

The Thin Man

by duniazade

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

Author's Notes: *The Thin Man* was written for bethbethbeth during the Snuna Exchange on Livejournal. Her prompt was: *Everybody's intrigued when The Quibbler announces the marriage of Associate Editor Luna Lovegood to naturalist "Rolf Scamander," especially when they remember Newt Scamander and his wife Porpentina never had children or grandchildren.*

Many thanks to the wonderful Melusin for the invaluable help as beta and Britpicker. This is a slightly extended version; any remaining errors are entirely my own.

1. Fickle Mansion

Chapter 1 of 12

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Fickle Mansion, Friday June 1st 2012

Severus used to think of the house as a head--with the point of its long nose sticking into Knockturn Alley--where the narrow door would only become visible to those who partook of the Fidelius; that is, Luna and himself, except that he never went out by that opening. It was Luna who carried out their very profitable transactions with the suppliers of the more creative magical concoctions and rare potions ingredients that dwelt in the shadiest recesses of the Alley.

The magical gardens that stretched out in the back, under Undetectable Extension and Unplottable Charms, were the delectable body, in which boring, reassuring routine entwined with renewed surprise. They sloped gently down from the house, the first third consisting of sunny lawns, strewn with Flutterby bushes amidst the Screechsnaps and Honking Daffodils. The second third was half shadowed by large trees, planted far apart, and held the vegetable and herb garden as well as the magical cages for the birds. The last third sheltered the pens for the reptiles and other creatures that were bound to the ground and shadow. It was darker, thickly overgrown with younger,

hungrier vegetation. A Devil's Snare, undulating lazily, almost hid the little gate at the bottom that provided access to Muggle London. Sometimes, at night, Severus hexed the eager plant into immobility before he slipped through the gate to delight in the blissful anonymity of a world that denied the very possibility of his existence.

Fickle Mansion had been one of the first houses built in a time when Diagon Alley did not yet exist, and Knockturn Alley was the most fashionable avenue in Wizarding England. The Founders were still in their nappies, the Fickles and their relatives were powerful, and nobody had bothered yet with separating the Dark from the Light, nor folly from reason; the house and its gardens were endowed with all the commodities that magic could provide.

As he watched through the bow window of the kitchen, revelling in the scent of his mug of fresh coffee and trying to ignore the whiff of Gurdyroot infusion coming from the self-cooking kettle on the stove, Severus was about to observe one of those commodities at work.

The Flutterby bush, a few yards away from the window, seemed even more agitated than usual. Its branches were writhing frantically, at first in a seemingly disorderly pattern, then in a distinctly spiral one until a vortex formed in the middle of the quivering leaves. It whirled faster and faster, pulsing, until it spasmed before enlarging sufficiently to spout on the lawn a girl in a loose t-shirt, pleated skirt and blue Doc Martens.

She rolled on the grass, hands clutched to her chest, and when she got up, Severus glimpsed the pulsing ball of white fur in her left hand.

He almost smiled. The Schwarzschild wormhole gave access to points of the world that were beyond Apparition or even Portkeys, and a baby Lethifold was a true prize. Its immaculate fleece could be shorn at least twice before it turned midnight black, and it was worth many times its weight in Galleons.

Luna tucked her wand behind her ear, waved at him and headed off towards the pens at the back of the garden.

Raspberry Jam

Chapter 2 of 12

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The Schwarzschild wormhole had already closed, but the Flutterby still looked flustered when Severus passed it on his way to the Harpyria's cage under the beech trees.

Keyed to his magical signature, the invisible walls of the wards opened silently and shut again behind him. He waded through the thick raspberry bushes, cautiously approaching the ladder propped against the trunk of the bird's favourite perch.

The creature shifted awkwardly on the branch, long claws raking against the bark.

Severus stopped on the fourth rung of the ladder, pail in hand, waiting for the bloody beast to settle down.

To the ungainly body of a turkey, the Harpyria Ideobati joined a heavy, sulky human face. It reminded Severus of the suspicious landlady of that seedy pub in Spinner's End. Unlike the landlady, the Harpyria fed exclusively on raspberries, and the byproducts were precious. Her bowels both concentrated and fermented the stuff, providing a unique flavour to the raw material from which Severus would distill Aunt Fickle's favourite liquor: the only rent she demanded in exchange for the use of the grounds.

The ritual was always the same. Irritated by his presence, the creature would fret and shuffle back and forth on the branch, trying to keep one eye on the lush bushes, heavy with fragrant fruit, and the other on the intruder. Then, she would turn her rear end towards him, shoot a malevolent look over her wing and simultaneously let loose the most unearthly string of strident curses and a load of the sticky stuff.

Severus had by now got the hang of holding the pail exactly where the precious crap would fall. In fact, he had noticed that it always came after a particular item in the string of curses.

