or, worse, an attempt to flirt with her. He was just about to sit when another beep was heard.

"Just a moment, that would be the scampi," Lucius said.

She was surprised when he went over to the corner where a small microwave was sitting.

"You have a microwave!"

"Yes. I am a horrible cook. Draco makes sure the elves from the Manor prepare meals for me. He seems to think I would eat nothing but sandwiches otherwise. The microwave is the fastest way to heat them."

"But, I ... It's a Muggle appliance."

"Yes, as are all of the appliances here. The cottage is hooked up to electricity."

"Wouldn't it just be easier to let the elves come here and cook or to heat your food with a warming charm?"

Lucius didn't respond; instead he chose to study her.

She began to feel uncomfortable under his constant stare.

"What?"

"I was under the impression you disagreed with house-elf enslavement. I would think you of all people would congratulate me on my use of Muggle technology instead of abusing them."

"I revised my opinion a while ago when I realized most of them enjoy what they do and they like belonging to a family. I am, was more recently, pushing for better treatment from their owners."

"What made your feelings change?" he asked as he began to dish out delicious-smelling scampi.

"I have spent time talking with Kreacher over the years. He is really quite articulate when given the chance. He told me so much about elf history; I think I could write a book. He made me understand it is in the best interests of both the wizards and the elves for this system to remain in place."

"Kreacher, he was Black's elf, wasn't he? I thought the thing was mad. I am surprised he is still alive."

"He was a little difficult at first, but once he recognized Harry as his owner, he cleaned himself up and acted much better around us. He doesn't do much these days but watch over the children. I think he is happy though. I see you are avoiding my questions again."

"Not avoiding as much as delaying my answer. I thought we could enjoy our lunch first."

"Of course."

"So, tell me. Why did you leave your fiancé?"

"That is hardly fair. You won't tell me your story over lunch but you expect to hear mine," she said.

"My story is complicated. I had the impression from the rumors yours is not."

"You're right. It is not. He simply wanted his mother. He expected me to have his children and stay at home. He would not even hear about me working outside of the home. I have nothing against Mrs. Weasley; I just don't want to be her in twenty years. We are nothing alike."

"That is where you are wrong. You are exactly like her or what I remember of her from school."

She stared at him. She couldn't believe what he was saying. She was nothing like Molly Weasley. Molly was a homemaker through and through. Hermione had dreams and aspirations, things she wanted to accomplish outside of having a family.

"Aside from being in Gryffindor, what could we possibly have in common?" she asked him.

"Molly Prewett was a brilliant and fiercely loyal young woman. Full of fire and enthusiasm for life. She wanted to become a teacher and make changes to the education system. She felt young wizards needed a school to prep them for Hogwarts or any of the advanced education schools."

"You sound as if you knew her. I thought you hated the Weasleys?"

"I do hate the Weasleys, but the Prewetts were related to the Blacks, and that meant they were frequent guests of my parents. Molly was four years ahead of me in school, and her brothers two years. They were all in Gryffindor. Back then, the house rivalry was not as severe as it was in your time. The rift between Slytherin and Gryffindor began after I left school. It probably had much to do with the Dark Lord, but the Marauders played their part in it as well. I often studied with Gideon and Fabian and by default Molly.

"Their deaths were hard on me. They were my friends. It was the first time I truly saw the Dark Lord for what he was. He was bent on petty revenge, and it started with any who opposed him. I admit his ideas about a world without Muggles was something I longed for, but I never understood the reasons behind killing purebloods, no matter what side they were on.

"Molly married Arthur within days of graduating. At first, it seemed she would achieve her dreams. She began to raise funds for a primary school. Arthur seemed supportive at first, but the minute he found out she was pregnant, he insisted she quit. He wanted her to stay home and take care of the child and their home. She refused and went to stay with Andromeda for a few days. Arthur chased her and demanded she return home. He knew just how to hurt her, telling her she had no one to turn to but him. She had just lost her brothers, her parents were dead, she didn't have much choice and so she returned. After that she was a different person. She became Molly Weasley. Mother and housewife. She lost everything that made her Molly Prewett. The fund and primary school were shifted to the control of the Ministry where the idea was set aside in favor of fighting the war."

Hermione didn't know what to say. She'd never known half of what Lucius had just told her about the Weasleys. She felt bad for everything Molly could have been if she had not married Arthur, but then there would be no Ron or Ginny or any of the other Weasley children. She was relieved and a little bit ashamed. Relieved she escaped from them and ashamed at the same time. Lucius read her silence correctly and decided to change the subject.

"How was your lunch?"

"It was very good. Your elves are excellent cooks."

