

A Suitable Young Man

by Blue Phoenix

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Lento

Chapter 1 of 6

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It was a Saturday morning at the beginning of her holiday from the Harpies, and Ginny walked out of her room and onto the landing only to find Ron on his way downstairs. With a smug grin, she jumped into the bathroom before him, locking the door in his face. Ron let out a few choice words -- they would have earned him a ten-minute scolding if their mother had heard him -- and pounded on the door.

'Make sure to dress properly, Ginny, so that the suitable young men might notice you!' he said, in his best imitation of Aunt Muriel. Obviously, he had realised she would not give up her claim to the bathroom and had decided to taunt her instead.

Had she not been forced to open the door to do so, Ginny would have used her Bat Bogey hex on him. She would one of these days, she promised herself, if he did not stop impersonating Aunt Muriel. The problem was that, after Ginny and Harry had broken up, Muriel had decided to view Ginny, now her last unmarried female relative, as her own special project.

'Well, I always did think the boy looked gormless,' her aunt had said sternly when Ginny had told her she and Harry were no longer together. 'I dare say you can do at least a little better.'

Whenever she stopped by, Muriel would suggest seemingly random bachelors around Ginny's age and rattle off a few choice words about their suitability. She would then forget herself and mention a few faults, as well, before she finally gave Ginny some advice as to the way to dress, walk, and talk.

Aunt Muriel also had a notion that Ginny needed to 'broaden her horizon,' and the last time she had stopped by, she had made it clear that her intention was to bring Ginny on a two-month holiday to Italy. She had decided that Ginny could not turn twenty without having been introduced to some 'proper culture.' Ginny strongly suspected she and Muriel would disagree wholeheartedly on just about everything and dreaded spending two hours alone with the woman, much less the full two months Muriel threatened.

Ginny slipped back out of the bathroom, ignored Ron's sneer, and was about to walk downstairs. But, just then, she heard the front door bursting open and an all too familiar voice drift up the stairs, making her stop right where she was.

'Molly, I see you're hardly up. I do approve of rising early,' Aunt Muriel barked as greeting, even though the clock was showing that it was barely eight in the morning.

'Where is Ginevra? Still sleeping, I dare say. Young people today!'

Ginny, who could hear every word due to Aunt Muriel's very loud voice, wished for nothing more than to creep back upstairs and hide. But now Ron was back on the landing, his evil grin telling her he would say her name loud enough for even Muriel to hear if she retreated back upstairs. Glaring daggers at him, she walked into the kitchen, forcing herself to smile pleasantly.

'Ah! Up at last. Earlier than that long-haired rascal, Ron, at any rate,' Muriel barked. Ginny grinned at the comment as Ron groaned and walked in behind her.

'Ronald! Are you still with the Muggle-born?' Muriel enquired, and Ron forced out a yes. Getting Muriel to mention Hermione by name had proved impossible.

'Well? What is taking you so long, Ron? You are old enough to marry now. You'd better ask her before she finds someone better! You never were that good-looking,' Muriel said sternly, and Ron turned as red as his hair. Muriel had repeated a variation of that comment every time she had seen Ron for the last two years.

As was her habit, Muriel continued without expecting a reply, saving Ron from spluttering excuses that all amounted to him not yet having picked up the courage to retort.

'Anyway, Ginny, we leave tomorrow. A friend was kind enough to lend me his château for two months. I dare say it will be sweltering hot at this time of year -- but it is the place to meet the right people!'

Ginny opened her mouth to protest, closed it again in confusion, and finally got out, 'But...'

'I don't suspect we'll find any eligible bachelors down there, though. Italians!' Muriel talked on over her half-formed protest. 'But I will keep an eye open. If only you would do a bit more of an effort with your appearance, Ginevra! That red hair can't be helped, but even with it, you don't look half bad.' As far as Muriel went, that was actually a compliment.

Ginny stared at her mother pointedly for help, but even though Molly Weasley could handle most people, Aunt Muriel was not one of them.

'Oh, heavens!' Muriel exclaimed. 'Look at the time. I must get going. I will come for you at seven tomorrow morning, Ginny. No time to travel like the morning!' With that, she ambled back to the door and grabbed Ron firmly by the arm. 'I'm a hundred and ten, Ronald! Don't stand there like a coat-hanger, but help me down that garden path,' she complained, leaning heavily on him as she passed out the door.

'But I can't spend two months with Aunt Muriel!' Ginny said shrilly to her mother. 'No one in their right mind can!'

'It can't be that bad!' her mother snapped, letting out the stress of Aunt Muriel's visit at the only one still in the room. 'And you do get two months holiday in Italy.'

There was less than twenty-four hours to escape her two-month holiday from hell with Aunt Muriel. Her mother gave her no support and had decided to act as if the holiday would be a treat to Ginny. Ron's contribution was a rather vindictive laugh on the whole matter. So, after threatening to hex him soundly, Ginny could do little but pack her luggage, groan loudly, and be ready at seven the next morning. She contemplated making a run for it, but upon closer inspection two months in Italy did sound better than two months cooped up at the Burrow. At least, if she ignored the looming presence of Aunt Muriel, it did.

A week later Ginny got out of bed reluctantly, not wanting to face the day ahead. Aunt Muriel actually did leave her alone most days, claiming that a lady her age should rest in the afternoon, that the heat was too bad to bear thinking about, and that she should have had the sense to stay in England. But Ginny still had breakfast and dinner with her. During that time, Muriel always found plenty at fault with Ginny.

As she walked into the breakfast-parlour, Muriel glanced up and greeted her with the usual, 'At least you did decide to get up before dinner!'

Ginny sat down with a bright and insincere 'good-morning,' thankful that Muriel never understood sarcasm.

'Don't you have something more fitting for a girl to wear, Ginny?' Muriel continued. 'No wonder you can not find a man when you dress like that.'

Ginny groaned, counting the minutes until she would be out of the house. After a week she had to admit that Capri, Italy, was great, but she would have enjoyed it much better without Muriel's rude remarks.

When she was finally free of Muriel ('I say, this heat is unbearable, why did I let you talk me into going?') Ginny decided that a nice relaxing day on the beach was what she needed to calm down again.

Getting out her bikini and grabbing a towel, she walked down the steep path leading down the crumbling hillside onto the beach. Once there, she spread the towel out on the sand, but was distracted from pulling off her sundress by a sudden shout from above.

Turning, Ginny stared in shock at the man tumbling down the hill above her and ending up in a heap in front of her feet. Bending down to check on him, she realised that she had seen that pale-blond hair before. Turning him over only confirmed the awful suspicion. Sharp, slightly pointed features, an arrogant expression on his face even though he was unconscious: Draco Malfoy! That was just what her holiday with dear Aunt Muriel needed. A sneering Malfoy -- like she did not already get enough insults flung at her. He was bruised and bleeding after the topple down the hill, and even her loathing for him could not prevent her from taking a closer look to see if he needed healing, or simply a bucket of cold seawater to the face to wake up.

Seeing a nasty cut to his shoulder convinced her that he would need at least a bit of healing. But once she had tended to that, she might grant herself the pleasure of tossing water at him. She drew up the short sleeve he wore, mentally scolding herself while doing so -- for some reason, the voice sounded a bit like Hermione -- for noticing his clearly defined arm muscles. Whatever Malfoy did these days, he clearly also took the time to exercise. She had just tapped her wand once on his arm when he opened his eyes with a start and sat up.

'Stay still,' she snapped at him. Could he not have toppled down the hill and landed at any other feet?

He rose instead, swaying as he did and reaching out a hand to steady himself. 'There's a Weasley even here?' he drawled rudely. 'I'd rather you not cast a spell near me. If your aim is as poor as your moronic brother's, I might well end up sprouting a second head.'

Ginny ground her teeth, fully determined to leave him be. If he refused to be healed and died of blood-loss, that was hardly her responsibility! In fact, it might even be a net gain for the world. But he swayed even worse, and sat down again, so she cursed silently and bent over him.

