

I Know What You Did Last Halloween

by peskipiksi

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Happy He Who Can Flee That Which Cannot Altered Be

Chapter 1 of 3

Arthur Weasley is in trouble with the Ministry again. And Snape is only making things worse.

Another one for Very Small Prophet, who will, I hope, approve of the casting.

Inspired by an old SND prompt from debjunk: "Snape is forced to attend the Weasleys' Halloween fancy dress party as a bat." This takes place the following spring.

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Molly Weasley was pacing around the Burrow's kitchen in a flap. How could Arthur have been so stupid? Hadn't he learned his lesson six years ago with a fine they could ill afford? Evidently not, because the first thing he had bought with his savings from his new job as Head of the Muggle Liaison office was another run-down old car. He hadn't flown this one, nor, thank Merlin, had the boys, but someone at the Ministry had got wind of the fact that it *could* fly, the loophole in the law had been closed, and now Arthur was up in front of the Wizengamot again. At this very moment!

Charlie Weasley, home for a fortnight's holiday, steered his agitated mother into a chair and forced into her hands a cup of tea into which he had poured a generous measure of Firewhisky. 'Calm down, Mum; it'll be OK,' he soothed. 'As long as Dad keeps his temper he'll be fine. Culpeo Malfoy's the best lawyer in the business, they say. He'll get Dad off the charges, I'm sure.'

What Charlie really *wasn't* sure about was why his father had turned to the Malfoy family for support. He'd come recommended by Severus Snape, who seemed to have been mellowed by the war to an extent Charlie would never have believed possible. The Ministry had recognised his contribution to the Order of the Phoenix with a First Class Order of Merlin, and the former Phoenix members knew, but never mentioned, the events of his past, treating him instead as a valued friend, and attempting to rehabilitate him back into the Wizarding world. Amazingly it seemed to be working. Snape had even attended the Weasleys' Halloween fancy dress party last year. Molly had explained to her family that she couldn't bear the idea of Snape brooding on the anniversary of Lily's death, and oughtn't they to invite him with the rest of the Order? To everyone's astonishment, he had accepted. And now he had gone out of his way to persuade Lucius Malfoy's cousin to represent Arthur in court. How times had changed.

Suddenly, the largest hand on the Weasley family clock swung to 'travelling', and a moment later Mr Weasley burst through the front door in a temper such as Charlie had never seen before, Lawyer Malfoy scurrying behind him remonstrating in a high pitched whine. 'I did tell you not to...'

Arthur threw himself down in an armchair and kicked off his shoes. Molly regarded him anxiously.

'Arthur, dear...'

'Two weeks,' said Arthur, morosely. 'Two weeks in Azkaban.'

Molly and Charlie stared at him, identical looks of shock on the faces.

'Azkaban?' said Charlie blankly. Even though new Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, had done what Dumbledore had begged Fudge to do two years ago, and substituted human guards for the Dementors, the thought of the dank, forbidding fortress still made every wizard in the country shudder.

Molly moved to her husband's side. 'Oh, Arthur. I thought... a fine... like last time.'

'Well, that's just the point, isn't it?' Arthur groaned. 'They say I didn't learn my lesson last time, that something more salutary was called for. They were debating whether to give me a week, and then this idiot,' he gestured to the lawyer cringing by the sitting room door, 'had to stick his oar in, and they doubled it!'

Culpeo Malfoy stopped cringing and stood upright indignantly. 'I told you to let me handle it, but you lost your temper! You shouted at the court.'

Arthur talked over him. 'You babbled; you stuttered; you dropped your notes all over the courtroom floor!'

'You flustered me!' protested the lawyer.

'Get out!'

'You can appeal. I'd be delighted to represent you for an increased fee, of course.'

'Get out before I throw you out!'

The lawyer bristled. 'I would advise you not to threaten me, sir. I am an expert in civil litigation, and would sue you for damages. Indeed, I should sue for defamation of my professional reputation!'

'I am glad to hear you are an expert in something,' countered Arthur loudly. 'Unfortunately for me, it's not criminal defence!'

Charlie stepped forward, rolling up his sleeves to show brawny arms strengthened by years of dragon-training. 'I am not threatening you, sir. I am merely requesting that you leave this house immediately. You are upsetting my mother.' He propelled Malfoy gently but firmly to the door, and shut it behind him.

As silence descended over The Burrow, Molly Weasley began to cry. 'Azkaban, Arthur! Two weeks! You'll miss the whole of Charlie's visit!'

Arthur put his arms around her. 'Come on now, Molly; it's not that bad. If I comply with my bail, I'll be out for Charlie's last night.'

'Bail?' said Molly confusedly. 'It sounds like they're going to fish you out of the sea.'

'They're trying a Muggle invention. I paid fifty Galleons, and they let me come home to see you. As long as I present myself at the Azkaban gates by nine o'clock tomorrow morning, I'll get the money back.'

'I don't care about the money, Arthur,' Molly sniffled. 'I just want you home.'

'I know, Mollywobbles. But I'll be perfectly OK. There are no Dementors any more, after all.'

Charlie grimaced. 'There may not be Dementors, Dad, but you'll still have Argus Filch to contend with. Rather you than me.'

Argus Filch had walked out of Hogwarts in disgust at the end of the last school year. He had never been happy since Dolores Umbridge left, and the loss of Amycus and Alecto Carrow, combined with the discovery that Headmaster Snape had never really been on his side, had, he claimed, made his position untenable. So he was now exercising his penchant for punishment and talent for misery as the new Governor of Azkaban.

