

Expectations

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How a misunderstanding can make two people choose different life paths.

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Chapter 1 of 1

How a misunderstanding can make two people choose different life paths.

Hermione was unusually nervous during her last class at Hogwarts. All her exams were over, of course, but all of the teachers saw them one last time. Mostly to remind them of their options for the future, the proper ways to write letters to request apprenticeships, and information about requesting official copies of their Hogwarts records.

But Hermione was nervous, nonetheless.

Other students who didn't know her well would have thought she was just being her usual self: worried about the future and panicking over whether she had answered some obscure question on a test correctly.

Anyone who knew her well would have noticed she frequently reached her hand into her bag to touch the cover of a well-worn, brown leather book. A blue stone was set in it. When it glowed a dim red and was warm to the touch, she gave a sigh of relief and stopped fussing with it.

When they were finally dismissed, Hermione walked through the hallways of Hogwarts one last time with her friends, Harry and Ron.

"I still have library books to return!" Harry laughed.

"Leave everything until the last minute, as usual?" Hermione shook her head at him.

"You could just leave them out after we leave," Ron said. "The elves will take them down for you."

"Or he could do it himself, Ron!" Hermione snapped as they rounded a corner and found themselves at a junction bustling with students. "I'm quite sure the elves will have enough to do with the feast tonight!"

"I have some things to do around the castle, anyway," Harry stepped in before Ron and Hermione started arguing. "I'll just bring them down later."

"Well, I have some scrolls to turn into Professor Binns," Hermione said as Harry and Ron started to veer off into the direction of the common room. "I'll catch up with you later."

Ron and Harry waved her off and Hermione started off in the direction of Binns' classroom. She went past it when it neared, however, and she looked around before slipping into an empty classroom.

She took the leather book out of her bag and opened it.

When Molly Weasley had given it to her months ago, little did she know what she was getting into.

"It used to be quite the fashionable thing to do when I was a girl," Mrs. Weasley had said as she had handed it over to Hermione. "I'm not sure how many people are on the network anymore, but you're sure to find a few old timers out there. It doesn't require any active magic so you can use it at home without any troubles."

Hermione had taken the worn leather book home with her and had thanked Mrs. Weasley politely.

Hermione loved her parents, and they tried to understand as much as they could about the Wizarding world, but when it came down to conversations about Transfiguration and Arithmancy, they were at a loss. This book gave her the ability to converse with other magically inclined persons during her time off from Hogwarts, and she was thankful.

She had laid the book on the corner of the white desk she had been given on her tenth birthday and had gone about settling in for the last winter holiday she would have.

It was relaxing, being back in the Muggle world, and she had enjoyed catching up on the television shows she had missed while at Hogwarts, but after a few days she had found herself yearning for stimulating conversation about the magical world.

She had sought out the book and opened it to the first page.

It was blank.

Hermione frowned, but after a minute, words blossomed on the page.

Please place the tip of your wand here to activate.

Hermione frowned. This reminded her of the descriptions Ginny had told her about Tom Riddle's diary.

But... Mrs. Weasley had given her this. It was bound to be safe then, wasn't it?

According to Mrs. Weasley, the Wizarding World didn't have traditional pen-pals like Muggles did. If that was the case, poor Errol the owl would have dropped dead from exhaustion years ago. Wizards had Conversation Books.

The Weasleys' Conversation Book hadn't been used in years, not since the twins had been young. Ron had no interest in it, and Ginny didn't want to go near the thing after her first year, so Mrs. Weasley had given it to Hermione.

"You're sure to get more use out of it than we are," Mrs. Weasley had insisted as she had given it to Hermione.

Hermione went to her trunk of school things and fished her wand out. Cautiously, she had reached out her wand and had touched it to the small point of light glowing on the page.

New Witch Recognized. It had written in a swirly black text. ***Proceed?***

Hermione had tapped the box that had a picture of a happy wizard and had laughed at the picture of a fleeing one.

Please select a pseudonym.

Hermione had thought for a moment, tossing looks about her room, looking for inspiration.

Her eyes fell on her old teddy bear.

Bobo? No. Too strange.

They swept over a dusty tiara from a childhood play.

Princess Somethingorother? No. Too pretentious.

Over to her bookshelf. She spotted a volume of Shakespeare and smiled.

Portia

Hermione reached over and picked up a thin felt tip pen from her desk and wrote her chosen name in the book.

Duplicate Person. Please choose another name.

Hermione frowned.

Helena

Duplicate Person. Please choose another name.

Brainy

Duplicate Person. Please choose another name.

Hermione snickered to herself. It looked like there were still quite a few people active, in spite of what Mrs. Weasley thought.

Young Witch

Duplicate Person. Please choose another name.

Hermione growled in frustration.

Annoyed Witch

Name approved.

Hermione slapped her forehead. Oh well, she was stuck with it for now, at least.