The Harpyria took a breath and began her shrill, drill-droning litany: "By Poseidon's pimpled bollocks and Prospero's pustulant prick, get lost in a ghou's arse, slimy Flobberworm spawn..."

Severus climbed another rung. The bloody bird shifted again, clicked menacingly her brass beak and screeched again: "... bowtruckle-legged biped, bugger off to the nine pits of hell to look after flaming Salazar's festering piles and Nimue's soggy knickers..."

The moment was approaching. Severus surreptitiously positioned the pail. The Harpyria tilted her ugly head and shot him a baleful, pointed look. The strident shriek was climbing now to coloratura heights:

"You couldn't hit a turd in a Delphi sewer, slippery Nargle shit on a stick *go eat rotten Troll brains on Freya's furry fanny..*"

At that moment, the garden shuddered. A deep, sick, groaning rumble as if the earth had been stuck through the bowels. Severus felt the rung slide under his feet, let the pail fall, grabbed the upright of the ladder with one hand and with the other clutched instinctively on the Harpyria's tail.

He felt the feathers slice through his hand, then a thick, lukewarm, sticky, overpowering goo fell on his head and slid down over his eyes and up his nostrils. The ladder swung and sent him reeling, and then he knew no more.

Weeping Willow Tears

Chapter 3 of 12

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The first thing he grew aware of was something or someone pulling him by the hair, presumably through the dire gates of hell; the second was a splash of cold liquid on his face, creeping into his ears and trickling into his nostrils. Through the nauseating sweetness of the sticky raspberry goo, it smelled familiar—bitter, darkly mineral—but he couldn't quite remember what it was.

He was on his back, in the grass. A second splash fell on his eyelids; light fingers moved over his face. The dreadful, overpowering ooze that had been distilled from innocent fruit in the Harpyria's alchemical bowels was washed away. He opened an eye tentatively. A sliver of blue sky tilted, then a straggle of flaxen hair unrolled over the swaying horizon.

"Don't move," said Luna. "This needs to be cleaned away before it sets."

He could feel the round warmth of her thighs at either side of his head.

She was kneeling behind him, a basin wedged between her legs; his head was craned back uncomfortably over the hard, rounded rim.

She finished washing his face and tugged on his hair again, tilting his head further back so that it was immersed to the hairline. The cold was now seeping to his scalp. Luna ran her fingers through his locks, parting them, and the black hair unfurled in the basin like dusky, sluggish seaweed, tendrils of ink swirling in the icy water. With each pass of her fingers, the cloying stench was diminishing. *I will never again approach raspberry jam*, he vowed silently. *I should have known something Dumbledore loved would be the death of me.*

She was now rubbing his scalp, slowly, methodically, with meticulous care, from the nape of the neck to the temples, circling the forehead and coming back to the crown and down again to the secret place where the spine joins the skull. The hateful scent was no more than a lingering presence in the distance, growing ever weaker until at last he could smell again the grass, the wet fabric of Luna's skirt and the faint honeysuckle fragrance of her warm body.

She lifted his head with one hand and began to wring his hair carefully. A very peculiar whiff of bitter, crushed vegetation joined the other scents.

He sat up abruptly and glared at her.

"You have washed my hair in a Pensieve?"

"We've always done that in the family for the difficult washings," she answered with a cheerful smile. "It loosens up the ideas, and it will make a great watering for Trobby and the vegetal doe."

"Using my whole reserve of Weeping Willow tears?" he asked in an outraged tone. "It's the only known solvent for Harpyria shit. How am I now supposed to distill the damn liquor for your blasted aunt?"

"That tremor," she said, wiping his hair with a fold of her skirt, "was probably Aunt Fickle dying. The house and the garden feel the passing of their owners and help them again through the gates.

Aunt Fickle's Will

Chapter 4 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

Luna carefully spilled half of the Pensieve's contents at the root of the cutting she had taken from Dobby's grave at Shell Cottage. It was a less-known trait of elves' physiology that they could reproduce vegetatively as well as through eggs. Dobby's tomb, however, had taken a very long time in producing any shoots.

The sapling was still formless, enfolded in its green sheath, but it vibrated gratefully. Luna poured the other half of the dark liquid at the feet of the vegetal doe.

She was splashing off the last of it when a lugubrious shriek rang out. The first drops of rain began to fall when they were on the lawn, halfway to the house, and they had just reached the door when the Augurey swept in and dropped the black-rimmed scroll on the threshold before vanishing away with another woeful cry, soggy wings flapping heavily in the downpour.

Luna unrolled the parchment on the way to the kitchen.

"Aunt Fickle passed away while the Crab was high in the sky—not a very good configuration, I have to say. She left the house to us... on condition that we marry before the next new moon at our place in the Forbidden Forest. Otherwise, it will go to the Riddick cousins, Brobdinag and Grondireck."

"Our place?" asked Severus.