Arthur collapsed back into the armchair. 'Merlin's beard! I'd forgotten that. I'm not sure I wouldn't rather have the Dementors!' He lapsed into a brooding silence, not even stirring when there was a knock at the door.

'Hello, Severus, dear; do come in,' said Molly in relief. 'Arthur's had a bit of bad news, I'm afraid. Do see if you can cheer him up. I've got to start dinner; I want to feed him up before he goes to that awful place!'

'I'll help you, Mum,' called Charlie, scuttling into the kitchen after his mother. It was all right for her and Dad, they hadn't been taught by Snape, but Charlie simply couldn't get used to him being a friend of the family. He always had the sneaking suspicion Snape had an ulterior motive.

'So,' said Snape, sitting down and accepting the glass of home-made wine Arthur had poured him. 'I'm to cheer you up, am I? It's just as well I have an invitation for Lucius Malfoy's masked ball birthday celebrations, isn't it?' He took a gold-edged card out of his pocket and twirled it around in his fingers.

'Malfoy Manor,' snorted Arthur. 'I'm not going anywhere near that family again! Thanks to their useless cousin, I've got to report to Azkaban for a two-week stretch.'

Snape grimaced. 'When?'

'Tomorrow morning.'

'Then come with me tonight. Come and take your revenge by drinking their champagne stock dry and puncturing the lawyer's inflated ego! Think of it as my apology for such a bad legal recommendation. It's the least I can do after enjoying your hospitality at Halloween. Hogwarts is hardly conducive to parties, so this is the only way I can return the favour.'

'I was planning to stay home with Molly.'

'Molly asked me to cheer you up. Enjoy yourself at the party tonight, and Azkaban won't seem so bad in the morning. Especially if you've destroyed Culpeo Malfoy's reputation in the meantime.'

'How can I go out gallivanting when I'm on bail, Severus?'

Severus drew a tiny bottle from the recesses of his dress robes. 'Polyjuice Potion. A new formula I invented. It only needs to be taken once to last twelve hours.'

'Whose hair's in it?' Arthur asked, taking the little bottle dubiously.

'Mine.'

'Yours! Really, Severus; I can't go to this party as you! I... well, I just can't.'

'Ah, but this bottle has been modified by me. You will merely resemble me slightly. I shall introduce you as a distant cousin on my mother's side. Your name will be Mr Fox, I think, since that is what you will be doing: deceiving everyone. Now hurry; you must change if we are to get there at all this evening.'

Arthur hurried. Snape's temper was still volatile, and Arthur really didn't want to upset him, especially after his choice of lawyer had proved such a disaster. Besides, Arthur had to admit the prospect of showing Culpeo Malfoy up in front of his family was inviting.

When Molly returned from the kitchen, Snape was standing by the fire examining Arthur's collection of Muggle technical manuals. 'Where's Arthur?' she demanded.

'Changing his clothes. I am afraid, Molly, that I have been ordered by Azkaban to escort Arthur there immediately.'

She looked crestfallen. 'I thought he was on the ball, or the bales, or something?'

'Argus Filch has a prior engagement this evening. Apparently he wants to make sure everyone is "under lockdown" before he hands over command to his subordinates.'

Just then Arthur bounded down the stairs in dress robes and a state of excited anticipation. His wife glared at him suspiciously. 'Arthur! Why are you wearing your dress robes to go to prison?'

'Oh, um, I thought I should set a good example, Molly, dear. You know, being from the Ministry,' Arthur mumbled, suddenly sheepish. Then he put his arms around his wife. 'Goodbye, Mollywobbles,' he whispered. 'Charlie will take care of you.'

'Oh, Arthur. I shall be so worried about you. I shan't get a wink of sleep tonight.'

'Nor will he,' Snape murmured to himself, smirking.

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'Who's it from?' asked Harry, staring at the letter in Hermione's hand.

He, Hermione and Ron were perched on his bed in the eighth-year dormitory. All seventh-year students had returned to Hogwarts to take their NEWTS, which were interrupted so comprehensively last year, and a new wing had been built to accommodate the extra students.

'It doesn't say,' replied Hermione. 'It's anonymous. But it's got to be from Draco, hasn't it? Who else would give me an invitation to a party at Malfoy Manor?'

Harry looked stunned. 'Malfoy? Why would he suddenly start being nice to us?'

'I don't know,' mused Hermione. 'Maybe he's sorry for how he treated me, now Voldemort's gone. Maybe it's from his parents in gratitude for you telling them he was alive last year. The whole family ran away from the Death Eaters in the Battle of Hogwarts. I really think they're trying to turn over a new leaf.'

'You're not thinking of going?' demanded Harry incredulously.

'I thought I might, actually,' said Hermione defiantly.

'You can't actually want to go back to Malfoy Manor after what we went through last year!'

'I think it's a good idea exorcise old ghosts.'

'You're going to bunk off school when we're supposed to be revising for our NEWTs? *Who are you and what have you done with Hermione Granger?*'

'I'm fed up with studying. We all need a break. The war taught me you have to live for today. You never know what's going to happen next.' She glanced at Ron, but didn't need to say more.

Ron contributed to the conversation for the first time since Hermione had opened the letter. 'You're not going there on your own. If you go, we're going too.'

Hermione knew Ron too well to argue, especially when his ears were going that red. 'OK. Now. Disguises. It's a masked ball, but we're too easily recognised to rely on masks.'

'Polyjuice Potion,' suggested Harry.