The book started writing on its own again.

Compatible Conversational Partners

Charming Witch

Prince Princely

Buggerit

Rich Lover

Hermione chuckled to herself. It looked as if she weren't the only one that had a problem finding a name.

Buggerit would like to converse with you.

She was a bit startled at the abruptness of it. She had only had the book activated for a moment, but she touched the tip of her wand to the box marked yes.

Have a problem finding a name, did you?

Hermione laughed aloud.

Looks like I'm not the only one. Hermione wrote back.

And it had been the start of a friendship.

He was reluctant to talk about any of the details of his life, something Hermione was thankful for. If he could be private, so could she, and she didn't want to give up any information that might be used against Harry.

The Dark Lord was still in hiding, but he was suspected of gathering secret forces.

To her relief, Buggerit was more than happy to leave the conversation light, not discussing anything to do with the Ministry or any rumors about the Dark Lord at all.

Hermione never asked if he went to Hogwarts, and he never asked her. They just wrote when they could without asking about one another's schedules, but Hermione decided that was typical in these dangerous times.

They talked about their career hopes and their options for the future. He wanted to specialize in Charms, although his parents didn't approve.

They think it's too soft. My father wants me to go into Potions. The tidy scrawl informed her.

There are plenty of viable options for a Charms master. She had scratched out her replies to him late into the night. By the morning, he had decided to go with his heart, and he had gotten the attention of hers.

She had taken the book back with her to Hogwarts, much to Ron's amusement. 'Trading potions recipes with someone's granny? That's cheating, you know?'

She didn't know why she didn't tell her friends about her pen pal. Mrs. Weasley had, after all, given the book to her legitimately.

Hermione hadn't meant to fall for him, but it was easy. He was smart, sarcastic, and witty.

He listened to her when she spoke without being patronizing, and he asked her advice when he thought he needed it.

So... hypothetically... if one accidentally set fire to one's mother's rose garden trying to pull off a Growing Charm... how would one regrow the plants before she returned in, say, an hour?

They both talked about their fears of disappointing their parents.

Over the weeks, she had looked forward to talking to him. She kept the book on her at all times and checked it for messages during the day.

She had started getting a small thrill when there was a message waiting for her. Then one day he had confessed the same.

They were both afraid to meet the other, fear of disappointment being the least of their concerns. There was a war going on, and it really wasn't advisable to go seeking out anonymous pen friends in real life, despite wanting to.

They had started talking about life after school and plans for the future. He, wanting to leave the country for a while; she, wanting to work at the Ministry, but wondering if that was a good idea anymore.

A few weeks before the end of term he had let it slip that he was a student somewhere, rather than a home schooled pupil, like she had thought.

Hermione found herself scanning the halls between classes and during breaks, looking for anyone carrying a book like hers.

She casually asked Ron about the book one day and he snorted and told her they came in all sorts of designs and sizes. Then he asked her how it was, talking to moldy old wizards.

She had waved him off and gave up her hallway search.

One day she had decided to risk it and complained about Filch, thinking no one but another Hogwarts student would know the name of the caretaker.

Buggerit had agreed with her.

She had laid her pen down and had closed her eyes. She breathed in deeply as she tried not to shout with excitement.

He was in the castle. He was really here.

Who was he? He was obviously someone she knew. Someone she had had classes with.

Hermione couldn't for the life of her think of anyone she knew who acted like Buggerit.

She tried to desperately think of anyone mentioning their mother having a rose garden and failed.

A week before the end of term she had asked him if he wanted to meet before their last dinner in the castle.

If they liked each other, they could eat together and maybe see each other. If they didn't they'd likely never have to see each other again.

He had agreed, but had warned her she might be disappointed.

Hermione had assured him this was not going to be the case, but secretly watched Neville like a hawk for the next couple days.

When she prepared for her last day of classes, she found herself taking extra care with her hair; applying a Blemish-Be-Gone potion to her almost blemish-free face;

picking out her nicest set of school robes.

He was supposed to write to her today, telling her where they would meet. She would spend the entirety of the day ignoring her classes in favor of checking the book every few moments.

Now she finally had a reply.

She bustled over to an empty desk and laid the open book on it.

I'm on the stone bench on the north side of the courtyard. A statue of a hippogriff is behind me. I have a white book in my lap.

Hermione felt her breath catch in her throat.

He was there? Now?

She thought she'd have a moment to get herself together, but apparently not.

She closed her book and put it away before heading towards the courtyard. Her thoughts were spinning as she walked through the castle halls.

Students bustled around her, saying their good byes and making promises to owl during the summer, but she walked through them without seeing details. All she could think about was each footfall bringing her closer to him.

One, two, three, step down... stone floor, wooden staircase, high archway bringing her one room closer to him.

Her heart was pounding in anticipation.

Someone held open the large wooden door leading outside for her. She mumbled a thanks without seeing who it was.