'That wound still needs healing, and you hardly look fit enough to do it yourself,' she said sternly, grabbing his arm a little harsher than strictly necessary.

'Watch it!' he sneered, trying to yank it out of her grip. 'I told you to leave it alone.'

'And what do you intend to do? Walk back along the beach, dripping blood and looking like a mess?' she asked him sarcastically.

He glared, but stopped trying to get away from her.

Before he could do or say anything else, she tapped her wand to his arm again and muttered a spell that made the cut seal itself back together. 'There. Do you still have complaints?'

He examined it, and seemed not to find anything negative to say, so he kept remained silent.

'You're welcome,' she said angrily and straightened up.

'If you're expecting a medal, you're in for a long wait,' he sneered, getting to his feet again. 'Your spellwork is better than the Weasel's, but only by a hair.' And, with that, he managed to get as close to a saunter as anyone could expect. He still limped slightly on one leg, but even with that, he moved in a confident way.

'Hope I don't see you again!' Ginny called after him.

'That makes two of us, then!' he coldly replied, not looking back.

Stomping back to her towel on the sand, Ginny cursed the day Malfoy was born. Or, at least, the day he had decided to go for a holiday at exactly the same place as her.

She made sure to get back to the château in time to change for dinner, hoping Aunt Muriel had not heard of the episode. The woman loved gossip and seemed to hear of everything that happened on the island.

But upon sitting down she was relieved; Muriel's pleasant greeting of, 'You really should stay out of the sun! A lady should have a pale complexion, and those freckles make you look horrid!' told her she had not heard of the incident. If Muriel had gotten wind of her as much as looking at any man, even Malfoy, she would have talked of little else.

After dinner, which was promptly at eight, Aunt Muriel retreated to her bedroom and expected Ginny to do the same ('You need all the beauty-sleep you can get, Ginevra, and no decent lady goes out at night'), so Ginny had plenty of time to read, or stare at the roof.

Tonight, she found herself flumped into a chair on the small balcony overlooking the bay, thinking about Malfoy. Why had he come tumbling down the hill, anyway?

As she stared out across the moonlit sea, she considered how respectable the Malfoy name was now. In the three years since Voldemort's death, Lucius had snaked himself and his son out of a justified trip to Azkaban. Well, more like paid his way out. But the Malfoys had not been happy with this alone, and Draco and his father had also pulled the Malfoy name back towards respectability with that old Malfoy combination of Galleons and flattery.

She had easily been able to see that Draco was dazed, not drunk. But it would have been a lot more interesting if he had been on a drunken escapade... perhaps with some of his old Slytherin gang. Blaise Zabini, for one, had been rumoured to have gone wild after Hogwarts. She amused herself for some time imagining scenarios that would have led to Draco toppling down a hill. When they became crazy enough to involve a hippogriff, a run-in with a goblin, and Draco on the run from justice, she decided it was time to go to bed.

Adagio

Chapter 2 of 6

Aunt Muriel continues her ploy to find Ginny a man.

These characters, naturally, are not mine. I just took them out to play and thought they could use a holiday.

As for the island Capro -- it's entirely of my own invention.

Adagio

The next day, Ginny decided on a trip into the village of Capro. Like Hogsmeade, it was an all-wizard one. That was why so many of the wealthy wizarding families had holiday homes on Capro -- the entire island was warded off from Muggles, thereby affording the rich a pleasant haven safe from prying eyes where they could indulge themselves in using magic publicly.

Aunt Muriel declared it was still too hot for her to venture outside, but sent Ginny off with a few parting words of wisdom. ('Do watch out for those Italian men, Ginny. I dare say they look handsome, but you can never trust them!')

Ginny spent a nice, but tiring, morning window-shopping at the finest Italian fashion stores and wishing that she had money. Even Muriel could not have found fault with her style of dressing if she could afford clothes like the ones she was currently looking at.

She was just stopping one last time to admire a dress, after having eaten lunch at a cozy bistro, when she could hear that all-too-familiar drawl behind her.

'Looking for a job, Weasley? You must be because surely you can't afford to *shop* here?'

Groaning, but not quite angry, she turned around (a week with Aunt Muriel hardened even the most easily offended, and Ginny never really had been easy to goad). Malfoy was wearing an outfit she was sure had come from one of these places, and he looked infuriatingly good in it. Those bruises and scrapes were healed, too. His tailored trousers and short sleeved shirt drew her eye. Black had to be warm in the sun, but she guessed he always wore black.

'Not tumbling down cliffs today?' she retaliated.

He snorted, and actually smiled faintly. 'Friendly game of Quidditch,' he said offhandedly. 'Accidents are prone to happen. You should know that; you play for one of those - er - lesser known teams.'

After Muriel's comment ('A girl shouldn't play Quidditch, but I guess it gives you a hobby until you get married'), that was positively a compliment.

'Will you be here for long, Malfoy?' Ginny asked. 'I don't want my holiday ruined.'

He narrowed his eyes maliciously. 'I'm here for the summer, but trust me, spending time around you is the last thing I want.'

'You are the one stopping to chat,' she said, smiling sweetly at him. Unsurprisingly, that made his eyes spark in anger. He always had been easy to offend.

'Just wanted to let you know that there's a used clothes market down the road,' he sneered. 'But seeing that outfit, I guess you've already been there.' With that he sauntered away, leaving Ginny fuming in anger. Would she have to listen to Malfoy seconding all of Muriel's comments? This had to be a nightmare!

The next morning, Aunt Muriel suddenly decided on a two-day trip to Rome, insisting that it was time she introduced Ginny to some ancient culture. ('You're brighter than that lummo, Ron, but that's true for most people. I'm sure there's room for a lot more inside your head.')

They followed an official tour to the ancient wizarding Rome, and for once, Ginny was pleased to be with Muriel. The tour-guide droned on in a sleep-inducing voice about the catacombs and a wizarding temple in the middle of the Tiber, but suddenly Aunt Muriel would whisper (and, as she was quite deaf, the entire group could hear it) that *she* had heard an entirely different version involving two werewolves founding Rome. By the time the tour ended, the tour guide had turned a bright purple, and Ginny had to excuse herself and run behind an old temple before she doubled up with laughter.

'Insufferable fool! Why they would give us a guide that has that little knowledge about ancient Rome, I have no idea,' Muriel yelled to a witch standing next to her.

After the second day, they returned to the château, Aunt Muriel still cackling contentedly over the stupidity of the tour-guide. As this gave Ginny a much-needed break from being criticised, she did her best to encourage it by inserting comments like, 'What about his statement about the Coliseum? That sounded true?' which would ensure that Muriel presented her own version of events. Aunt Muriel's take on history sounded like a worst-case scenario cooked up by evil tongues, but it was far more entertaining than History of Magic ever had been.

The next day, Aunt Muriel opened her copy of '*Capro Daily*' (the translator spell ensured she could read it in her native tongue) and let out a cackle that made Ginny jump. Aunt Muriel's cackles usually meant she had found some gossip story of an unusually malicious nature, but, this time, the cackle was one *so* gleeful that Ginny suspected nothing short of the Minister of Magic himself being engaged to Voldemort's unknown daughter could have induced it.

'This is wonderful,' she announced to a startled Ginny, who rarely could remember Aunt Muriel using such a positive word before. 'Look at this, Ginny!' She brandished the paper happily, and started reading out loud:

'Annual Summer Ball.

This Saturday, at Capro Grand Hall.

This traditional gathering has through the times been a favoured meeting place for the select young witch and wizard. As late as last summer, Frances Miles DuFin met his wife, Pansy DuFin, whose maiden name was Parkinson, at this very gathering. Among notable names...'

Ginny zoned out, inwardly groaning. She could picture Muriel happily attempting to marry her off to some rich wizard at this very ball.

'We will attend, of course,' Muriel announced. 'You'll have to buy a dress. I've seen your usual clothes - it won't do. Thankfully, you have a nice posture. That red hair can't be helped, I suppose, but some people do like red hair.'