'No time. The ball's tonight. And Slughorn hasn't kept Polyjuice out in the open since Malfoy stole some in our sixth year. We'll have to use Transfiguration. We'll turn you back into Dragomir Despard, Ron, like when we broke into Gringotts. Harry, you can be his brother. I'll get you some coloured contacts so you won't need your glasses. Oh, I wish we were all Metamorphmagi; it would make this much easier!'

She flicked her wand at her own hair, turning it blonde and poker-straight. Her eyes became palest blue. A final flick of the wand produced a Venetian carnival mask, the type which cover the whole face in elaborate red and gold papier-mâché.

'Wow!' exclaimed Ron. 'You look like Fleur!'

'Now there's a thought,' said Hermione.

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Molly and Charlie had just sat down to the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding intended to sustain Mr Weasley through his time in jail ('Come on, Mum, no sense in letting good food go to waste,' Charlie had reasoned), when there was a loud knock at the front door.

'I'll go, Mum.'

On the doorstep was a skinny, pimply wizard who couldn't have been older than nineteen, wearing the official Ministry uniform of the new Azkaban guards. 'Mr Weasley?' he demanded.

'Yeah,' said Charlie suspiciously.

'I have a warrant for your arrest and subs... subs... subsequent incark... incarceration in Azkaban,' said the visitor, trying to sound official, but stumbling over the unfamiliar words.

'Who the hell are you?'

'Now, sir; there's no need to swear. My name is Kevin Shunpike and I will be escorting you to your temporary place of abode this evening. Mr Filch has resk... rescinded all bail applications on account of a prior engagement, and I must ask you to accompany me immediately.'

Charlie opened the door a little wider. 'I think you'd better come in for a minute.' He led the way into the Burrow's kitchen. 'This is Kevin Shunpike, who is here on official business,' he announced, with more than a hint of sarcasm.

'Kevin Shunpike? Stan's brother?' Molly turned to the young wizard in confusion. 'But this isn't... Arthur's already...'

Before she could finish the sentence, Charlie had grabbed her arm and steered her to the other side of the kitchen. 'Look, Mum,' he whispered. 'I'm going to have to take Dad's place. The lad's obviously an ingredient short of a potion, but if "Mr Weasley" doesn't go with him, Dad'll be looking at two years, not two weeks.'

'But Severus has already taken him to...'

'Yeah, well, I don't trust Snape further than I could throw a Hungarian Horntail. He's obviously encouraged Dad to do a bunk; God knows why. Just find Dad and get him to Azkaban ASAP. He owes me. Big time.'

'But Charlie, dear, you can't go to that awful place!' Molly was on the verge of tears again.

'I don't think I have a choice. Not if we ever want to see Dad again.' He put his arms around his mother and kissed her cheek. 'I'll be fine, Mum,' he whispered. 'Just find Dad!' He disentangled himself from his mother's tearful embrace and called to Kevin. 'All right; I'm ready. Let's go.'

Left alone, Molly sat down heavily in he husband's chair and drained the glass of wine he had left unfinished. As she put the glass down, something attracted her attention. Under Severus's empty glass was a letter, addressed to her, in Severus's handwriting. And in the envelope was a tiny bottle, sealed with wax. Intrigued, Molly drew out the letter and began to read.

'Dear Molly,

You are cordially invited to the 45th birthday celebrations of Mr Lucius Malfoy.

Place: Malfoy Manor

Time: Commencing immediately

Dress code: Masked Ball

Your servant,

Severus Snape,

P.S. Take the enclosed, use a pseudonym, and you may discover something to your advantage about your husband.'

Molly snorted. She had better look out her own dress robes: it seemed she would have to put in an appearance at Malfoy Manor. She had no particular wish to associate with Lucius and Narcissa, but if that was what it took to find her husband and rescue her son... Charlie was right; Snape was up to something. She had a feeling he was playing them all, like a puppet master pulling the strings, and if they weren't careful, they would all end up hopelessly entangled and unable to get free.

Chacun a Son Gout

Chapter 2 of 3

Arthur Weasley is in trouble with the Ministry again. And Snape is only making things worse.

For someone who had skipped bail and colluded in a lie to his wife, Arthur was enjoying himself more than he had any right to. The Polyjuice disguise wasn't nearly as bad as he had feared. He had the same black eyes and long, thin, sallow face as Snape, but not the nose, thank Merlin *that* he had inherited from his father so it wasn't compatible with Arthur's identity as a member of the Prince family. And cut short and slicked back, his oily hair could pass as glistening with gel or pomade. And, of course, the fact that they were both masked helped considerably. Arthur scanned the throng of people.

'Culpeo Malfoy isn't here, Severus,' he complained. 'He's the reason I agreed to come, and he isn't even here!'

'Isn't he?' asked Snape, unconcerned. 'Ah, well, have a drink. It'll be the last one you get for a while.' He gave Arthur a significant look and steered him over to the drinks table, where Draco Malfoy seemed to have made heavy inroads into the supply of champagne.

As Draco propped himself up, slightly unsteadily, on the bar, a willowy girl with long blonde hair sashayed up to him and touched his arm.

"ello, Draco,' she said. 'I 'ave come in disguise as you requested.'

'Yeah? So, what? It's a masked ball; everyone's in disguise.' Draco blinked and tried to focus on the stranger. 'I don't even know you.'

The girl leaned towards him and cupped her hand to whisper in his ear in her usual accent. 'It's me, Hermione. Thank you so much for inviting me.'