"The place where all the Fickles, the Lovegoods, the Scamanders—even the Riddicks a long time ago—got married. It's the Nemus by the deepest pond in the Forest, so that the river gods can drop by easily."

Severus went very still. He had known it was too good to last.

"Is it possible to negotiate with the Riddicks?"

"They're a bit odd." Luna sounded hesitant.

Severus quirked an eyebrow.

"Or maybe not, considering they've got three-quarters of Ogre blood, but when they had eaten everything alive on the island, including all the sharks in the surrounding waters, gnawed the coconuts and started on the rocks..."

"And they would have the use of the Schwarzschild wormholes if they inherit this place?"

"Well, yes," said Luna.

Snape shivered. The whole world would be eaten.

"Of course we can't marry. You're dead," said Luna. "Except..."

"Except nothing," said Severus. "I'm dead, full-stop."

It would have been easy to corrupt the Supreme Pogwump, who presided at wizarding nuptials. Everyone knew the current Pogwump was Mundungus Fletcher, who donned a tufty wig for the occasion and took his one and only bath of the year. However, the Conjujo charm was cancelled in the presence of Polyjuice or in the absence of witnesses.

And there was no way in hell he'd play at being Severus Snape, resurrected war hero and romantic basket case.

He would have to move to bloody Durmstrang again and give private tuition in toenail-growing hexes to idiot parvenus.

Luna looked thoughtful. "I'm going to see my godmother, Porpentina."

Severus snorted. If anyone could be more hopeless than the Lovegoods, it was the Scamanders.

"Do you want some pudding?" asked Luna. "I've made gingerbread snaps and newt jelly."

Retorts and Runespoors

Chapter 5 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

Once Luna had left, Severus went to his potions lab in the cellar.

The last batch of Harpyria droppings was simmering happily in the copper cauldron on the blue flames. The pinkish fumes writhed in the glass retort like fat, lazy snakes, rising and falling.

His first impulse was to turn off the fire and vanish the whole load. On second thought, if Firewhisky was the usual tippie of the modern wizard, the Harpyria Raspberry Triple Sec had been all the rage in Aunt Fickle's generation. If he could find one or two eccentric fogeys, he could still sell it for a nice amount, especially as the nasty denizen of the cage under the beech trees was, to Severus' knowledge, the last of her kind to live in captivity.

He checked the temperature of the viscous concoction and slammed the strongest wards he knew around the whole installation, making sure not the faintest whiff of raspberry scent could drift from the alembic.

Then he attended to the other underway potions, sorted out the raw ingredients, tidied up the finished products cupboard, scoured the empty cauldrons, whetted the knives to dreamlike sharpness and polished them until they shone like mirrors.

By five o'clock, Luna still hadn't come back.

Severus made a tour of all the pens and cages, checked the wards and Summoned food when necessary. The Harpyria gave him a dirty look and uttered a string of unholy expletives when he passed by.

"Wait until the Riddicks take over," he muttered bitterly.

The elf sapling hadn't progressed much, but the vegetal doe had benefited enormously from the Pensieve watering. It was now almost perfectly formed with a foreleg slightly bent as if ready to bolt, and the ears were twitching.

He glanced at the tank containing the baby Lethifold—it had unrolled, and except for the lazy undulations, looked every bit like a small, white, straggly hearthrug. It would turn black in about three months, but the chances were good that he wouldn't see that. Then he stopped by the cage of the Runespoors.

The male was nowhere in sight—probably dozing under the pile of rocks that served as shelter. The female was coiled against the magical mesh. Two of her heads continued to feign indifference, but the critical one, Sally, reared and rubbed against the divide, greeting him in a flurry of hisses. He hadn't bothered to name the planner, who was keeping a watchful eye on him, nor the dreamer, still lolling on the floor with an absent gaze.

As often happens, the planner and the dreamer had ganged up on the critic and had almost shredded her throat. Severus, using both wandwork and dittany, had managed to save her, but she now needed a permanent reinforcing bandage to keep the head from drooping. Severus had procured unicorn hair wrappings and had moreover imbued them with a bitter potion, meant to dissuade the two other heads from biting again. It had worked.

He put a finger through the mesh and tickled under her chin. Sally hissed again, on a lower tone, flicked her soft tongue against his finger, just once, then drew back with utmost dignity. The audience was over.

The wizard stood up and took the path back to the house. He had some research to do.

The Gobstones Room

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

The white, opalescent Gobstone rolled towards him. It stopped five inches from the seventh hole, quivered menacingly and clouded with red before spouting a jet of clear liquid.

Severus ducked, but the jet still caught him on the arm. He rubbed it off absently before thinking better of it. Damn, it was Scratch Potion and it would sink through the cloth.