A cool breeze hit her face as she stepped outside and started walking out into the courtyard, her eyes searching for him.

Her eyes caught the statue of the hippogriff and her eyes fell to the bench under it.

Sitting on the bench, with a white book on his lap, was Draco Malfoy.

He wasn't looking up, he was reading a much smaller, black book.

Hermione slipped onto a stone bench behind a statue of a dragon and tried to look as if she were searching in her bag for something as she spied on Draco.

He never looked up from the black book he was reading.

She pretended to be going over some old potions' notes and hid her face behind them as she studied him.

What was she supposed to do? If she tried to talk to him she'd be humiliating herself. If she didn't, she might be turning her back on something she might not be able to find with another person.

But his father was a known Death Eater. Draco hadn't been proved to be a Death Eater, but Hermione still was wary of him.

Still... this was the person who had written to her frantically one afternoon because he had accidentally turned one of his father's birds a bright pink while trying to bathe it using magic.

Had all his posturing been a façade? Was he really as sensitive and funny as he had been when he had written to her?

She watched as he took a quill and a jar of ink out of his bag. He uncorked the top of the small glass jar and dipped the quill in.

To Hermione's horror, he wrote, not in the white book, which was obviously the Conversation Book, Hermione could see a small blue stone in the corner of the cover now, but in the black book he had been reading for so long.

He had two books.

She felt sick to her stomach.

This was obviously some plot to cultivate her favor, maybe even to use her as a pawn to get to Harry.

He had to have known it was her all along, and she had fallen for it.

Her hands shook as she replaced the things in her bag, and she rose from the bench, ready to run to Gryffindor tower if need be.

She should have known better than to have believed in anything as stupid as a marriage of two minds, unsullied by physical or social prejudices.

She tried to hurry through the clusters of students before anyone noticed the tears winding their way down her cheeks.

She dropped the Conversation Book on a ledge as she rounded a corner.

She never wanted to see it again.

~+~+

Draco sat under a statue of a hippogriff, wind tickling the hairs at the base of his neck.

She had to come.

He couldn't hold it together if she didn't come.

He stared at an old copy of *Hogwarts: A History*. This version had cost him a fortune when he had bought it the year before he had begun going to Hogwarts. It was unabridged and contained more information than the library copy had. It was charmed to appear no larger than a paperback so he could carry it with him everywhere. After what he had paid he would rather lose a finger than lose it.

He wasn't really reading anything, just turning the pages and trying to appear intellectual when his eyes spotted a notation about a painting that had been in the Slytherin common room before it had been destroyed his third year.

He wrestled with his writing implements and made a small notation in the margin: *burned to ash by Goyle during a spell mishap*.

He hoped this girl was pretty, whoever she was.

Draco sighed and shook his head as he put his writing things away. This was stupid.

He should have thought to meet her somewhere else. Somewhere less public. Somewhere he could seek her out instead of her seeking him.

With his father's reputation getting worse with every passing day, it was a wonder anyone even talked to him anymore.

He sat until his bum was numb.

He finally stood and stretched, his thighs tingling in relief. It had to be near the time for the End-of-Year feast.

He tried to reason she had things to do and perhaps was late because she was fussing with herself, like some girls tended to do.

The nagging voice of reason told him she'd have at least written to him, telling him she was running late.

His lip curled in disgust.

She wrote about how the Wizarding World operated under traditional prejudices, and it looked as if she had just proved her own argument.

Draco heard a heavy door scrape open, and Crabbe and Goyle blustered over to him.

"We were looking for you all over," Crabbe said, puffing as if he had been running.

"What are you doing all the way out here?" Goyle asked, running his hand over his sweaty brow.

"Reading," Draco said sharply. "What's wrong?"

"The feast already started and you weren't there," Crabbe said. "We thought something might have happened to you."

"Things have been... funny lately," Goyle stammered. "Our fathers told us to look out for you."

Of course.

"Well, no junior Auror patrol managed to seize me today," Draco said sarcastically. "You can rest now."

Crabbe and Goyle did seem to visibly relax and Draco wanted to beat their heads in out of general frustration.

"What've you been reading?" Crabbe asked, trying to lighten Draco's mood.

"A book," Draco said sharply as he tucked his History of Hogwarts away. "Here." He thrust his Conversation Book into Crabbe's hands. The large boy opened it and quirked an eyebrow at the blank pages. "Happy end of year."

"Do I get a present, too?" Goyle asked excitedly.

"It's back in the common room," Draco lied. "I'll give it to you later."

The boys walked back into the castle, and Draco felt his mood darken even further. His father was right. No one but the Death Eaters would ever accept him. No one but the Death Eaters would accept him at face value, not judging him or breaking their promises.

Draco's lip curled. He knew his father would be seeing the Dark Lord soon. Perhaps it was time to ask for his father to speak for him after all.