'Granger?' Draco hissed back, his words slightly slurred. 'I certainly didn't invite you.'

'Your parents then?'

'No. I had to help them with the bloody invitations last Hogsmeade weekend. You weren't on the list.'

Hermione was confused. If the Malfoys hadn't invited her, who had? (Arthur was confused too. He was sure he knew this girl, but he couldn't for the life of him think where from.)

Draco peered tipsily at her. If Granger was here, then so were Potter and Weasley. The three of them were as thick as thieves. But he couldn't see them anywhere. Mind you, it was impossible to recognise anyone in these damned masks his parents had insisted on. They thought it was sophisticated, but it was just bloody annoying. And there was just the tiniest chance he was just the tiniest bit drunk. Still, that was no reason not to continue drinking. He turned to the nearest guests, two men with *long wavy hair, thick brown beards and moustaches, short, broad noses and heavy eyebrows*.

'Hey, you! What's your name?' Draco asked belligerently.

'Dragomir Despard,' replied one of them. 'Zis, Vladimir.'

"Ow you?" grunted Harry, mimicking Ron's thick East European accent.

'Do you even speak English?' sneered Malfoy.

"Ow you?" repeated Ron.

'Well, you don't need to be able to speak to drink. Down in one!' declared Draco, pouring four generous measures of Firewhisky.

'You want a drinking competition?' Gregory Goyle had joined them, and snorted in disbelief. 'Get real. You threw up in the bogs in the Hog's Head last time we tried Firewhisky!'

'I could drink you under the table any day of the week, Goyle. Father's let me have wine since I was twelve, and I drink this stuff all the time now. Down it!'

'Nah, you're all right, Draco. Can't be arsed.'

Draco picked up the empty bottle and looked for a moment like he was going to smash it over Goyle's head. But then he slammed it down on the bar and hurled himself into an armchair with an air of disgust. 'This is boring! Mother and Father's parties are always boring, and they always insist I come. I'd rather be at school. What's the point of getting permission for a night off if you can't do anything interesting?'

'Ah, now, Draco.' Snape materialised out of the crowd to stand behind Malfoy's chair. 'I can assure you this party will not be in the least boring. I have prepared... shall we say a little comedy for your entertainment.'

'Theatre's for pansies,' scoffed Draco. Then, catching sight of Snape's raised eyebrow, he sighed. 'All right, then; what's it called?'

'The Bat.'

Draco sneered. 'Crap title.'

Snape ignored the profanity. 'Or should I say "The Bat's Revenge"?' he added silkily.

Now Draco took interest. 'Revenge? Revenge for what?'

'Oh, I think we should let the leading man tell you that tale.' He called Arthur from across the room. 'Fox! Cousin, come and tell our host's son The Story of the Bat.'

Apprehensively, Arthur crossed to Snape's side. 'Ah... yes... er, The Tale of the Bat, eh?' Then he rallied. No one here knew about that, after all. These weren't the sort of people he would have invited to any party of his, and he was pretty sure Snape wouldn't have broadcast the story of his humiliation too widely. He settled into the armchair beside Draco's and stretched expansively. 'Well, last Halloween, my cousin,' he shot a look at Snape, who merely inclined his head, 'and I went to a fancy dress party at the Weasleys' house in Devon. They offered to get us costumes from their son's joke shop. I went as a Muggle please-man...'

Here, he had to stop the narrative as the half-bloods explained to the pure-bloods what a policeman was. Under cover of the noise, Ron turned to Harry in amazement. 'Dad went to that party as a policeman; I've seen the photos. Bloody hell, Harry; that's Dad! What's he doing here in disguise? He's supposed to be in Azkaban!'

'Shut up!' Harry hissed. 'You'll blow our cover!'

'Anyway,' Arthur continued, raising his voice over the babble of talk. 'Severus shilly-shallied about accepting the invitation for so long that the only costume left was a bat. To take the edge off his embarrassment, he drank rather too much Firewhisky, and we were the last to leave. I Side-Along-Apparated Severus to the Hogwarts gates, but, as you all know, you can't Apparate inside the grounds. And as this was the small hours of the morning, the walls were warded, and no one knows the counter-spells except the Headmaster, here.' Arthur began to chuckle. 'So what else could I do? I left him there, and in the morning, he had to walk all the way through the school grounds dressed as a bat. He's never lived it down! I understand he always was known amongst the students as The Bat of the Dungeons; now he's the Bat of the Second Floor!'

'And he hasn't taken revenge on you yet?' someone called incredulously.

'Oh, no,' said Arthur blithely. 'I'm on my guard against that!'

In the course of the story, Snape had moved away from his inquisitive audience and now skulked in the shadows. 'He who laughs last, laughs longest, Arthur,' he muttered ominously.

Arthur hadn't heard. He was accepting yet another glass of champagne from his host, who had seemed very interested in his story. (Lucius had offered wine to Snape too, but Snape had refused, saying he wanted to keep a clear head.) He was just embarking on a humorous description of Snape's costume 'Yes, *long claws and huge ears. He looked like Dracula!*' when he spotted a familiar figure in the crowd. Well, vaguely familiar. 'Hermione! Shouldn't you be in school? And you've dyed your hair. It looks very... well, it's lovely to see you!'

"Ermione?" the girl enquired politely. 'Oo ees zees 'Ermione? My name ees Adele; I am a friend of Mrs Weasley.'

Arthur jumped slightly. Had Molly found out where he was? Had she sent spies to keep watch on him? 'Mrs Weasley?' he asked in a strangled voice.