Ginny forced a smile, while telling herself that she really *did* want a new dress. She would not mind dressing up and going to a dance either; it was this matchmaking scheme that spooked her.

Ginny walked into the ballroom, feeling like a horse up for display. She was glad this horrid tradition of balls was on its way out of fashion - at least outside the rich and powerful families. How one could actually be expected to meet someone they would like to marry in a setting like this, she had no idea.

Every man in the room was in dress robes; most of them looked desperately uncomfortable and kept casting glances at their neighbours for moral support. The girls all seemed to be in groups of three or four, giggling madly and eyeing the men. The sight sent chills down Ginny's spine.

'Ah. Finally some eligible bachelors,' Aunt Muriel said, uncharacteristically cheerful. 'These are the rich and powerful, Ginny, *sodo* try to behave properly.' Her voice was one one would normally use at a child who was prone to pulling off all the tablecloths and running around screaming madly. Even after the past weeks, Ginny had to close her eyes and swallow the retort she had on the tip of her tongue.

'Yes, Aunt Muriel,' she forced out, instead - agreeing meant she could get away faster.

'Well?' Muriel asked pointedly. 'No need to stand around here! But do remember, Ginny - they might be rich, but they still look like spineless fools to me.'

Ginny happily grasped the opportunity to walk away and circled the room, looking for somewhere she could sit down without anyone noticing her, or preferably a door leading outside so that she could slip away for a bit. It was a large hall, the sides partially hidden from her view by columns and the middle intended to be used as a dance-floor.

While looking around, she kept an eye on the people surrounding her - wanting to know just who all these so called 'eligible bachelors' were. To her, they looked like nothing more than spoilt rich boys trying to impress. For once, she had to agree with her aunt - they *did* look a little spineless.

Just as she contemplated this, she saw a streak of pale blond hair across the room. *Great*, she groaned inwardly, *of course Malfoy had to be here!* Despite groaning, she followed him with her eyes. It was best not to turn one's back on the enemy, after all. And even she had to admit he stood out. It had nothing to do with the paleness of his skin, the blond hair, or even the black, almost sombre, dress robes.

It was his attitude. Or, rather, his *lack* of attitude. In a room where everyone was trying their hardest to impress, Malfoy merely walked across the room. He did not saunter, or strut. He *walked*. Calmly, assuredly, like he had done it a hundred times before. He let his eyes sweep the room with a look of disinterest, not pausing at the groups of girls who were suddenly not giggling any more, but rather tossing their hair over their shoulders, sending long glances after him. It wasn't that he was so handsome - there were several men present who were obviously much better looking. It might have been his money, that Malfoy fortune beckoning the unhitched. Or, it might just have been that lack of attitude, that way he wore his robes like he was used to them - not like many of the others, who looked like little boys forced into formal attire by their mums.

He walked over to a man standing not far from Ginny, but on the other side of a wide column.

'Didn't think you'd show, Malfoy,' greeted the man.

'Mother decided to send one of her letters to remind me that I'm not getting any younger and that the Malfoy family needs an heir. If I didn't make an appearance tonight, she would make a fuss,' Malfoy replied, sounding bored. 'The way she talks, you'd think I was turning thirty this fall, not twenty-one.'

Ginny grinned to herself, moving away. It didn't particularly sound like Malfoy was too eager to be here, either. She kept circling the room. If nothing else, she could at least make sure to avoid meeting Malfoy face to face. As she paused, deciding she must have put a safe distance between them, a man walked up to her. Well, to be honest, he almost jumped, seeming to hesitate for a moment, then gaining courage to leap the final three steps. His appearance took Ginny completely by surprise.

'I ... May I claim the first dance?' he stuttered. He had too-big ears and curly brown hair. Somehow, it made him look a little elfish, almost like he belonged in stories from Roman mythology.

'Sure,' Ginny blurted out. It was a dance, after all, and the evening was sure to pass faster if she danced. It might even be fun, if Muriel did not find her a potential husband.

At least, by dancing, she would get to refresh all those lessons her mother had given her.

But the first dance proved her wrong. The man with the curly hair seemed to step on her toes as often as not; and finally, Ginny had to steer to avoid him making a total fool of himself. She desperately hoped the rest of the evening would not prove to be as challenging.

After a few dances, she decided on a break. Formal dancing might look calm enough, but with toe-stepping wizards, heavy flirting, giggling girls, and the warm Italian night, it was anything but relaxing.

No sooner than had the next dance started, Muriel caught her by the arm, leaning heavily on her.

'I must say, Ginevra, at least you know how to dance,' Aunt Muriel said. Ginny was stunned to hear Muriel actually complimenting her on anything. 'But you do seem to pick out the most gormless partners in the room.

'I'm going back to the château,' Muriel continued. 'A lady my age needs a good night's rest. I'm a hundred and ten, after all!' She cackled a little. 'Do stay longer, but at least try to dance with someone with a backbone!' With that, Muriel ambled up the stairs towards the exit. Ginny let out a relieved breath. At least Muriel had not suggested she married anyone.

She walked over to the punch, helping herself to a goblet, and watched as Malfoy danced with a pretty girl in a pink dress that stood out vividly against his black robes. Not even now did he look happy; he still had an arrogant, bored look that didn't at all seem to discourage the girl, who appeared to be talking away rapidly. *What on earth does she see in him?* Ginny wondered to herself. She never would comprehend how some girls could marry for money. There were so many things in life of much greater importance, after all.

As the dance ended, she tried to snap out of her thoughts. It would not do to be caught staring at Malfoy. She rose and put the goblet aside, determined to dance some more. If the man only knew how to move his feet, it was quite fun.

She turned back to the dance-floor only to find Malfoy right in front of her. The girl dressed in pink looked dotingly at him, but he seemed to ignore her.

'Malfoy,' Ginny snapped. What did he want now, then?

'Ginny. Care to dance?' he asked, taking her completely off guard. 'You do know how to dance, right?' he continued in that intolerably arrogant voice of his.

'Yes, Malfoy. I'm the only girl in a family with six brothers. Of course my mother taught me how to dance!' she replied impatiently.

'You better not be lying!' he snapped and grabbed her hand and waist firmly, pressing her a little closer than she would have liked.

She snapped for breath, making him leer at her, while he made a condescending noise.

'Try not to faint at being close to a man, Ginny,' he mocked, steering her surprisingly skillfully. There was nothing hesitant whatsoever about his movements, and he seemed to know his steps well enough to keep his attention on the room around them.

'Is that what you call yourself, then?' she retorted.

He merely smiled, as if amused. 'What?' he asked. 'Surely you can do better than *that*? If you're going to offend me, at least do it properly.'

'I'd almost think you have a crush on me, the way you act,' she said offhandedly. 'First, you 'accidentally' tumble down at my feet, then you stop for a pleasant chat in the village, and now you invite me to dance?'

He did react to that one. She knew it should possibly upset her that he got so very offended at any allusion to him liking her, but it really didn't. She detested him, too, so it hardly mattered.

'Like *that* could ever happen!' he snapped. 'In case you haven't noticed, I have plenty of more attractive offers.'

Okay. So that one stung a little. There was no need for him to comment on her appearance. 'I'll let you get back to them, then,' she replied coldly, trying to pull her hand out of his.

But he merely held her back and twirled her around. 'No, you don't,' he sneered. 'If you run away now, there'll be all kinds of rumours. I ~~don't~~ want to hear talk about how we're having a lovers' quarrel!'

The notion was enough to keep Ginny where she was. Rumours about her and Malfoy? Ugh!

To her great disconcert she enjoyed the dance. It might have been Malfoy's obvious skill, or it might have been the fact that he actually stayed silent for the rest of the dance. The absence of leering made a nice change from what she was used to.

Aunt Muriel had gone to bed by the time Ginny got back to the château, so Ginny merely went to bed. As she fell asleep her last thought was *Oh, I really hope Muriel doesn't hear of me dancing with Malfoy!*

Adagietto

Chapter 3 of 6

Ginny goes sightseeing.

