

Invitation to the Dance

by Fairfield

Cho Chang as never seen before.

Prelude

Chapter 1 of 3

Cho Chang as never seen before.

1. Prelude

I, Lucius Malfoy, am a bad influence.

At least, that was what I was told. The tale of the telling is a convoluted one.

To occupy my time and mind while Narcissa visited relatives and reconsidered our relationship, I had taken a position as a Wizard Britain ambassador, as someone who could deplete the expense account with panache.

One afternoon, I was at a sidewalk café and pondering what to give my niece for her birthday when a shadow fell across my café au lait. She was vaguely familiar.

“Cho Chang,” she reminded me.

I invited her to sit, ordered another café au lait, and being preoccupied with gifting a young girl, mentioned my problem to Cho. She suggested a children’s potion kit. They came in two versions for boys called Little Bang and Big Bang, depending on the boy’s age and the courage of the parents. Versions for girls came in versions called Colored Delights and First Cosmetics. Cho said she had always insisted on a Big Bang.

I’ve been hearing all the wrong things about this lady, I thought.

After choosing the potion kit, I was ready to walk back to the Boulevard, but Cho insisted she knew a short cut. As we made our way through a back street, three burly wizards appeared. Cho shoved me into an alley.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?” the head thug asked.

Cho struck an innocent pose. “I was on my way to a birthday party, but I took a short cut and got lost. Do you three handsome men know the way back to Main Street?”

“Lost, huh? All alone, huh?” said a thug.

Cho nodded yes. “Are you three bodyguards?” she asked. “I like bodyguards. They’re so brave and strong.”

“You do, huh? This is your lucky night lady,” said another.

The three started toward her.

“Oh, not right here in the open, not all three at once,” said Cho.

She pointed to where I was hiding. “There’s a dark alley. And only one at a time. I’m a decent woman.”

Cho waltzed the first one into the dark where I was waiting. We lowered him silently to the ground.

“Just a second,” she said.

“Ohhh,” moaned Cho. “Oh ... Oh ... Oh ... Oh, Merlin ... Oh, that’s too good ... Oh, Don’t stop ... Oh ... Oh ... Oh ... Ohhhhhhhhh.”

She unbuttoned the top of her blouse, pulled it half out of her skirt, mussed her hair, and stepped out to face the other two.

“Your friend was terrific,” she said. “Who’s next?”

The next one rushed to her arms whereupon she pulled him into the dark, swung him around into the wall, and kneed him. He fell with a crash.

“Some people like it rough,” she said, straightening her hair.

She was glaring at me. “Stop gawking and take care of Romeo out there.”

“Did I do it right?” asked Cho after I had dropped the third one.

“What?” I asked.

“I tried to act as a Malfoy would. Did I make the mark?”

“You did fine,” I said.

“Well, I think you’re a bad influence,” said Cho.

We were almost in the clear when six gang members stepped out with wands drawn. They took our wands and asked, “You didn’t see three scraggly mongrels go by, did you?”

Cho pointed the opposite direction from which we had come and told them we saw three men sneaking off that way and it looked as if they were carrying a crate of firewhisky. The six grumbled, said they thought a crate was missing, and vowed revenge when they caught up with the berks. They noticed Cho and declared they could take us upstairs and have some fun this evening after all. They told me I could watch. That would make it even more fun.

“I like having fun,” said Cho. “Is there a stage? I can dance for you.”

There wasn’t a stage, but Cho insisted they clear some floor space for her. She made a dramatic pause before leaping to the middle of the floor and twirling. She performed a few more steps, but clearly, the men were waiting for her to twirl her skirt up again. She did. She had their attention. Mine too for that matter. A few more steps to heighten the anticipation. A leap with an impressive split. Mysteries revealed. Reverential awe gripped the room. She spun and came down with a wand in her hand.

Onetwothreefourfivesix.

Only Cho and I were standing.

“Where’d you hide that?” I asked.

“Where do you think I hid it, dumkopf?”

When I looked incredulous, she asked, “Want to sniff it to check?”

As we were leaving, she was fretting about her performance coming up to Malfoy standards.

“It’s exactly what I would have done,” I said.

She paused to push their crate of firewhisky down the stairs. “That’s for staring at my legs.” As it landed with a crash and tinkle, one of the six downed men had enough left in him to shake his fist at us and declare, “God will punish you for that,” before collapsing.

Cho merely smirked – more of my bad influence I suppose.

I wanted to hurry on, but Cho had to stop to check the potions kit. When we were almost in the clear, we let our guard down, and the three men from the alley reappeared. One leaped out and grabbed Cho from behind in a bear hug. Another was sneaking up behind me, and the third confronting me. I drew my elbow back into the face of the ambusher and punched the forward one in the solar plexus. Cho turned to let me reach the one on her back. I chopped him in the neck.