'Yes,' said Hermione, tossing her long blonde hair over her shoulder exactly as Fleur did. 'We were at Beauxbatons togezzier.'

Arthur breathed again. She meant his daughter-in-law. But he could have sworn it was Hermione. Surely he should know his own son's girlfriend, dyed hair or no. Had he drunk that much champagne already? It was all getting too confusing. 'I'm awfully sorry,' he stammered, his ears going red. 'I thought you were someone else.'

The girl had pulled Fleur out of the crowd and was introducing herself. 'Fleur! *Eet 'as been too long!* You remember me from school, *n'est pas?* Adele?' (Hermione had been re-reading *Jane Eyre* and rather liked the name of Mr Rochester's ward.)

Fleur looked blank for a moment, then smiled dazzlingly. 'Adele,' she cooed. 'I did not recognise you! 'Ow are you? Such a shame Bill could not be 'ere. 'E ees working very 'ard.'

'Now, I'm sure you ladies would like to speak French,' cut in Snape smoothly. 'None of us wants to deprive you of the opportunity to converse in your native tongue.'

Hermione shot a swift look at Snape. He was smirking. Had he too seen through the Transfiguration? Oh well, she thought, nothing for it. She should have bargained for this when she was thinking out her disguise. '*Je voudrais un chambre pour deux personnes, s'il vous plait*' she said, dredging up the smattering of French she'd learnt on holiday.

Fleur's smile never slipped. '*Bien sur*, Adele. But we must not speak French all evening. Ze ozzer guests will not be able to understand a word we say!'

Still confused, Arthur drew Snape aside. 'Severus, I could have sworn that was Hermione Granger. Wouldn't I know my own son's girlfriend?'

Snape looked impassive. 'I grant you there is a passing resemblance,' he drawled. 'But equally, shouldn't I know my students? After all,' he muttered, turning away. 'I taught the little know-it-all for six years.' But as he passed "Adele", he murmured in her ear, 'You know, you do look very like a student of mine. A student who, at this moment, should be at school revising for her NEWTS.'

Hermione turned her head to look at him. He was going to pay for that know-it-all comment. And for forcing her to speak French. 'Ah, Monsieur Snape,' she said with a tinkling little laugh. 'I think you must 'ave a, 'ow you say? A leetle crush on zees student, and zat ees why you see 'er in every woman you meet, *non?*'

Flushing brick-red, Snape muttered, 'No, of course not,' and hurried away to find a glass of champagne clear head be damned. When he'd sent the invitation to her, he hadn't expected the joke to backfire on himself!

When he returned to Arthur's side, nerves steadied by alcohol, Draco was causing yet another drunken commotion. 'Take your mask off!' he yelled at Adele.

'Ah, non,' she demurred. 'I've a pimple on my nose. I look 'ideous.'

'Off, off, off!' Draco chanted, emphasising each word by banging an empty wine bottle on the table.

Lucius Malfoy strode over to take charge. '*Now, now, Draco; play nicely*,' he drawled. 'In this house guests are free to do as they please, and if the young lady wishes to remain...' he shot a lascivious look at the disguised Hermione, '...fully clothed, that is her prerogative.'

Hermione was saved from answering this embarrassing comment by a commotion at the door. A tall, black-haired woman had just arrived, more than fashionably late. She was evidently an eagerly awaited addition to the party, as Snape glided over to greet her. 'Countess. I'm so glad you received my invitation,' he said silkily, ushering the woman over to Lucius Malfoy.

Malfoy detached himself from Hermione's side, looking stunned and delighted that his birthday party had apparently just been gate-crashed by the nobility. 'My Lady, I am honoured. I don't think we have been introduced.'

'I am the Countess von Dragomir,' the stranger replied in a light accent.

'A very old family friend,' Snape clarified. 'Visiting England from Hungary. Allow me to offer you a glass of champagne, my Lady.' He took the elegant woman's arm and escorted her over to the drinks table.

In the corner, Ron stared gobsmacked at Harry. 'The Countess von Dragomir?' he hissed. 'How is someone else using my pseudonym?' His face turned suddenly from shock to horror. 'Mum! She's the only one I told about breaking into Gringotts; she's got it from me!'

'Why would your mum be at Lucius Malfoy's birthday party?' asked Harry, bewildered.

'I don't know, but Dad's here in disguise, why not Mum? I bet she's come to keep an eye on him!'

Harry stared at the "Countess". Mrs Weasley was wearing a very low-cut dress which transformed her usually dumpy figure into something curvy and voluptuous. He shook his head. He was absolutely not going to have those sort of thoughts about his best friend's mum. Although they did say look at your girlfriend's mum if you want to see how she's going to look in thirty years time. And if Ginny looked like that, Harry would be very happy. He removed his glasses and polished them on the sleeve of his dress robes. Stop it, he told himself firmly. Mrs Weasley was here in disguise; she had clearly got hold of some Polyjuice Potion from somewhere, and the figure which had caused Harry such disturbing thoughts wasn't hers. And Ginny would kill him if she knew what he was thinking. 'We need to leave,' he hissed at Ron. 'Now!'

'What?'

'Someone's going to twig you've got the same name sooner or later. They'll introduce us to her and she'll know we've bunked off.'

'But how are we going to get back? The gates'll be locked.'

'We'll sleep at Grimmauld Place and sneak back to school early tomorrow,' Harry decided. 'Let's get Hermione and get out of here!'