Finding the Gobstones Room hadn't been too difficult. While the front part of the house, where Luna and he lived on a daily basis, was relatively stable, the other rooms flickered in and out of existence, but they always grew from the central Room of Mathoms, which contained all the junk that had once been useful, might yet be useful, or never would be useful but had been passed from hand to hand as unwanted gifts and might yet be given to an unsuspecting relative. Severus had turned widdershins around the circumference of the room, wading through mountains of discarded brooms, broken cages, chipped portrait frames, dingy wickerwork furniture, false Erumpent horns and old boots. He had stopped to look at a pair of tiny, mother-of-pearl baby shoes, when he spotted the door with the little sphere incrusting in its middle. The cat eye marble had winked at him when he had touched the doorknob and had given access without further ado.

Trying to ignore the itch on his arm, he leaned again over the pitch, studying the positions.

On the other side of the soft sand arena, the opposing Gobstones were grouped together by size, from small as a pea to big as a Snargaluff pod. They were glimmering in all the colours of the known and lesser known rainbows; their insides were writhing with veins of storm, from which tiny malevolent faces, like pinpoints of lightning, were glowering at him. Each time he had won a point, one of them had been compelled to move towards the center of the pitch until they had aligned in a sinuous pattern, the smaller ones drawing the outlines of the map while the bigger ones signaled the locations of all the existing relatives of the Fickle family, ranked by closeness and/or level of annoyance potential.

The first one that had rolled into place was a nut-sized, pale blue agate. As soon as it had stopped, its inside had cleared and a tiny panel with the name of Xenophilus Lovegood, his location (Rook Tower by Plimpy River) and a few (not very respectful) character evaluations had appeared. Severus snorted – he got on rather well with the old fool and had even helped him to set up the new delivery system of *The Quibbler*, but the Gobstone description was certainly accurate.

He had already located the Scamanders, the Sinnans, the Hapys, the Shreks, the Proudfoot, the Baggins, and the contours of the seven continents of the Lower and Middle Earth, but the Riddicks were still hidden. His latest move had been a winning one. However, it had only earned him the jet of itchy potion.

He scratched his arm again and made his decision.

Slowly, deliberately, he sent the biggest of his marbles, a golden one that mimicked a Snitch, into the Losing Pit.

The Gobstones on the opposite side stood still for a moment, then rolled grudgingly towards him. They formed the outline of a tiny island off the east coast of Africa. There was a brief snap of jaws inside the biggest marble, then a shredded grey panel went reluctantly up, bearing in red letters a single word: "Riddicks."

Fwooper Mail

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

By eleven o'clock, Luna had still not turned up.

Severus took two steps back and inspected his travelling coat critically. It was hanging in the middle of the bedroom, supported by the Vestemlevis spell that made it turn very slowly, spreading its folds for easy inspection of the lining.

"Stop," he said.

The cloak stopped obediently in mid-air. Severus checked the hidden pocket in the twenty-fourth division of the right hem, gauging the magical extension spells. With the addition of an Air Charm, it would do nicely for Sally and, alas, the other two heads of the Runespoor. The dreamer wasn't much of a bother, but the planner irritated the hell out of him.

He slid his hand over the other side of the cloak. Spare wand, liquorice allsorts, spare silver dagger, reading glasses... There was a very small pocket above the last division of the left hem. His fingers closed on the thick, black glass of the tiny bottle.

It was a powerful potion—one drop was enough to corrode and send into nothingness seventy square miles of land. The Riddicks' island—he had checked—was about fifty square miles. But it was a hundred miles from the nearest coast, and flying over the devastated island, even under Disillusionment, would be risky. Ogre sense of smell was extremely keen, and combined with wizarding powers, it could lead to unpredictable outcomes.

The house was very quiet.

He folded and put away the cloak, put on his old nightshirt and slipped between the tangerine sheets. He stayed awake for a long time, trying to ignore the faint peppermint and honeysuckle fragrance of Luna's pillow, before falling into a troubled sleep, rife with ogre teeth, exploding islands, and toenail-growing hexes.

~*~*~*~

He woke to the hopeful scent of warm coffee and the contented hum of the house.

Luna was seated at the kitchen table, nibbling the iced head off a gingerbread man between sips of her Gurdyroot infusion.

"Want some coffee?" She pushed the steaming mug towards him.

He was going for it when the Fwooper swept in, dropped *The Quibbler* into his outstretched hand and swooshed out in a garish, frenzied flurry of multicoloured feathers.

"I can't get used to these damn birds," he growled.

"I'm glad you thought up the serial Silencing Charm for them. Daddy is very grateful. They're faster than owls and get a lot of attention."

There was no answer. She finished nibbling the head and looked up.

"Severus?"

Snape had unfolded *The Quibbler* and was staring at the front page. He was as white as chalk. Finally, shaking his head, he turned the paper towards Luna.