These characters, naturally, are not mine. I just took them out to play and thought they could use a holiday.

As for the chapter titles -- Italian musical terms. Just me having a little whimsical fun.

'I heard you danced with that Malfoy boy,' Muriel said, gleefully, as soon as Ginny entered the kitchen for breakfast next morning. Ginny closed her eyes and wished Aunt Muriel didn't get up at the crack of dawn to gossip with the other elderly ladies on the island. 'He looks a little pale, I must say. And a man should not have such blond hair,' Muriel continued

Ginny grinned, and happily agreed, as she joined her aunt at the table.

'But he's very rich. You could marry him for money!' she continued, making Ginny gulp. 'The rumours I've heard about what the Malfoy family did to worm their way out of that trouble after Voldemort died...' Muriel cackled to herself, apparently amused by the notion of the Malfoy family's underhandedness.

'That reminds me,' Ginny cut in, before Muriel could expound on her idea that Ginny should marry Malfoy (or anyone else, for that matter) for money. 'Last night at the ball I was invited to come see the Grottoes today.'

'Ah!' Muriel exclaimed. 'A date!'

Ginny, who did not want her aunt to think anything of the sort, quickly corrected the notion. But Muriel still sent her off with plenty of advice to dress properly, for once, and to take a sun-block potion. ('You can't afford to get any more freckles, Ginevra it's a wonder men pay attention to you as it is!')

She walked down towards the pier, a little nervous. Bathing in the shallows was all very well, but Ginny was not fond of water, and being in a boat made her a little edgy. Only the assurance that the Grottoes were beautiful, and a sight she must not at all miss, had made her accept.

But walking out onto the pier, she very nearly turned back. Those boats were tiny! They looked more like the ones Hagrid used to float the first-years in at Hogwarts than anything else. She was confident that a boat that small had no business on the sea.

'Hello!' the girls from the night before called, smiling brightly and waving. Ginny breathed deeply and walked over to them by the stairs leading down the side of the pier. She was not one to show she was afraid she was a Gryffindor, after all.

'We're just waiting for a few more,' one of the girls said brightly, almost bouncing. 'I've always wanted to see the Grottoes!'

Ginny managed a reply that conveyed moderate enthusiasm. Those boats were too small.

'Ohh! Here they are, at last!' another girl squealed. She had black hair that was donned in waves down her back, and something about the way the slight curls ringed her face made Ginny think it had taken quite a while to adorn.

Ginny turned to the direction the girl was looking and felt her heart sink. Malfoy *again*. Was there no avoiding him? The island was not *that* small. For him to turn up wherever she was sightseeing was exceptionally bad luck. Suddenly, she was a little happier to see the small boats. At least she would not be anywhere close to him.

'Draco!' the black-haired girl squealed, making Ginny grin. He sure was popular, that guy. No wonder his ego was *slightly* inflated.

'Weasley,' he said, nodding shortly at Ginny. 'Cassiopeia,' he then drawled, not sounding happy at all. 'Are we leaving now?'

For some reason, the guide seemed determined on them being two to each boat and not just any two, but a man and a woman. Ginny could distinctly hear him mutter to himself about the Grottoes being very '*romantico*.'

Still, her fear of the water had not lessened, so she let herself be steered into the last boat, gingerly sitting down and looking straight down at her feet. There sure would be no romance. She had enough on her plate with trying not to panic.

She nearly squealed when the boat rocked, but sternly told herself to stay calm it was only someone else getting in.

'And now, we leave,' the guide said in a heavy Italian accent.

The boat Ginny sat in started moving on its own, and she looked up, alarmed. What she saw did not calm her down *Malfoy*? What was he doing in her boat? What had happened to the squealing girl who had positively beamed at the sight of him?

'Malfoy?' she got out. 'Why are you here?'

He didn't reply, just leant back, looking so relaxed that she almost wanted to slap him. That was just mean she was gripping her seat so hard her knuckles were white.

'Really. Why would you get into the same boat as me?' she pressed.

'Oh, shut it, will you?' he said irritably. 'If you must know, I just can't stand Cassiopeia, so you were the lesser of two evils.'

'Gee. Thanks for the compliment, Malfoy,' she said, rolling her eyes.

He raised one eyebrow, looking arrogant. 'I heard Potter dumped you. Is that true?' he asked.

She groaned. 'We broke up. Not that it's any of your concern,' she said shortly.

Malfoy smirked. 'What? I'm just making conversation.'

'Rude conversation,' she snapped back. 'What about you, then? None of these girls silly enough to want you?'

'I got offers, of course,' he said, sounding unworried. 'I'm not willing to marry one of them just yet. In a few years, maybe.' He sounded like it didn't matter which of them it would be as if he would simply pick one of them at random and ask her to be his wife.

'Here we see the opening to the Grottoes,' the guide called, and she looked away from Malfoy. Whatever else the man might be, he ~~had~~ distracted her from the fact that she was in a tiny boat out on the ocean. Already they were drawing near to the cliffs, gliding through an arched opening and into a sunlit space where azure water was framed by towering brown cliffs.

Ginny had to admit it was worth the boat ride. She even forgot about Malfoy's presence as they drifted slowly through the Grottoes, seeing more azure water and shafts of light streaming down, giving the scene an unearthly and distinctly romantic feel.

'We pause here, and you may go swimming, if you like,' the guide called as they came into a round cave with a circular hole in the roof that sent a narrow beam of sun-light down into clear, deep water.

'These caves are too hot,' Malfoy drawled, and she remembered he was there again. Turning to him, she saw him tug his shirt over his head, then stand up and dive from the boat. It rocked again, and Ginny squealed. Thankfully Malfoy didn't notice the last she needed was him taunting her about being afraid of boats or, worse yet, thinking she was squealing at the sight of him shirtless.

Ginny remained firmly seated and was happy to see that most of the others did too. Certainly most of the girls did. But Malfoy did have a point the cave was beautiful, but

sweltering hot.

'Not bathing?' Malfoy asked as he pulled himself back into the boat and sat down again, ignoring the fact that he sprayed water on her. To be honest, Ginny wasn't entirely sure he wasn't doing it on purpose.

'No,' she replied coldly, wiping the cool drops of water from her arm while ignoring the fact that her skin seemed to tingle*It's just the water being cold*, she told herself.

'I thought you were the sporty type?' he persisted. 'Or are you afraid to ruin your hairdo, like the rest of them?' He nodded in the general direction of the other boats with a contemptuous look on his face.

'I just didn't feel like bathing,' Ginny lied smoothly. She was hardly about to admit to Malfoy, of all people, that her poor swimming abilities made her less than confident in water too deep for her to reach the bottom.

He let out a sound of disbelief, and rested casually against the hull of the boat. Ginny took one look at his chest and then forced herself to keep her eyes firmly on his face. *It isn't that handsome a chest, after all*, she told herself firmly. It looked perfectly normal pale, but normal. He wasn't all that muscular or anything, so there was no call for that slight twinge she felt, just because water was glinting on it. He should have put his shirt back on, anyway.

'Why do you avoid Cassiopeia?' she asked, trying to distract herself.

'What is it to you?' he snapped.

Yes, she mused, *this sure is one romantic tour!* 'Just making conversation,' she replied, mimicking him.

He snorted and looked away, ignoring her.

'I'll just assume she's your ex-girlfriend, then, shall I?' she asked sweetly as they exited the caves again. There was far too much water out here, and while Malfoy was infuriating, she found that the feeling of wanting to whip out her wand and hex him worked excellently against her hydrophobia.

'You'll do nothing of the sort, Weasley!' Malfoy sneered. 'If you must know, she's my future wife, if she gets her own way.'

Ginny barely restrained herself from making a shocked sound. Sure, Cassiopeia was friendly around Malfoy, but he did not return the favour. Why the girl would want to be around a man who obviously despised her, Ginny had no idea. *It's as silly as the notion that I would want to be his wife!* she mused.