"This was made by Severus actually. He stops by, from time to time, to check up on me."

"I didn't know he had returned to England. I thought he swore never to set foot anywhere near this part of the Wizarding world ever again?"

"He did say that. He only comes to visit me and escort me on my quarterly trips to Diagon Alley. He is usually under a Disillusionment Charm and covered with my Invisibility Cloak."

"If he comes back to visit you, why does he not visit the rest of us? I know Harry would love to spend some time getting to know him."

"Severus' reasons for avoiding Wizarding England are his own. I will not lose the one friendship I still have by speculating on his lack of friendly attitude to you and your friends. He knows of my unfortunate restrictions and has offered his help."

"Am I going to finally find out what the Ministry is holding over you?"

"Yes. Come, we will have some drinks in the garden, and I will tell you my story."

He held out his hand to help her from her chair and allowed her to precede him to the door. He stopped only briefly to retrieve a bottle of wine and some glasses. He picked up a folded blanket from a chair.

The garden was merely a small patch of grass under a tree surrounded by daffodils. Hermione had expected elegant flower beds filled with various flowers. There wasn't even a table or bench. She looked back over her shoulder at Lucius, not able to keep the surprise from showing on her face. Lucius laughed.

"I know what you are thinking. You expected a fancy garden complete with a fountain and dancing fairies?"

"Uh, yes."

"Once I realized I spent more of my time living and working with Muggles, I slowly stopped pretending I was still a wizard, I started doing things the Muggle way. I was never very good at Herbology. I was always good with the daffodils though. Narcissa was fond of them."

Hermione opened her mouth to ask what he meant about pretending to be a wizard when she noticed he had a faraway look on his face. She reached towards him and gently squeezed his hand. His wife's death must have really been hard on him. He took a moment to open the blanket and spread it out on the grass before gesturing for Hermione to have a seat. He set the glasses down and pulled the cork from the wine bottle.

"I promised to tell you my dirty little secret. Looks like I let it slip out. Strange really. I don't think I have ever felt comfortable enough to be so abrupt about it. The few who know were either at my trial or have guessed on their own."

"Are you saying you can't do magic anymore?"

"No, I can perform some magic. I still do a few simple Accios and glamour charms almost daily. When the Ministry released me, they took away my wand. They wanted to be sure I would not try to start up where the Dark Lord left off. They felt because of Mr. Potter's testimony, the public may feel sympathetic towards me, but they, the Wizengamot, wanted to make sure there was no need to fear I could or would do something like that."

Hermione just looked at him, her eyes widening at what he had not said. Lucius Malfoy, one of Lord Voldemort's most prominent Death Eaters, was without his wand not much better off than a Squib.

"I cannot own, purchase or touch a wand. If I do, I will violate the terms of my release and be sent directly back to Azkaban. As I said before, I am expected to attend certain Ministry functions. I must stay for at least an hour, every time. I must make myself known to the Minister or one of his lackeys so they can verify I am there. I also must be seen in Diagon Alley every three months, at the minimum. This last part I think is so the witches and wizards who feel I have wronged them in some way can take out their vengeance on me. The Wizengamot disagrees, of course. They claim my being out in public is to show the public I am a contributing citizen."

"Do they, I mean, you have had someone seek you out for revenge?"

"Yes. Every time I go out I have been accosted by someone. I have been spit on, cursed, hexed and stabbed."

"Did you tell someone at the Ministry?"

"I mentioned it after the first time to the Minister. Shackbolt claimed it was probably just some kids fooling around. He was sure it would settle down. If I remember correctly, he said they were just harmless insults and mild curses, something I should be used to. After the first few times, Draco insisted on accompanying me. He didn't like the idea of me walking around unarmed and defenseless. I refused. He was just starting to get out from under my shadow and make a name for himself; I did not want to jeopardize that for him.

"About four years after my wife's death, someone hit me with a particularly nasty curse. It was a definitely a dark curse. Neither Draco nor I could find the counter curse. After a few days of excruciating pain, Draco sent for Severus. He figured out the curse and found the counter. After that he decided to follow me on my visits. No amount of arguing on my part could stop him. Most of the witches and wizards who approach me intent on doing harm have a sudden urge to vomit. I have no idea what kind of hex he is casting, but it seems to keep me safe so I don't complain."

"Why didn't you go to St. Mungo's when you got cursed?"

"The witches and wizards there are not much better than the common public. They would have been all too happy to poison or curse me. No, it was safer to stay home and try to work it out on my own."

"How long do you have to live under these restrictions?"