The front page read: 'Associate Editor Luna Lovegood to marry naturalist Rolf Scamander, son of the famous magizoologist Newt Scamander and his wife Porpentina.'

Her eyes were guileless.

"Aren't you happy?"

"Lovegood." It was a raspy hiss. "The Scamanders have no children."

She tilted her head and, for some unfathomable reason, he noticed the white icing from the ginger biscuit had melted and stuck to her fingers.

"Precisely."

His lips half-opened, closed again, twitched, fighting against some inner pressure, and widened in an irresistible grin.

Luna smiled and delicately licked her forefinger.

Weasley versus Wittgenstalt

Chapter 8 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

21 Dulwich Road, Lambeth. Saturday, June 2nd 2012

The sun-flooded windows of the Granger-Weasleys' living room at 21 Dulwich Road opened onto Brockwell Park. At Ron's insistence, Hermione had managed to put a bit of the park under Muggle Repelling charms and convert it into a private Quidditch pitch.

Harry stretched and yawned.

Ginny had taken the children—all of them, Rose and Hugo included—to a Quidditch camp in France. Harry and Ron were on duty, and Ginny knew better than to ask Hermione. The Trio had reunited again, in blissful peace, over a late breakfast.

"How is the portrait going?" asked Ron. He was toying with his unsweetened porridge.

Harry shot a guarded look at Hermione, but she was deeply engrossed in the *International Journal of Arithmancy*. He scraped the top of his treacle tart and smoothly dumped it in Ron's bowl before answering.

"The background is great. You wouldn't believe how this new painter has got the Potions office just right: you can almost touch the slimy things in the jars on the shelves. It made me squirm, I swear—incredible detail. The problem is the man himself; however much Ricci paints, the paint is just absorbed into the canvas or something. It leaves like a black hole. A Snape-shaped hole, all right: perfectly recognisable. Still, it's not a portrait. Ricci is getting frustrated—I'm afraid he'll quit like the three others."

Hermione shut the journal abruptly and flung it on the table. Ron leaned over.

"That Wittgenstalt again?"

"Of all the narrow-minded, stubborn, provincial smugness... How dare he claim the fundamentals of my reasoning are not sound! That old fraud! His equations are all wrong!"

She was reaching for *Analytical and Numerical Approaches to Problems in Topomantic Analysis* when the Fwooper swept in and dropped *The Quibbler* into Ron's porridge.

"Watch out!" cried Ron, trying to wipe the splashes from his tracksuit. "I wish they wouldn't use those crazy birds."

"It's excellent publicity," muttered Hermione, pointing her wand to Scourgify Ron's clothes. "Everyone recognises them at once, and at least they've put that Silencing Charm on them."

"What's this?" said Harry, rescuing the paper and goggling at the front page.

Hermione snatched it from his hands and read:

'Associate Editor Luna Lovegood to marry naturalist Rolf Scamander, son of the famous magizoologist Newt Scamander and his wife Porpentina.'

"Well, that's nice for Luna," said Ron.

"But I thought the Scamanders had no children?" asked Hermione. "Porpentina is the best Arithmancer since Pythagoras, but she never publishes. They say she keeps her best discoveries for improving the layout of their house."

"No children." Harry nodded. "I remember the file very well. He has the funniest forenames: Newton 'Newt' Artemis Fido. He's been in the Brazilian rainforest for quite a

while now, researching Fire Slugs," he added wistfully.

Hermione bit her lip. "Hang around. I'm just going to check something."

One hour later, she was hailing them down from the Quidditch pitch behind the house.

"Come, quick. I've got a Portkey to the Scamanders."

The Proof of the Pudding

Chapter 9 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

The Portkey had dropped them off directly onto the Persian rug in the Scamanders' living room.

Sprawled on the sofa, glass in hand, Harry swirled the amber liquid, sniffed it appreciatively and let his eyes wander again over the place.

The room was of generous proportions and, despite the good amount of cosy furniture, chintz and china, looked airy. The large French windows, facing southwards, opened directly onto the lawn, letting the sun flood in.

Tea had been served for Hermione and Porpentina, while Ron and Harry had been left in possession of the vast sofa, the coffee table, a lavish assortment of sandwiches and a tall unlabelled bottle of what was... *the best Firewhisky I've tasted in ages*, thought Harry, taking another sip. *Old Newt's research on Fire Slugs is definitely paying off.*

Ron, eyes half-closed over his own tumbler, was humming tunelessly, right forefinger tapping the rhythm on the arm of the sofa. At his feet, three Kneazles played with something that bounced, giggled and looked like a silky black Puffskein.

At the other end of the room, Hermione and Mrs. Scamander were bending over a thick sheaf of papers spread over the desk.

They must have been at it for hours, thought Harry. The light that fell through the great windows on the vast rug at his feet was already oblique and had woken up the figures in the thousand colours of the woven forest. Deer, rabbits, lions and stranger beasts slunk through the trees, while the hunters checked the strings of their bows and spurred their horses.