'Why do you dislike her so much, then?' she asked instead. 'She looks nice. I'm sure that's an important criterion for you.'

'Of course it is,' Malfoy replied in an exasperated tone. Obviously, he was shallow and not at all ashamed to admit it. It didn't really surprise her. 'But not the most important one,' he added. 'I'm not an idiot.'

'So? Why do you dislike her?' Ginny pressed. To be honest she was a little curious as to how a twisted mind like Malfoy's would work. Besides, the topic annoyed him and anything that annoyed Malfoy was worth talking about.

'Don't you ever shut up?' he drawled rudely. 'No wonder Potter got sick and tired of you!'

'Fine!' she replied coldly. 'Next time, please find another boat. Or, better yet, swim.'

'Why?' Malfoy asked with a smirk as they drew near the pier. 'This was much more entertaining than hearing Cassiopeia attempting to flirt for a few hours.' He got up and leapt onto the stairs of the pier, making Ginny curse inwardly and grip her seat firmly as the boat rocked again.

Early next morning Ginny woke with a start, heart beating fast, and then she let out a curse. Not only would she have to see Malfoy every day, now she had nightmares about him, too? She firmly ignored the fact that it hadn't really been a nightmare. Now that she was awake, it sure looked like one, so such petty details of exact definition were of no importance. In her dream she had been alone with Malfoy in the Grottoes and he'd still been shirtless. Somehow the dream Ginny had turned into a drooling fool and leant towards him as if hypnotised. Good thing she had woken up before she had actually kissed him. The memory of that, even from a dream, might have scarred her for life.

Andante

Chapter 4 of 6

Playing Quidditch with a Malfoy?

Not mine, sadly. I'm just having fun.

Thank you for reading. I do hope you like the story. Leave me a review if you do, or don't.

Andante

Not able to go back to sleep after the horrid near-kiss dream about Malfoy, Ginny decided to get up and go for a walk before breakfast. She walked aimlessly up the hill, no plan in her head besides a desire to move. Her holiday so far had been relaxed almost too relaxed and she made a mental note to find a Quidditch pitch at her earliest convenience. After all, if Malfoy had fallen down playing Quidditch, there had to be a possibility for her to find *someone* to play with. If not, at least she could just get some flying done.

Walking along a path lined with short bushes and fragrant heather, she admired the vividly red colour of the earth where the first rays of morning sun reached it. Looking ahead again, she barely had time to make out a figure before it walked right into her.

'Ouch!' a man's voice said arrogantly, and she immediately recognised him. With that pale-blond hair, it was hard not to. Malfoy, again. How *did* he manage to sound arrogant with that innocuous four-letter word?

'Watch it!' she snapped. Normally, she would just have let it go. The path was partially obscured by bushes, and the mistake of bumping into someone was easy enough to make. But, given the fact that this was Malfoy, she was sure it had been intentional.

'Calm down!' he sneered back. His surprised look told her he really had not seen her. He looked preoccupied and troubled.

'What are you up to?' Ginny asked, intrigued.

'Is that your concern, Weasley?' Malfoy drawled, raising one arrogant eyebrow. He seemed to have collected his thoughts again, if his attitude was any indication.

'No. But then, when a Death Eater ambles around in the hills, deep in thought, I get worried,' Ginny replied. The term had slipped off her tongue before she had considered it, and she gripped her wand in her pocket. Okay, so Malfoy was supposed to be reformed. But she still didn't want to be caught unawares if he did decide to hex her.

'I'm not pondering evil deeds,' he said mockingly. 'Hate to disappoint you,' he added, sounding very insincere. 'What are you doing here, anyway? Are you stalking me?'

She rolled her eyes. 'You sure are full of yourself,' she retorted.

'This *is* the path leading to my chateau,' he said, pointing back up the path. 'See that big structure with a roof and windows? It's called a house. Unlike the ~~ten~~*trou* probably live in.'

She ignored the taunt. It was getting old, anyway. It hardly bothered her that she was not a spoilt brat like Malfoy. But he did seem to be telling the truth; the roof and top floor of a terracotta-coloured stone building were visible through the trees ahead.

'Great,' she replied. 'I'll remember to stay away from this path, then. Don't want the misfortune of running into you again.'

'I'm relieved to hear that,' he said. 'But, if you're still bent on following me, I'll make it easy on you and tell you I'm going down to the bay for a swim.' With a smirk, he stepped past her, sauntering down the path.

Ginny muttered a swear word under her breath that would have earned her a severe scolding if her mother had heard her and remained where she was. She could always continue up the path, and most likely end up in the garden of Malfoy's holiday house, but that idea wasn't exactly appealing. That left the option of turning back down, and she sure didn't want to do *that* until Malfoy was well out of sight.

Returning to the chateau for breakfast, Ginny found an almost vindictive pleasure in seeing that Aunt Muriel was not yet seated at the breakfast table.

'There might be hope for you yet, Ginevra,' Muriel barked at the sight of her. 'At least you are up at a decent hour today.'

'Good morning, Aunt Muriel,' Ginny replied in a far more sincere tone than normal.

'I have made plans for us to see Corsica the next two days,' Muriel announced. Long warnings never had been her style. 'We're leaving after lunch. I do hope they give us a more capable guide than in Rome. That fool talked as if he never had any proper schooling.'

'Corsica sounds nice,' Ginny replied, to ward off a more long-winded complaint about the guide.

'An excellent island,' Muriel declared. 'It's where Paoli Corsare grew up - the wizard who invented the disillusionment spell, or at least so they claim.'

Ginny returned to her room to pack, oddly relieved that she now would at least not see Malfoy for a few days! *It's not like it matters*, she told herself sternly. *I'm above letting him bother me*. There was no call for him unsettling her the way he did. He might well be a bother, but she should be used to that by now. And he wasn't very handsome, so that twinge belonged nowhere at all. *A Pygmy Puff is more attractive than he is*, she thought angrily, ignoring the fact that she for some reason found him more attractive than most men she knew.

After lunch, she and Muriel grabbed the new trans-sea Portkey developed by the Mediterranean wizards to travel between all the islands and landed with an unfamiliar rocking movement on a walled-in patio with moss-covered grey tiles. Looking up, Ginny saw that the patio belonged to a small sand-coloured house positioned at the very brink of limestone cliffs. It seemed about to topple down into the sea below at any moment, and she hoped it was supported by magic.

'Where is that lummo of a guide that was meant to meet us here?' Aunt Muriel said disapprovingly, looking around her. At the same moment, the man walked onto the patio.

'You're late!' Muriel barked as greeting, making Ginny struggle to hold back a wide grin. It always pleased her to hear her aunt bark at someone else for a change.

They spent the next two days touring the island. Ginny loved the house on the cliff where they were staying and would wake up at dawn just to stare out at the sea below the towering cliffs. The natural harbour hidden in a fold in the landscape was very picturesque, too, but Aunt Muriel turned her nose up at all the Muggle tourists, though she did cackle gleefully and comment on their clothes in an embarrassingly loud voice.

The second day, they joined a guided tour to Paoli Corsare's birth-place, a small village in the mountains consisting of a huddled group of stern-looking houses in dark stone, surrounded by forested slopes. The guide excitedly explained how Corsare had lived and worked in a house set slightly apart from the rest, although his speech was slightly dented by Aunt Muriel's remark. (*I've heard that he stole the idea to that spell from an Irish wizard down on holiday.*)

Back on Capro again, Ginny was glad she could finally find time to play Quidditch. She grabbed her broomstick and walked up the hill early in the afternoon. Everything on this island appeared to be on the other side of some hilltop or another, but Ginny preferred walking to Apparition. At least then she got some exercise plus she could enjoy the beauty of the island.

She hurried up a steep slope and stopped indecisively at a fork in the path. There was no indication as to which was the one she wanted, so she pulled out her wand to get directions.

'Point me, Quidditch field,' she muttered and saw it spin around. The modification of the Four Pointer spell was very useful.