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Molly gulped her champagne. She was more than a little nervous. She was glad she'd taken the time to Transfigure some of her old robes into a gorgeous dress dripping with jewels. She had only thought of giving herself confidence no one would associate the impecunious Weasleys with the amount of diamonds she had on, but it was a good job she had, since Snape had evidently decided she was to be the guest of honour. Well, she'd just have to go along with whatever he had planned until she found an opportunity to unmask Arthur literally as well as figuratively.

'Dance with me, Severus,' she demanded, rolling the "r" slightly, and holding out an imperious hand.

'I do not dance,' said Snape laconically. 'Why not take a turn about the floor with my cousin?'

'Severus, I can't!' hissed Arthur, scandalised. 'What about Molly?'

Snape shrugged. 'What about Molly?' he asked softly. 'Arthur, I brought you here to enjoy yourself before your little "island sojourn". Molly will never know.'

Just then the orchestra began a particularly fast Strauss polka (Lucius's one concession to the Muggle world was classical music), and Molly had an idea. Arthur's most prized possession (apart from that damned car) was the watch she'd given him on his promotion. He delighted in showing it off to anyone and everyone. If she could get him to show it to her, she wouldn't need to unmask him now; she would take the watch and present it to him later as proof of his duplicity. Seizing his hand, she dragged him determinedly onto the dance floor.

As the music ended, Molly stumbled theatrically and grabbed Arthur. 'Ah, Mr Fox, I will faint!' she exclaimed.

'Come and sit down, Countess,' said Arthur solicitously, leading her to a sofa.

'My heart, it beats so fast! I cannot breathe!'

Smiling broadly, Arthur drew a silver fob-watch from his waistcoat pocket. 'Let me take your pulse, dear lady.'

Molly returned the smile: this was too easy. '*Ah, what a sweet little watch!*' she cried.

'It's a Muggle antique,' said Arthur proudly. 'It's clockwork. You wind it up using this little wheel here, so it doesn't need batteries or eckeltricity.'

'May I look at it?'

Arthur handed over the watch, charmed by the woman's interest. She held it up to her ear to hear it ticking, then it happened so fast, Arthur didn't see *how* it happened she dropped it into her bodice.

Merlin's beard; what was he to do now? He couldn't go round accusing members of the Hungarian aristocracy of theft. Investigations would be instituted, and awkward questions asked. And there was no question of him retrieving the watch himself not given its current location. And yet he had to have it back before he saw Molly again. No, this Countess was Severus' friend, and Severus would have to ask for the watch's return. He'd have two weeks to get it, after all. Arthur closed his eyes and leaned his pounding head back on the sofa; the music was really far too loud, and the Countess wasn't the only one to feel dizzy.

When he opened them, she was gone, replaced by a man in a most alarming mask black with a long pointed nose. He reminded Arthur of the plague doctors he had seen in his Muggle history books.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Arthur. 'I mean... er... how do you do? My name is Fox.'

The newcomer regarded Arthur blearily; the champagne was flowing freely tonight. 'Fil... I mean Frank. Frank... er... Smith.'

'Pleased to meet you, Frank. Can I get you a drink?'

'No need, Fox, mate; no need. I came prepared.' The plague doctor held up two bottles of clear liquid. 'Shhtol... Stolichnaya. And Shhlivovitzshhh.'

'Bless you,' said Arthur, pouring them both a large one.

In the shadows, Severus Snape watched this little pantomime with satisfaction. His stocks of Polyjuice would be severely depleted by tonight's escapade, but it would be worth it to see Arthur Weasley's face tomorrow. He had also had to sacrifice two bottles of rather good alcohol to Filch's disguise, but again, *he* would have a clear head tomorrow, while others would be distinctly worse for wear.

Severus' silent gloating was interrupted by the appearance of his victim's outraged wife.

'Have you seen him, Severus?' she hissed. 'He's cavorting with his gaoler while his poor son's in prison!'

'What a touching reunion there will be in gaol, Snape replied sardonically.

*

Some time later, Filch poured the last of the vodka into Arthur's glass. 'Slainte!'

'Wha?'

's Irishh.' Meansh Cheersh.'

'Shhkâl,' countered Arthur.

'Wha?'

's Swedishh.'

's gibberishh!'

Both men fell about laughing, fell off the sofa, and fell asleep.

*

Arthur woke to blinding sunlight and a blinding pain in his head. He was sprawled on the floor and his mouth felt like sandpaper. He had a nagging feeling there was something he had to do, but he just couldn't get his beleaguered brain to concentrate. A reedy voice came from somewhere at his feet.

'Have you got the time, Fox? My watch has stopped.'

Arthur patted his pockets, sat bolt upright in horror and groaned at the movement. 'At least you've got a watch, Frank. That Hungarian woman stole mine.'

'Where is it then?' asked Filch regarding him blearily. His mask was hanging around his neck, and his hair stuck up in clumps.

'In her décolleté.'

Filch sniggered delightedly. *'Well, it'll take you a while to find it there!'*

'It's no joke!' said Arthur desperately, hauling himself up onto the sofa. 'My wife gave it to me; I'm going to be in hot water when I get home!'

'Ah, there's a Mrs Fox, is there?' leered Filch, hauling himself up beside Arthur. 'Serves you right for dancing with the foreign floozy. I'd like to see you get yourself out of that one, Fox, mate!' He clapped Arthur on the back, making him lurch forward and clutch his head. 'Ask your cousin the time, then.'