The Kneazles seemed to have noticed too. Their play was quicker, more excited and, between two gentle jabs at the black Puffskein, they tried to grab the animals in the rug. Finally, the Puffskein, still giggling, rolled at Ron's feet. He bent, grinning from ear to ear, and tickled the soft fur.

An excited squeak from Hermione drew Harry's sluggish attention.

"... so, in a topomantic approach of non-inclusive logics, he results from a double negation and so to speak, doesn't doesn't exist?" she said, beaming at Porpentina.

Tall, dark-skinned and wrapped in saffron robes, Porpentina Scamander looked both majestic and motherly. Her black hair was tied high on the head, but the forest of multicoloured quills pinned through the two-tiered bun trailed low on the nape of her neck, quivering at every movement. As Harry looked, she took out one of them and drew an intersecting circle through Hermione's diagram.

"You could use that expression for a wider public and draw a parallel with the distinction between the unobservable-in-principle, or unobservable absolutely, as distinct from the relatively unobservable; it would perhaps be preferable to say "unexists," though, of course, only the symbolic expression is adequate." The older woman drew a series of scribbles under the diagram. "From a cosmological angle, it's not so much a displacement in Riemannian space as a materialization of the piercing through folded multi-dimensional space and time; but it's better to envision it as a congruence under certain assumptions taken in context, with a uniqueness quantification. As you know, with the advent of Kripke's models, the law of the excluded middle is disallowed since one can construct, via Gödel's incompleteness theorems, a mathematical statement that can be neither proven nor disproved. As realized in specific disciplines like Fuzzy Sets and Systems, this approach through Topomantic Logic is actually more rigorous than conventionally founded Arithmancy. I have to say that most Arithmancers, being ignorant of Muggle research, have trouble understanding these notions."

"That's exactly the problem with Wittgenstalt, Mrs. Scamander..."

"Call me Porpentina, dear. You're the most gifted young Arithmancer I've seen since Perenelle Flamel."

"Thank you, Porpentina. As I was saying, Wittgenstalt has never accepted to consider combining Muggle and magical contributions to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, or he might have understood better the problem of Schrödinger's cat. While your elegant solution to the question of quantum decoherence proposes a topomantic intersection of N sets of E with $N+1$ sets of non- E , meaning that your son could be considered as the scalar product of two vectors, or the vectorial product of two scalars, and he would both exist and non-exist depending on the state of the observer."

"Definitely, my dear."

"For any values of n in $n+1$ spaces."

"Indeed."

"And this means," -- Hermione sprang to her feet -- "that Wittgenstalt's equations are proved defective!"

Scamander Park

Chapter 10 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

At Porpentina's words, the Kneazles, tabby one in front, immediately got in line and marched through the French windows to the path of white gravel beyond. Harry and Hermione, having said their goodbyes, followed them.

But as Ron was stepping out, the black Puffskein rolled towards him, squeaking, and began to climb his leg. He froze, one foot over the threshold.

Porpentina smiled, and the feather quills planted in her double-tiered chignon quivered. A quick thrill of colour, waving from pink to red and back again, ran through them.

"I think Lucy's chosen you, Mr. Weasley, and as you already have a foot over my threshold, you'll have to take her with you."

"Oh... all right."

Ron bent awkwardly to scoop up the handful of soft black fur, but it had already escalated to his waist, and it took advantage of his fumbling to reach the shoulder and huddle up against his neck, chirping softly in his ear. He tilted his head against the silken ball of fluff and grinned sheepishly. "Thank you, Mrs. Scamander."

Outside, the Kneazles had sat down on the white gravel and were waiting impatiently, eyes narrowed. The tip of Mauler's tail was tapping the minutest drum against the ground, and Miller's left ear was twitching as if a drunken ant had decided to explore its depths. As soon as Ron joined his friends, their furry guardians leapt to their feet and surrounded the trio in a spearhead formation. Hoppy was leading the way, tail proudly held up like a flag.

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The path wound across a vast meadow with scattered trees before seeming to disappear, far away, into a very high and dark hedge of evergreens. The sun was already low in the sky, tinging a few purple clouds with a lining of copper rays.

"Is that a giraffe?" asked Harry, pointing at an animal that was crossing the lawn with a strange, ambling gait. "I didn't know the Scamanders had a safari park."

"That's an Aepycamelus," corrected Hermione. "Tertiary era, early to late Miocene. A cousin of the modern camel. Not at all related to modern Giraffidae, which..."

A large shadow dived over the path and the trio ducked. Ron instinctively cradled Lucy with his hand as she clutched at his shoulder.

"I saw that in a Muggle book," whispered Harry.

"I hope you did. That's a pteranodon," said Hermione, brushing back a lock of hair that had fallen on her forehead and screwing her eyes up to follow the triangular, dark shape as it flapped majestically into the sunset.