The wand stopped while pointing up the left-hand path, so she deposited it back into her pocket and was about to continue when she suddenly heard voices from the other path. Turning, she saw Malfoy walking beside a boy of seven or eight; the boy was obviously in the middle of explaining something. He talked rapidly to an attentive, if bored-looking Draco, who was carrying two broomsticks over his shoulder.

'Ginny,' Malfoy acknowledged when they came up to her.

'Malfoy,' she replied. *Should I have said Draco? He keeps calling me Ginny* she mused. 'And who's this?' she added, collecting her thoughts and trying to appear more friendly, while she smiled at the boy.

'Distant cousin,' Malfoy dismissed, apparently not bothered enough to give the child's name.

The boy himself was absorbed in watching a large beetle crawling across the path and seemed unconcerned.

'I keep running into you,' Ginny said, trying to be civil now that Malfoy actually had stopped to chat. She could hardly offend him in front of the child.

'That's because we're probably the only two on this island not too lazy to actually walk instead of just Apparating,' Malfoy replied, his voice unusually neutral.

'But it's so beautiful here!' Ginny exclaimed. 'I wouldn't possibly miss out on walking, even if the island seems to consist solely of steep hills.' Her enthusiasm surprised her. This was *Malfoy*, after all.

'It has a stern beauty,' he allowed reluctantly. 'But still, you will risk being frowned upon for walking.'

Ginny shrugged, unconcerned. 'And they will not frown at you?'

Malfoy laughed shortly. 'I'm a Malfoy,' he said arrogantly. 'They would not dream of doing any such thing.'

'Aren't we going to play Quidditch, Draco?' the boy asked impatiently, having lost interest in the beetle. Ginny could hear the family resemblance; he had that assured arrogance down already.

'That is where we're heading,' Malfoy replied rather condescendingly. Apparently he was rude to children, too, but the boy seemed undaunted.

'Then stop flirting, and let's go!' he demanded.

Malfoy raised an arrogant eyebrow. 'Come along, then,' he said, ignoring the accusation. 'Coming, Ginny?' he asked. 'I assume you're going in the same direction, or do you carry around a broomstick for fun?'

'Great!' she muttered under her breath, following the two up the path.

'You're not very good at it, you know.' She could hear the boy talking to Malfoy in a grown-up voice.

'What am I not good at?' Malfoy enquired.

'Flirting, obviously,' the child informed him. 'You're supposed to be *nice* to her.'

'Says who?'

'Says my brother,' the boy announced, as if this would end all discussion.

'Well, I'm not taking his advice,' Malfoy replied. 'Vito is engaged to a...' He seemed to remember who he was talking to. 'Nice girl,' he ended rather insincerely. 'And I was *not* flirting.'

'Was too!' the boy stubbornly maintained.

'Do you want to play Quidditch or not?' Malfoy snapped. 'Give it a rest with the girl.'

The boy only laughed at Malfoy's bad mood.

Ginny tried not to grin too widely at the conversation as they reached the end of the path and faced a state-of-the-art Quidditch field. To her irritation, it was better kept than the one she trained at with the Harpies'.

She watched as the boy, now jumping up and down in excitement, grabbed the broomstick from Malfoy and soared into the air. Malfoy seemed unconcerned as the child tried moves that had Ginny cringing in a second and wanting to run after him, yelling at him to be careful.

'Are you not *worried* about your cousin?' she asked Malfoy a little sharply as the boy narrowly avoided colliding with one of the hoops.

'Why?' he asked, turning to her. 'Lamberto can't get better without training, and I can hardly run after him to hold his hand. If he falls down, I assure you I know enough healing spells to get him back on his feet.' He was leaning casually on his broom, and it made him look... strong, and oddly appealing.

It's the broomstick, she told herself. *I've always been weak for Quidditch players, that's all.* Somehow, she feared her explanation wasn't entirely true.

'Fine,' she allowed, trying not to stare. Having six brothers had taught her that running after a boy to tell him to be careful was pointless, anyway. She could not count the times her mother had scolded her brothers while healing their cuts and bruises after falling off a broomstick. Ginny had received a fair share of those scoldings herself, for that matter.

Malfoy got out a Quaffle, and he and Ginny switched playing Keeper for a while, in a surprisingly relaxed and rather friendly game. Not until Lamberto, as Malfoy called him, complained of being hungry did they break off for lunch. As they walked away from the pitch, Ginny was stunned to notice that she had spent hours in Malfoy's near proximity without wanting to hex him.

Moderato

Chapter 5 of 6

A trip to the village.

Next morning Ginny walked down to the village again, in need of two equally important things. Firstly, of course, was a diversion from Aunt Muriel, who had returned to her complaints about the weather being too hot, and consequentially spent the day gossiping in the shadowy patio of the château with an old friend of hers called Violet. Secondly, Ginny needed a new quill so that she could reply to Hermione's letter, where the girl had used an entire roll of parchment to complain of yet another mistake Ron had made. How Ron could keep infuriating Hermione like that, Ginny had no idea. Especially when Hermione scolded him worse than Mrs. Weasley ever had...every single time.

She rounded the corner into one of the narrower streets, turning away from the expensive stores she had ogled at last time. Now that she was actually buying something, she needed shops without price tags displaying sums the size of her monthly salary. Or, worse yet, those stores with no prices at all, where only those too rich to worry about sums would shop.

Passing a small used-clothes store...no doubt the one Malfoy had pointed her to last time...and a pet shop that looked like it had long ago seen better days, she turned into a bookstore to find a quill and some parchment. By the counter, she came across some nice cards, one showing the village with the pier in bright sunlight and happy people chatting in the streets. It conveyed a picture of such perfection that Ginny decided to get one and send it to Ron. After mocking her about the holiday with Aunt Muriel, being tortured by how pretty Capro looked was the least of what he deserved.

Her purchases safely in a bag, she walked out of the store again and continued down the winding street. She stopped to admire some cheap copies of the designer clothes sold a few streets away, but decided against buying anything...the last thing she needed was Malfoy seeing her and sarcastically commenting on her apparent desire to climb the social ladder...and walked on past a murky-looking store selling potions and a few souvenir shops.

To her surprise, the street ended in the harbour, where two cafés lined the houses on either side, shaded against the sun by colourful, mismatched parasols. Not far down the harbour the shadings changed to a more elegant off-white or sand, and the price of refreshments no doubt made a tour in the same classy direction.

Ginny, not yet thirsty, was walking along the harbour when she saw one very familiar blond man walking towards her.

'Draco,' she greeted, feeling awkward using his first name. But she felt even more foolish always calling him 'Malfoy,' too...especially when he called her Ginny.

He raised an eyebrow in that arrogant way she had recently begun to notice was really rather attractive, and looked surprised at her use of his name. 'Ginny.'

'Lamberto not with you today?' she enquired as she stopped beside him. She only stopped to talk because he was the only one she knew. It certainly had nothing at all to do with her liking him in any way. He was a *Malfoy*...the Malfoys were sworn enemies of Ginny's family. Anyone at all sensible disliked the Malfoys, really.

'He was only here for one day,' Malfoy replied. 'His parents skipped him down by Floo so that they could enjoy a romantic day alone in Rome. So, I was stuck babysitting.'

Ginny stared at him and realised that her mouth was slightly open. The notion of Malfoy as a babysitter was an utterly absurd one.

'What's wrong with you?' he drawled. 'You look as demented as your brother.'

She hurriedly closed her mouth; to her frustration, she was actually worried about Malfoy's opinion. 'I just can't imagine you...' She stopped. 'Never mind,' she said, deciding to drop it. Malfoy had been okay with the child. Well, not really, but Lamberto had seemed to like his cousin, anyway.

'Think I'm not fit to look after him, *Weasley*?' he asked angrily. 'He might be an arrogant little bugger, but he's still family.'

'He reminds me of you,' Ginny replied lightly.

'Me?' Malfoy asked incredulously, as if the idea that he could be arrogant was meaningless.