“I failed the Malfoys, didn’t I?” said Cho, kicking the sprawled figure who had jumped her.

“We’ll talk about that and inspect the potions kit later,” I said, grabbing her hand and running for the safety of Main Street.

The next day, I was having lunch at the same spot, secretly hoping Cho would appear. When she arrived, she asked about the potions kit. I said it had survived, but I had to pick up the birthday cake this afternoon.

“Well, if you want to see me again, all you have to do is send an owl,” said Cho. “You do know how to send an owl, don’t you? You just compose a sensitive, handwritten note, attach it firmly to the bird, and softly whisper my name.”

I can take a hint. “Would you like to go for a cake walk?” I asked.

“I hope you have this expedition planned better than the last one,” she said.

I took her comment in stride as she herself would expect from a Malfoy and mentioned that if she helped, she might as well attend the party. She wasn’t certain the parents would appreciate an uninvited guest, but I replied that if they were that ungracious to one who had undergone such harrowing experiences on their behalf, then we could depart for our own adult party. I mentioned that I was partial to peaches and cream.

Cho sighed and shook her head – tempting her away, a bad influence.

From MuseAmusant: birthday cake, children’s potion kit, owl.

Author’s Note: The original intent was to write another character-driven PWP, but the muse did not cooperate. Such a PWP is still the goal.

Overture

Chapter 2 of 3

Multi-faceted Cho.

2. Overture

I, Lucius Malfoy, am an evil man, a wicked man, an obnoxious and petty man. I believe my shoelace is untied. But will I reach down and remedy that? No. I don't know why not, but I will let it drag on the ground through the dirt on which I walk.

In the meantime, I was waiting for Cho at the outdoor café where we first met. Waiting for Cho and staring at my shoelace.

She arrived and immediately launched into her ideas of introducing non-wizard technology into our world. I admitted that modern plumbing was a good thing, but I reminded her of the terrible Victorian social attitudes we adopted.

"It's a blasted infusion of non-wizard culture, a moral code at odds with nature and common sense," I said. "It comes from a bloody mindless adoration of Victorian England."

"You're being reactionary," said Cho.

I shook my head in remembrance and said, "If I hadn't been young and naïve, I would have known something was amiss the moment I boarded a steam locomotive at King's Cross."

"Think about electrical appliances," said Cho. "It's the only hope of freeing the house-elves."

When I gave her a quizzical look, she stated that appliances would eliminate drudgery and wives could lead a decent life without elves. She didn't think any social movement would end their enslavement until the economic reasons were removed. I maintained that new technology inevitably modified society's standards.

She claimed we could pick and choose. I talked about the Law of Unintended Consequences. She replied there were unintended consequences of doing nothing.

She looked at her watch and declared she had to hasten back to the office.

"This was great fun," she said, grabbing my hand.

She didn't let go when I held her hand. Something stirred inside me.

"No one else will even talk to me about this," she said. "Can we meet again next Friday? And your shoelace is untied."

The next Friday, I came prepared with a balanced assessment of introducing new technology ending with a fair and unbiased conclusion that doing so would be a mistake. I had even retrieved an old essay I had once written about rejecting alien culture.

Cho arrived, plunked herself down, and declared she had brought some documents.

"More about electrical appliances?" I asked.

No, she worked in the Department of Archives and had come across references to lost and valuable artifacts. She wanted someone to help her, but she needed someone not as old and decrepit as the men in her office to assist her in retrieving those treasures for the benefit of wizard society. Did I know anyone robust enough?

Then she gave me a big grin.

I decided to add to the merriment. "Right ho, let's bring a shitload of alien technology and mores into our lives and follow that by digging up a bunch of stuff that should remain buried. Life is getting dull."

"It's all there and waiting for us," said Cho sadly, "but I don't know if I can live up to the Malfoy standards for this type of enterprise."

"I have no doubts about your capabilities," I said.

"Oh, Lucius," she said, "I'm so glad. I was afraid you would think I was a silly girl and refuse to be my partner."

As I was wondering how this had happened, she placed the briefcase on the table.

But she paused and gave me an entreating look. Did I really want to participate?

I took her hand and said, "I would only go on this adventure if I had a steady and reliable companion."

She gave a knowing nod. "Someone to restrain your impetuosity, no doubt."

She opened her briefcase and said, "I told the people in archives that I needed to copy some of the old documents before they deteriorated."

"Are these the copies?" I asked.

"I left the copies in the files," she said. "I brought the originals in case there were secret messages on them. Was that worthy of a Malfoy?"

I said, "We don't want another Malfoy, we want a Chang. You bring something new to the mix. You're doing great."

While I wondered what had got into me to utter such sentiments, Cho glowed. One might think no one had ever said such a thing to her before.