'The time is half past eight, cousin,' said Snape smoothly, materialising once more at Arthur's shoulder, suave as only someone who had spent the night in a proper bed could be.

'Half past eight?' asked Arthur muzzily. 'I could've sworn we'd been here longer than that.'

'Half past eight in the morning,' Snape clarified with an amused smirk.

That sobered both Arthur and Filch up immediately. 'I'm supposed to be at work!' Filch exclaimed, dashing out of the house.

'Merlin's beard, Severus!' whispered Arthur. 'I've got half an hour to get you know where!'

'We'd better make a start, then' said Snape smoothly. 'Lucius, many thanks for your hospitality.'

'Glad to be of service,' drawled Malfoy, strolling back into the room having bid Filch a hurried goodbye. 'As I told Mr Smith, you can Apparate outside the gates of the Manor.'

'Oh, I think we should walk at least part of the way. Give my friend a chance to sober up.'

'It's raining!'

'All the better.'

As he saw his guests off the premises, Lucius shrugged to himself. If Snape wanted to get wet, that was none of his business. *'To each his own,'* he muttered.

*

A/N: Hermione's French means 'I would like a room for two, please.' The quotes in italics are from Deathly Hallows, The Chamber of Secrets film, and various translations of the German opera this is based on.

Filch's mask is Il Dottore from commedia dell'arte: http://cdn16.create.net/siteimages/16/2/7/162799/1580264/f_1138929.jpg

Blame it on the Champagne

Chapter 3 of 3

Arthur Weasley is in trouble with the Ministry again. And Snape is only making things worse.

'And Odo the hero, they brought him back home

To the place that he'd known as a lad.'

Number Twelve was singing again, as he had been doing ever since Filch got into work at half past eight with a hangover that threatened to split his head open. 'Be quiet!' he groaned.

The noise stopped for a few seconds, then started again.

'Oh, my poor heart, where has it gone?

It's left me for a spell.

For when you stole my gold away

You stole my heart as well.'

'Number Twelve, if you don't pipe down, I'm gonna come in there and... ugh. Hair of the dog,' muttered Filch to himself. 'That's what I need.' He slumped onto the floor of his office and pulled out a hip flask containing redcurrant rum. Unfortunately, all the vodka and plum brandy Snape had given him seemed to have run out. His monster hangover had prevented him doing his usual morning rounds of the cells, but the Shunpike lad had assured him all prisoners were safely gathered in last night. Including the occupant of cell twelve, whose caterwauling was drilling into his brain.

Charlie Weasley was singing to keep his spirits up until his dad showed up, but happily it seemed to have the added bonus of infuriating Filch. He put on a mock-sultry voice.

'Oh, come and stir my cauldron,

And if you do it right

I'll boil you up some hot, strong love

To keep you warm tonight.'

'Weasley!' bellowed Filch. 'If you don't shut up right now, I'll double your sentence!'

Charlie shut up.

*

In Number 12, Grimmauld Place, Harry was woken by a post owl rapping on the window. Blearily, he got up and took the envelope. Inside was an official looking letter, headed SUBPOENA. Harry took it straight to Hermione, who read it with the boys watching over her shoulder.

'Azkaban?' exclaimed Ron, looking stunned. 'We're being sent to prison for skiving off?'

'Don't be silly, Ron,' said Hermione, calmly. 'A subpoena's for witnesses; an official summons. It's signed by Snape as Headmaster. He must need us to witness something.' She broke off and stared at Ron. 'Your dad! We're supposed to confirm he was at Lucius' Malfoy's party last night. Snape must have recognised me. I did wonder when he asked me to speak French. He knew I couldn't!' Her jaw dropped. 'It was Snape's writing on the invitation! He'd tried to disguise it, but I recognise it now. Why didn't I see that before?'

'Well, to be fair, we haven't been taught by him in over two years,' said Ron reasonably. 'And he never used to write anything more than "Appalling" on my essays.'

'And we didn't recognise his writing in my Potions book, did we?' Harry pointed out.

'So what on earth's going to happen to Dad?' asked Ron weakly.

'We'd better go and find out, hadn't we?' said Harry grimly.

*

Charlie was getting worried. It was two minutes to nine, and there was no sign of his dad. He hammered on the door of his cell. 'I demand to see a lawyer!'

'Yes, yes, all right, all right!' groaned Filch. 'Just stop bloody singing! Malfoy!' he bellowed, which was a mistake, making his head ring.

But Filch's poor head was to get no respite. As soon as Charlie stopped banging on his cell door, someone else hammered on the front door. Filch staggered over to open it, and once he'd seen who was on the doorstep, hollered for his assistant. 'Kevin! Get down here!' Leaving the visitors to make their own way inside, he muttered, 'Must still be drunk. Seeing double.' As Kevin came skidding into the entrance hall, Filch hissed, 'There's another Mr Weasley at the door.'

'But Guv'nor,' protested Kevin, 'I arrested Mr Weasley myself last night. He's in number twelve!'

'At what time?' Arthur Weasley demanded, striding into Azkaban's entrance hall.

'About nine in the evening.'

'In his house?'

'"Yep," confirmed Kevin. 'He was having dinner.'

'With his wife?'

'Yeah. 'cept, well, she was quite a bit older'n him, but fair play to her, I thought!'

'She's *my* wife!'