'Yes, you,' Ginny maintained. 'You *are* a little arrogant, you know.'

'I can assure you, I was *not* as annoying as that boy when I was young!' Malfoy protested.

'I went to school with you, remember?' she asked, a little mockingly. 'Do you still claim not to have been annoying?'

Malfoy grinned rather maliciously. 'If I managed to annoy your brother and Potter, I'll be well pleased,' he stated. 'I did try.'

'I think you managed to annoy every Gryffindor that ever met you, actually,' Ginny retorted.

Malfoy snorted. 'I'm honoured,' he said, sounding rather proud. Of course he would be. What had ~~he~~ he imagined? That he would confess to really just being misunderstood?

Shaking her head slightly at the silly notion of Malfoy being likeable, she met his grey eyes. The annoying twinge in her chest returned again! *need a boyfriend*, she sternly told herself, *if I'm attracted to Malfoy. I think I'm almost as desperate to find a man as Muriel is attempting to make me!*

Malfoy smirked slightly, and she wondered if he had noticed. Thankfully, she had grown out of blushing like a lantern every time she became embarrassed, or else her face would have been a bright red by now.

'Out shopping?' she asked, grasping the first question that fell into her head in order to break the silence.

'No,' he replied. 'I'm just back from enjoying a morning on the bay.' He nodded in the direction of the marina, where an impressive collection of boats were assembled. They were of a size much better suited for the sea than the tiny one she had forced herself into to go to the Grottoes. For that matter, several of them looked big enough for her entire family to live in.

'You, however, seem to have gone shopping in the dingiest street on the island,' he continued, his expression unreadable.

'Yes,' she snapped. 'My clothes look like crap. You've already pointed it out...multiple times...so thank you very much. But not all of us are born into more money than we could ever need. *I* actually need to work for a living.'

'Touchy today, are we?' he asked, sounding amused. 'I was going to say I saw you walking out onto the harbour...with that red hair, it's quite hard to avoid noticing you.'

'Oh,' she replied, a little put out. How did Malfoy manage to annoy her so much? 'I'm glad to see you've acquired at least some manners.'

He laughed, giving her that signature smirk before he continued down the harbour, leaving her to look after him just long enough that he turned to notice.

Cursing under her breath, she turned abruptly around and stomped on up the main street.

'We have been here for over three weeks, Ginevra, and still you have not found a man,' Aunt Muriel said disapprovingly during dessert that night. 'What have you been doing with your time?'

Trying her hardest not to scowl at her aunt, Ginny swallowed her retort, instead poking the spoon into her gelato, using more force than necessary.

'I heard the Turpins are down for the summer,' Muriel continued. 'That Matthew Turpin isn't quite a catch. But you can't be too picky, or you'll never get married.'

Gritting her teeth, Ginny tried to focus on her dessert. She could remember Matthew from school...he had been as stupid as his sister was smart, and his sole interest had been that of hiding behind tapestries to stick out a foot and trip unsuspecting people walking past. *Not be too picky, indeed*, she fumed. *Who does Muriel think I'm fit for, anyway?*

'I remember him from school,' she forced out, trying to not sound murderous, at the very least.

'Well, if you've met him, he won't do!' Muriel said, sounding annoyed. 'He's best married without acquaintance, that lummo. Worse even than Ron, and that's a feat! At least *Ron* managed to find himself a girl. I told his grandmother the other day that...'

Ginny ignored Muriel's long explanation of how she had insulted Matthew's poor grandmother. She was relieved when her aunt finally rose from the table to go to bed, leaving a few well thought-out words with Ginny as her way of saying goodnight. ('Make sure you get your beauty-sleep, Ginevra. If you don't want a man like Matthew, you'll have to make more of an effort with your appearance!')

Ginny spent the rest of the night out on her balcony writing a reply to Hermione's letter. She gave a detailed account of their tour of Rome...not forgetting to put in Muriel's rude comments...an excited description of the beautiful places she had seen on Corsica, and mentioned going to see the Grottoes. She then sealed it and tied it to the foot of Hermione's owl, Agatha, before watching the bird fly in an arc across the bay and turn due north. *I didn't mention anything about Draco because it wasn't important* she tried to convince herself. All she accomplished, however, was to become even more troubled. *Since when do I think of him as Drac?* she wondered, looking out the bay at the faraway lanterns of Muggle ships passing through the night. Somehow, she guessed she would not find the peace of mind to go to bed any time soon.

Allegretto

Chapter 6 of 6

A trip to the Villa Oriole.

Allegretto

Still yawning, Ginny got out of bed and walked into the bathroom. After a hurried shower, she moved over to the mirror, tapping her wand to her hair in order to dry it and giving her face a critical look in the mirror. The freckles over her nose and cheeks were more prominent than normal, and she briefly wondered if she should use a concealment charm to dampen them a bit. Then she scowled at herself for entertaining such a silly notion. Since when did she fret about her appearance?

'Who's the boy, dear?' the mirror asked brightly, making Ginny glare at it. Meeting her own angry brown eyes, she grimaced at how she was behaving and walked out of the room.

Who's the boy, indeed! So far, the only man her own age Ginny had met was Draco. And it wasn't like she wanted to look nice *for him*.

Pulling on a light summer dress, she walked down for breakfast, in no mood to face Aunt Muriel.

'You have made an effort today,' Muriel greeted her as she entered the room. 'You actually look acceptable in that dress.'

For once displeased with one of Muriel's rare compliments, Ginny sat down by the table, trying to convince herself that she had picked the dress by chance, having no agenda at all.

'It's a good thing, too,' Muriel said, making Ginny think she must have missed out on something her aunt had said. 'Today, we're going to Villa Oriole.'

'What's Villa Oriole?' Ginny asked, a little confused.

'Honestly, Ginevra!' Muriel said impatiently. 'Don't you ever pay attention? Villa Oriole is the ruin of the villa from the first witch ever to live on this island...the Lady Oriole. For some reason, the locals celebrate her today. I dare say it's just an excuse to have a party, but then again, the Italians are a lively bunch.'

'How do they celebrate?' Ginny asked, intrigued. Aunt Muriel did know how to tell an exciting tale...if one just ignored those snide hints she so frequently dispersed...so Ginny listened attentively to her explanation about a complicated magical ritual, a large feast in the ruins, and dancing under the stars.

As Ginny walked up the hill after lunch, she could understand why Oriole had decided to have her villa built up here. Unlike the village by the bay, where it could be swelteringly hot, there was a cooling breeze up here that made the climate much more comfortable. Still, there did not seem to be many people walking, and most of them appeared to be local residents. Aunt Muriel had declared she would Apparate but encouraged Ginny's decision to walk. ('Uphill walking gives you nice legs, Ginevra, and that's never bad with the men.')

Arriving at the top, Ginny could see the ruin of the villa spread across half the hill. Apparently, Lady Oriole had been a wealthy woman. Ginny wondered how old the villa was, if it was actually in ruins...few magically strengthened buildings ever did become ruins, after all.

Moving closer in order to be able to see the ruin Muriel had talked about, she noticed Draco standing to one side, his face displaying the usual bored look, and by his side the girl with the elaborate black hair whom he had called Cassiopeia.

Ginny experienced one of her characteristic pangs of possessiveness at the sight - she never had been able to contain those - and was unreasonably happy to see Draco all but ignoring the girl beside him, apparently deaf to her attempts at conversation.

In annoyance, Ginny turned away...the last thing she needed was for him to notice her looking at him. She could only imagine what sort of sneering comment *that* would inspire.

'There you are at last,' Aunt Muriel shouted beside her, making Ginny...and several of the nearest witches and wizards...jump in surprise. 'I almost started hoping you had found yourself a man and eloped!' Muriel yelled, and even Ginny turned slightly pink. There was no need to shout things like that in public! Now *anybody* might hear.