"No kidding," said Harry. He looked a mite pale. "But... how?"

"A simple and elegant application of Porpentina's work to the Transfiguration-related problem of folding multi-dimensional space and time. I'm so glad we came!"

They had reached the high, forbidding hedge when the herd of Aethonons grazing on the side of the path snorted, stirred and began to gallop before taking flight in a flurry of powerful wings. On their far left, a silver ribbon gleamed in the dusky distance.

"There's a river there," said Ron, leaning over.

"Keep to the path, Ron." Hermione sounded worried.

"But there's something... someone in that river. I thought it waved at me."

"Could be old Scamander. He's a river god - we were told in History of Magic, don't you remember?"

"Doesn't look so old to me," muttered Ron, shading his eyes with his hand and taking three strides off the path. "Hey, what is he holding? Blimey..."

"Ron, come back to the path!" hissed Hermione.

It was too late. From between the dark trees, a long, sinuous shape towered above the hedge, then arched and plunged towards Ron, winding thrice around his waist and lifting him from the ground. Harry lunged forward, grabbing Ron's legs, but it made no difference. The Kneazles screeched but stayed on the path. Hermione screamed and lashed a *Diffindo* at the monstrous form, but missed.

Lucy, however, had leapt from Ron's shoulder to the surface of the writhing tentacle and from there to the ground. She scurried towards the hedge where she gripped the thickest of the trunks, hooking eight long legs around it.

For a moment, the gigantic, thrashing limb was immobilised. It was long enough for Hermione, who took aim and shouted: "Sectumsempra!"

The tentacle was neatly severed ten feet at the apex of its curve. Ron and Harry fell in a heap; the slimy coils around Ron's waist unrolled limply, while the flailing stump jerked back across the hedge and disappeared.

"I thought you didn't like that spell," panted Harry who had got to his feet and was dragging Ron back towards the path. "Hey, what's that?"

"It's far more precise." There was the slightest trembling in Hermione's voice, but her wand was steady, still aimed at the top of the hedge. "And that was a Squiddiform Manticore. I thought they were extinct."

Ron muttered darkly.

"No, this," said Harry, showing her the fine, silky threads clinging to his palm. They ran down along his legs in irregular strands, like the frayed ends of a rope, and coalesced on the ground into a thick, black cord slithering towards the shadows of the hedge. He pulled tentatively and Lucy lurched out of the shadows.

She looked exhausted as she swayed towards Ron, twitching on her eight spindly legs. When she reached his feet, she tried to climb up but instead collapsed.

Ron looked thunderstruck.

"Let's face it, mate," said Harry, grinning. "We owe our lives to a spider."

"*Mygalomorpha Amicula Recumbens*," murmured Hermione. "Extremely rare."

Ron bent and slipped his hand under the soft ball of fur, scooping it up carefully. The long legs dangled for a moment, then with a visible effort, Lucy retracted them and lay, shivering, in her friend's palm. Tiny drops of dew trembled like diamonds on the tip of the long, silky hairs.

The first stars had lit the sky.

The Kneazles yowled urgently.

"I'll be glad to get home too," grinned Harry.

Ron tucked Lucy into the crook of his shoulder.

Hermione sheathed her wand, took the boys' hands in her own and pivoted. It was with a queasy relief that Harry and Ron felt the swirl of Disapparition engulf them.

A Slice of the Man

Chapter 11 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

Fickle Mansion, nineteen days later...

The vegetal doe had grown beautifully. Perfectly formed, she looked, in the slanted light of the dusk, ready to detach. Only the thinnest of threads still rooted the points of her hooves to the rich soil.

Luna crouched to the left, holding the wooden bowl, and stroked her side. The smooth, luscious green flank quivered.

Severus felt along the sternoclavicular joint and poised the tip of the dagger on the subclavian vein. A short thrust, and the milkblood began to flow, a lactescent, thick sap that turned to dark red as it fell into the bowl.

The doe tensed and strained against her roots. Luna soothed her again.

When the bowl was full, Severus applied a marigold leaf on the wound and pressed carefully, whispering a few words. At once, the leaf blended in the vegetal skin, as if there never had been a wound.

The doe pulled one last time, hard. The roots gave way; she leapt to her freedom and disappeared into the bushes.

"Here, or in the house?" asked Severus.

"In the house," answered Luna. "I want to watch the news."

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Luna leaned over and tapped the small TV on the floor with her wand, then lay back on the pillows with a satisfied sigh.

The black and white image whirled, then, as the sound came in, stabilised. The chubby presenter winked at her. She winked back and reached out with her naked foot, pushing the set around so that she was just out of his vision field. He strained against the frame.

"I need both your feet," grumbled Severus.

He was kneeling on the rug, well out of the presenter's line of sight, the bowl of milkblood in reach of his right hand.