Kevin blinked in confusion. *'What, you've got one wife between you?'*

Snorting with exasperation, Arthur turned to Snape. *'So I'm in here and out there at the same time?'*he whispered, clutching his head. 'Severus, I need another drink!' Then he spotted Culpeo Malfoy cringing beside Filch. 'And I need your robes. And your wig.' As Culpeo demurred, stuttering, Arthur lost his temper. 'It's your fault I'm here! You owe me a favour!' Pulling on the lawyer's official robes and wig, he declared loudly, 'I'm going to find out who's been impersonating me!' He strode into cell number twelve, then, with a strangled cry, staggered out again, to be confronted by a new arrival to the rapidly swelling crowd: his exceptionally angry wife.

He stopped in his tracks. 'Molly! I... er... Charlie...'

'Yes, Arthur: Charlie! You were at a party while your son served your sentence! Arthur, how could you?'

'Molly, dear, I complied with my bail I was here at nine o'clock. I didn't know they would come for me early, and I certainly didn't know they'd arrest Charlie... Hang on; how do you know where I was?'

Molly removed from the pocket of her robes a small, silver pocket watch.

Her husband gasped. 'You were the Hungarian Countess!'

'You were flirting with another woman!'

'I was flirting with you!'

'You didn't know it was me!'

Arthur caught hold of his wife's hands before she could really get into her stride, and kissed them. 'Molly, I'm so sorry it was the champagne. I was horribly drunk, and now I'm horribly hung over, but I'm sober enough to apologise.'

'It's not me you need to apologise to it's your son!'

Charlie staggered out of his cell. 'About time you showed up, Dad,' he said, his voice hoarse from all the singing.

Kevin Shunpike shot a look at his boss, who appeared to have passed out at his desk, shrugged and decided to take control of the situation. 'Right then, sir. If you're the real Arthur Weasley, I must insist you take your rightful place as the occupant of cell number twelve.'

Arthur drew himself up. *'I absolutely refuse to go to prison!'*Then his bravado deserted him, and he stared around pathetically. 'Haven't I been punished enough?'

'All right, Severus.' A voice rang out with absolute authority as Lucius Malfoy strode into the foyer. 'You've made your point. Let him go now.'

Snape inclined his head sardonically. Arthur's head whipped round from Molly to Malfoy. 'What's that, Malfoy?' he demanded. 'What did you just say?'

Just then the door of cell thirteen burst open, revealing Harry, Ron, Hermione and Draco Malfoy. 'Bonjour, Monsieur Weasley,' said Hermione coquettishly, tossing her hair around.

"Ow you?" grunted Ron, and punched his father on the arm.

From the Prison Governor's desk there came a loud groan as Filch, recognising his cue, hauled himself upright. 'Shhkâl, Fox,' he slurred, raising his hip flask, then slumped back into unconsciousness again.

Arthur was more confused than ever. 'Severus, what's going on?' he pleaded.

Snape flung his arms wide so that the sleeves of his robes extended like wings. 'Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the third act of my tragi-comedy "The Revenge of the Bat".'

Arthur couldn't take it in. 'Revenge? What for?' he asked looking around in bewilderment. Then his face fell. 'Merlin's beard! I thought you'd forgotten all about that, Severus!'

Snape smirked.

'You were all in on it?' said Arthur, blinking stupidly. 'Lucius? Culpeo? Molly?'

'That was a rotten trick to play on poor Severus, Arthur,' said his wife severely. 'We were all trying to make him feel welcome, and you took advantage. You deserved a taste of your own medicine.'

'I can't believe you were all in on it,' repeated Arthur weakly.

'I wasn't!' protested Charlie.

His mother went over to him and put an arm around his shoulders. 'I'm so sorry about that, dear. You arrived out of the blue, and I didn't have time to explain. Perhaps you'll give me a bit more notice when you want to come home in the future. And you, Arthur! I hope this will teach you once and for all not to tinker with all that Muggle rubbish in your shed!'

'But Molly, dear; you were inconsolable when I came home from court. If you knew it was all a play...'

'Well, that just shows you how I'd feel if you really were arrested, Arthur!'

'I'll sell the car, Molly, I promise. I'll take out all the adaptations first,' he added quickly, looking at the lawyer, who, since he was now standing shivering in his underwear, wasn't doing much to represent the awful majesty of the law. 'But how did you manage it?' Arthur asked Snape. 'All this, the party, the Wizengamot?'

'I have friends in high places,' replied Snape coolly, indicating Lucius Malfoy. His gaze fell on Harry, Ron and Hermione. 'And as Headmaster, I still have a certain amount of influence, no matter how much you try to undermine me.'

Arthur suddenly perked up. 'So I really don't have to go to prison?' he clarified delightedly.

Lucius Malfoy decided to take control once more. 'Indeed not. Well, ladies and gentlemen, since no-one is actually to be incarcerated today, may I suggest we all repair to my house once more. There should still be several bottles of champagne left. If my son hasn't drunk it all, that is,' he said, looking sidelong at Draco, who hadn't uttered a word and appeared rather green. 'We can celebrate the Triumph of the Bat!'

Under his breath, Snape sighed. It seemed he was never to be free of his unofficial title. And he doubted he would ever be invited to the Weasleys' house again. But, he

reflected wryly, watching Arthur Weasley being laughed at by his friends and chastised by his wife, "The Bat Who Got His Own Back" was, perhaps, a title he could live with.

THE END

A/N: This is, as some of you have recognised, a Harry Potter version of 'Die Fledermaus'. According to Glyndebourne Opera Company, there was a fad among fashionable people in 19th century Europe for playing practical jokes. To be the victim of one and not to get your own back could ruin your social standing forever.