'Weasley. I don't believe I've met your friend?' Draco said behind her, and Ginny closed her eyes and swallowed a few choice swear words before she composed herself and turned around. Of *course* he would have heard! She never would hear the end of this one. And, to make it all worse, Cassiopeia was standing beside him, her arm tucked under his.

'Aunt, this is Draco Malfoy,' Ginny introduced. 'Malfoy. This is my great-aunt, Muriel Prewett.'

'Nice to meet you!' Muriel barked. 'And who is this young lady?'

'Cassiopeia Hill,' Draco replied curtly. 'You've met Weasley before, of course,' he added dismissively, making Ginny want to grit her teeth.

Thankfully, the ritual started shortly after, making Muriel declare in a loud voice that she was too old to stand on her feet and grab a stunned-looking Draco by the arm. Ginny smiled gleefully at the sight, but her joy didn't last long; Draco simply drew up a chair with his wand and helped Muriel onto it before he walked away, Cassiopeia in tow.

Ginny fumed until the ritual caught her attention and then decided to forget about Draco. She might be just the tiniest bit attracted to him, but he was still hardly worth her time.

The feast afterwards was highly enjoyable, not least because Muriel sat at the other end of the table, happily gossiping in loud voices with her friend, Violet. Ginny, on the other hand, ended up beside a dark-haired Italian man who introduced himself as Giovanni and flirted rather shamelessly.

As dancing began, Giovanni asked her up and Ginny happily agreed. If nothing else, she could both dance *and* annoy Aunt Muriel, who did not trust Italian men. To Ginny's delight, he was a good dancer, too. *Almost as good as Draco*, her mind strayed, before she could rein it back in. Where did such ridiculous notions come from?

'Ginevra!' Muriel barked beside her as night had fallen, making poor Giovanni flinch in alarm. 'It's too late for a lady my age to be up, so we are going home.' Apparently Muriel didn't want to risk leaving Ginny alone.

'Yes, Aunt,' Ginny agreed. Her feet were exhausted anyway, and she would not regret leaving Giovanni behind. While fun to talk to, he was exhausting over time.

'I left my bag by the table,' Muriel stated, sounding annoyed. 'I'm not nearly old enough to start forgetting things, so it must be an effect of the wine.'

'I'll go get it,' Ginny offered and hurried away. Going out in public with Muriel was something of a trial.

Walking into the shadowy ruins where the tables stood, Ginny tried to remember exactly where Muriel had been sitting. It was somewhere near the end, and her large, black handbag should be easy enough to spot.

Finding it under a chair, she lifted it and walked back outside, wondering what Muriel carried around with her that would require that large a bag. In the arched opening, she nearly collided with someone, stepping aside just in time.

'*Lumos*,' a familiar voice said, and a beam of light lit up the somewhat pointy features of Draco, making him look slightly ghostly. 'You again?' he asked, sounding disbelieving. 'I'm starting to think you really *are* stalking me.'

'Funny,' she snapped. 'I could say the same to you, you know.'

'You're the one staring after me with those big, brown eyes.'

She spluttered. 'I have done no such thing!' she maintained. 'Maybe you ought to get your ego deflated?'

'My ego seems to attract you just fine,' he replied, sounding a little smug.

Ginny could not believe him. How could anyone be that annoying? 'I can assure you, the only feeling I have for you right now is fury,' she said coldly *This is hardly the time for that twinge to return*, she reminded herself sternly, to no avail.

'Really?' He smirked at her and closed the distance between them. Her breath caught as he looked into her eyes and then slowly lowered his face to hers until her eyes closed of their own accord, and his lips touched hers. Somehow, her arms ended up wrapped around his shoulders and his firmly behind her back. She wasn't entirely sure how long time had passed when he drew back, but she *did* know she was out of breath and felt slightly light-headed from the kiss.

'Well, I guess I'll see you around,' Ginny said, blurting out the first thing that occurred to her.

'You can always hope,' Draco replied, that smirk, if possible, even wider.

The next morning, Ginny walked into the village once more, her aunt having sent her to buy more ingredients for the sun-block potion, as well as a new cauldron. ('I can't go myself, Ginevra...I'm a hundred and ten! And if you keep your wits about you, you might just meet a man.')

She was just done with her shopping when she ran into Draco again. He seemed to be always walking around on this island!

'Ginny,' he said, smiling slightly.

'Draco.' She would not show him that she was slightly embarrassed. Anyone could make the mistake of kissing a man after ... well, one glass of wine. She could hardly blame *that*.

'A cauldron?' he asked, seeing her purchase. 'You're not making love potions, are you?' *Great*. Of course he would refer to Muriel's shouting. But, for Draco, that one was actually mild.

'It appears I don't need them,' Ginny replied. 'I didn't slip anything into your drink last night.'

He chuckled. 'I was just on my way to eat lunch. Care to join me?'

She experienced that oh-so-familiar feeling of disbelief. Now he spent time around her of his own free will? 'Sure,' she said lightly, curious to see how this would play out.

As she sat down opposite him, feeling a little cautious, she noticed that his eyes glittered as if he was amused. But he didn't speak, just handed her the menu sitting on the table and lazily watched as she read it. His choice in a place to eat had surprised her. *Draco Malfoy at a Pizzeria*? If she wrote home about that, they would think she had stayed out in the sun too long. Then again, if she wrote home about eating lunch with Draco, they probably would come down to fetch her back home. Her mother certainly would lapse into hysterics.

She decided on a type of pizza and listened as Draco placed the order in what appeared to her ears to be flawless Italian. It took a lot of willpower not to look overly impressed. He *had* spent a lot of summers down here, after all. And for all she knew, he could be making mistakes by the dozen. But she knew that thought was simply uncharitable...his accent sure sounded impeccable.

When the waiter returned, he was bringing her pizza Napolitano, as well as Draco's order...what looked like seafood pizza. She couldn't help ogling at the sight. Did the man deliberately try to confuse her these days? She had no clue he could be this ... not snobby.

He noticed her look and returned her gaze. 'You're staring. It's starting to unsettle me. What's up?' he asked.

'It's just not what I expected you to choose,' she said.

'Why not?' Draco enquired, one eyebrow raised questioningly.

'I'd imagined something more...' Ginny searched for a word that wouldn't offend him. *Preentious? Extravagant? Snobbish? Expensive-looking?* 'Sophisticated.'

He snorted. 'Quality isn't determined by the time of preparation for a dish, or its elaborateness, or even its price,' he stated. 'Although, if you quote me on that, I'll hex you into the next century.'

She smiled. 'You wish!' she replied. 'With six older brothers, do you *really* think you could manage that?'

Draco looked a little calculatingly at her and smiled slightly. 'I wouldn't feel too safe, if I were you,' he said teasingly, and started eating.

Ginny felt her smile widen into a grin, quite on its own. It really was a little annoying that he could charm her with retorts like that. 'I feel quite safe, I can assure you. Besides, you wouldn't dare hex me.'

'And why would I not dare?'

'Because my hexes are quite powerful,' she threatened mildly. 'You would not want to provoke me.'

'I'm sure I've been up against tougher opponents,' he said flatly, sounding serious again. 'Anyway, this Pizzeria has been here for close to two hundred years. No restaurant survives that long without serving excellent food,' he added, as if wishing to change the topic. Or perhaps assure her that his choice was one of fine quality?

They talked on in surprisingly friendly terms for the rest of the meal before they rose and Ginny was about to walk away.

'Ginny, wait,' he called her back. 'I'm going back to England for a few days, but I'll be back by Thursday. Would you meet me outside my villa at one o'clock?' Was he asking her out? 'You *do* know the way,' he added with a smirk.

She ogled at him, for once lost for words.

'Well?' he snapped impatiently.

'Why not?' she replied, a little sharply. 'I don't have anything else planned.'

Draco just smiled, ignoring her sharp tone, and walked off up the street.

She turned back towards the chateau, her mind reeling. *Did I just say yes to go on a date with Draco Malfoy?* her mind marvelled. *Did I just say yes to Draco? This holiday is not turning out the way I expected.*