"Until the Wizengamot decides I am no longer a threat. There was no set sentence. My barristers tried for the first few years to get the Wizengamot to reverse their decision or at least allow for me to regain my wand after a set number of years. They could never get a hearing. Somehow my case is always dismissed before we can have our appearance in front of the Wizengamot. When I was cursed the last time, I told them not to continue, and then I slowly started to immerse myself in the Muggle world and withdrew almost completely from the Wizarding world."

"Maybe I can help you with your case? I constantly lobby the Wizengamot, and I know a few people who may be able to pull some strings."

"I thought you had retired from that profession? You would really want to drag your name down by trying to defend me?"

Hermione shrugged. "I don't like the thought of anybody being treated unfairly, and I don't think defending you would hurt my reputation any more than my ex bad-mouthing me to every known publication he can find."

"I appreciate your offer, but I think I will decline. I think I would like to stay in the Muggle world. No one knows my past, and I am comfortable around them now."

Hermione stared at him. She just couldn't figure him out. Of all the wizards she had ever met, Lucius Malfoy was the last person she would have ever expected to want to live his life as a Muggle. He ignored her silence and went on to explain his reasons.

"When I was younger, I began to invest a small amount of money into horses. After a few years I started to get heavily involved in breeding. It became sort of a hobby. Something to occupy time and fill my vault. In the last five years or so, I became more involved in the business and in the management of training and breeding. I have made quite the name for myself around the circuit for the excellent horses my barn turns out. I have a good and honest reputation with many of the top breeders around the world. A reputation which has nothing to do with my last name or my blood status.

"I have a great network of acquaintances and business partners, and even several people I consider friends. Your parents fit in the last part, or they did. I can tell you that aside from Severus, I haven't had friends like that since I was in school. Like your parents, I am enjoying this new lease on life. I don't think I want to go back to being Lucius Malfoy, former Death Eater."

They sat quietly for a while, sipping their wine. Hermione wanted to argue with him, so he would let her fight for him, but she could understand his reasons. How could she tell him to fight when she and her parents were doing the same thing?

"Let it go, Hermione."

"How did you know what I was thinking?"

"I can see the gears turning in your head. I tell you what, if I ever change my mind, I will let you take on the Ministry on my behalf."

"Deal. I know just where to start looking for case studies and..."

"Hermione, Just enjoy the afternoon. We can worry about it another day."

And so she did.

"I wonder who won the show," Hermione mused, staring out towards the barns.

"I did, of course."

"Oh," she said, trying not to smile. "How can you be so sure?"

"Because I have the prize, sitting next to me," he said as he reached over and caressed her face.

Some years later...

"What's that, love?"

"It's a letter from Hermione with an invitation of some sorts."

"I still can't believe she left the Wizarding world all those years ago to take up horseback riding," Harry said, shaking his head.

"You know I went and watched her a few times when she and Ron first split up. She is really good and I think she truly enjoys it. I don't think I have ever seen her so happy."

"Still, it's not like she was doing it for a living though, just for fun you said. She could have done that and stayed involved with us. She didn't need to cut all ties with us."

"She didn't cut ties. She just wanted to distance herself from the Wizarding world and asked us to respect her decision. I don't see why you and Ron have such a hard time understanding that. Besides, her last letter said she was seeing some horse breeder, who was a Muggle. She probably didn't want to answer awkward questions about owl post," Ginny said as she was looking over the letter.

"Not hearing from someone for more than fifteen years is cutting ties. Well what does she have to say?"

"Give me a minute to read it," she said without looking up.

"Oh, Harry. She's coming back. She says here it is time for her and her family to once again become part of the Wizarding world."

"Family. What family?" He made to grab the letter from Ginny. She quickly turned her back and stepped out of his reach.

"Just a sec. It seems Hermione went and got married without telling anyone. Just a simple service with her family and his present. She's been happily married for twelve years, and now their daughter is expected to start at Hogwarts in the fall. This must be an invitation to the girl's birthday party she mentions here."

She tore the seal on the delicate parchment of the invitation and began to read it aloud.

"Mr. & Mrs. Lucius Malfoy request the honor of your presence...."

It was a good thing Harry had come up behind his wife to read over her shoulder. He was in the perfect position to catch her as she fainted. It took a few moments for her words to register. When they did, he dropped his wife and grabbed for the letter.

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A/N: Without the gentle nudging of Semptra, I probably would have written an entirely different story. Thank you for telling me to use my strengths.

My thanks also to Stefdarlin and luvsev for keeping me sane. A special thank you and hug to Ladyinthecloak for stepping up to beta when sempra was unable.

Original Prompt: Lucius and Hermione take up a sport and run into each other while playing.

Description of Narcissa Malfoy's injuries is loosely based on Guillain-Barré syndrome.