Except for the livid flicker of the TV, a single, floating candle lighted the room.

Luna obediently brought back her foot.

Severus was now holding both her feet in his left hand. In the pale light, they looked like twin almonds, fresh in their shell. He waved the candle nearer, dipped his right forefinger into the milkblood and began to paint. From the point of the toes, up the instep, the unbroken string of symbols expanded slowly towards the ankle.

"And now," the presenter was saying, "the most anticipated programme of this evening. I'm honoured to host *The Magic Hour* talk show, and this evening's subject is the Lovegood-Scamander wedding that is supposed to happen tomorrow evening before the new moon shows its crescent. I'm very pleased to welcome Mrs. Granger-Weasley, the renowned Arithmancer, whose last article in the *International Journal of Arithmancy* is said to be Bridget Wenlock Prize material, as well as Professor Wittgenstalt from the Wizarding University of Lübeck..."

There was a brief shuffle. The sound derailed and screeched with interference, then picked up again: "... I'm sorry, but it seems Professor Wittgenstalt has had to attend to a personal emergency. Miss Lavender Brown, from the "True Hearts" Agency, has volunteered to replace him. We are also greeting Mrs. Molly Weasley, Family Undersecretary, Ms. Rita Skeeter and Mr. Rubeus Hagrid. And now, Mrs. Granger-Weasley, could you please explain in simple words how this marriage is possible?"

Luna giggled. "It tickles."

"Just be still."

The interlaced runes had wound around the right leg and were plunging in the crease of the thigh before climbing again towards the navel.

"Mr. Scuttlebutt, I regret that my distinguished colleague saw fit to leave in such a hurry, but in simple words, I can tell you that I have proved, by a rather straightforward application of the premises of Muggle paraconsistent logics to Arithmantic hitherto unchallenged axioms, that for a given set of conditions, the appearance of an existential singularity was possible under the principle of explosion, or *ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet*."

Severus stopped to kiss the navel before filling it with milkblood and resuming the complex interweaving down the left leg towards the foot.

"Just a moment, please... Mr. Hagrid?"

"Never taught young Rolf, I'm pretty sure of that."

"Thank you. Miss Brown?"

"Truth is in the eye of the lover."

"As it should be. Thank you. Ms. Skeeter?"

The dark lace had already dried up on the left toes. Severus put down her foot and took the right hand.

"My own investigations revealed that a Muggle information organ, known as the HP Lexicon, lists Rolf Scamander as being either the son or the grandson of Newt and Porpentina. How does Mrs. Granger-Weasley explain that?"

The filigree of charms glided smoothly to the tip of the left fingers.

"In even simpler words, Ms. Skeeter, it would prove my point that Rolf Scamander exists as a set of possibilities including non-existence. How an observer would perceive him would depend on the complex coordinates defining said observer's position in a multi-dimensional space and time existential contiguity."

"But," Molly interrupted acridly, "wouldn't that be like marrying more than one man?"

Severus rested his head on Luna's knees. He was shaking with silent laughter.

Chuckling, she lifted his head between her painted hands. From behind the curtains of black hair, a sliver of white face grinned at her before the kiss obscured it.

An Ancient Place in the Woods

Chapter 12 of 12

Trust Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist.

"... now this Korzybsky is the top art critic, so he came and said Ricci had invented negative art and was a genius. Ricci was very happy."

"And asked for twice the money," added Ginny tartly.

The Potters and the Granger-Weasleys were teetering on the mossy path towards the edge of the Forbidden Forest where the Thestral-driven carriages were waiting.

"Great wedding," slurred Ron. "Best Firewhisky in the world." He stumbled, caught himself and tucked against his shoulder a shrilly twittering Lucy.

"Special Newt's reserve," Harry announced with great pride. "Distills the stuff himself, straight from the strongest Fire Slugs."

"The pictures on her hands and feet were lovely. Mum, can I have them when I marry?" asked Rose.

"Of course, dear. Many Muggles do that too, you know." Hermione's enunciation was painstakingly precise.

"The tiara was beautiful. Shame I couldn't see the groom—wonder what he looked like. Oops." Ron had stopped to pick up Hugo's teddy bear.

"He had a big nose," piped Albus Severus.

"You prat," spat James. "One can't see him. Didn't Aunt Hermione explain?"

"That's not what she said, but you wouldn't understand."

"Stop that, you two." Ginny's voice was firm. The two boys sulked but kept silent.

"... I don't know," mused Harry. "I couldn't see either, not really—but... it was impressive. Like a rift in the night... When they passed under the bower, it looked like the branches were making a crown for him, too..." Harry hesitated. "Like he was my Patronus... only not white, you know?"

"You've had too much Firewhisky, mate." Ron guffawed and slapped him on the back. "Anyway, trust old Luna to marry someone who doesn't exist."