Meanwhile, she had moved closer and her knees were against me. Hadn't anyone ever looked beyond her beauty to see what an incredible woman she was?

Cho claimed we could legitimately spend the afternoon examining the manuscripts since the people in her office were making a big fuss about possible evil influences

associated with the old artifacts.

"I'm consulting with a Dark Wizard or the best I can come up with," said Cho. "It's time for triage: stuff not worth going after, stuff too dangerous to go after, and stuff that's valuable enough and safe enough."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"Oh, nothing," said Cho, rolling her eyes. "I thought you might like to watch."

"Okay. Okay," I said. "We figure out how to get the good stuff. As a cover we write up the worthless stuff as too dangerous and turn in the report. Tell the bureaucrats what they want to hear, and they won't question what we're doing. "

"Diabolical," said Cho. "You're corrupting a civil servant which establishes your bonafides as a Dark Wizard and legitimizes my working with you."

Several days later, while tying my shoelaces, I was still trying to parse that one.

After several hours of examining the old manuscripts, I suggested a break and asked Cho if she wanted to visit my beach house in Ireland for a broom ride. Her eyes widened as we approached the cottage. While I was thankful that the only evidence of my dissolute life was an empty milk bottle by the fireplace, Cho was in the kitchen, counting the appliances.

"You hypocrite," she said.

She was standing at the large window overlooking the beach. "Who designed this place," she asked, "Frank Lloyd Wright?"

"I'm renting it from a rich American who uses it one month in the summer," I said.

She nodded. "That explains the longhorn over the fireplace."

"Would you prefer a dank place with a smoky peat fireplace that was more suitable for brooding?"

She shrugged off the question, chose one of the brooms, and tore into the stratosphere. Luckily, I was in good shape since I had been riding several hours a day since my wife left me to keep my mind off things.

"That helped," said Cho when we were back at the house. "It cleared my head and let me realize the wisdom of what you said."

I was wondering which of my wise words she had taken to heart when she announced that since we were Victorian in outlook, the most valuable artifacts would be the sex toys. She was waving a document and raving about 'The Ring of Everlasting O.' She was searching for the map to 'The Thunderous Wand' which turned a demoness into a household goddess.

The sun was going down when she suggested I escort her home because of the valuable material she was carrying. As we were walking down a deserted street near her flat, she took my hand. When I intertwined my fingers with hers in approval, she placed her other hand on my waist. I reciprocated and kissed her on the forehead.

Her arms were around me; her lips were devouring me; her tongue was probing me. Fortunately, she came up for air before I swooned from the aroma of perfumed and excited girl.

"Come to my flat for lunch tomorrow?" she asked. "It'll be simple, but we can study everything in private."

Yes, we certainly could study everything in private. We should study every private thing, I thought.

And those thoughts, dear reader, are sufficient explanation for not noticing that Cho was standing on my shoelaces, and when I started to back away, I fell on my bum. A gentle reminder that women are dangerous.

From MuseAmusant: Ireland, milk bottle, an old essay.

Author's Note: Apologies are due to Dostoevsky and the 'Notes' and for late submittal because of network connection problems.

Waltz

Chapter 3 of 3

Reminisces about a misjudged character.

3. Waltz

"Whee, I'm a cowboy."

Cho was waving her flaming marshmallow in the air.

I had arrived unfashionably early at her flat for lunch, but she had taken it in stride and suggested we go to my beach house in Ireland since any place with a longhorn over the fireplace had to have a barbeque pit in the garden. When I had said I hadn't noticed, she had evinced disappointment followed by understanding compassion. That had hurt. My efforts to preserve the true wizard heritage had cost me dearly, and my wife had left me, but I had always prided myself on being a stalwart Malfoy beyond any need for sympathy.

After verifying the house had a barbeque pit, we had gone to the store for sausages and buns. While I was looking wistfully at the caviar and aged cheese, Cho had been waving a package of white puffy cubes. What a find. She had found some barbeque sauce which she insisted I try. *Lord, have mercy.*

Later, I was ready to continue our examination of the pilfered manuscripts when Cho said, "The Archive Department has an entire basement full of stuff."

"I thought they only considered documents," I said.

It turned out that since her group dealt with antique material, the removal team brought the entire contents from an abandoned estate to them, not knowing what else to do with it. Once, in the early days, the group had carefully researched and priced the goods from an estate, but once that had been done, the Artifacts Department had claimed that since these articles were now on the market, they were contemporary and belonged under their jurisdiction. The sale brought in a lot of money and the people in the Artifacts Department received bonuses and promotions. The Artifacts Department was not interested in the stored items because they were antique, not contemporary.

I recalled that Kafka had been an Eastern European civil servant. It must have been an enlightening experience.

"Assessing and extracting any valuable items will be difficult," I said, knowing the Archive people would be jealous of their department's possessions even though they had no use for them.

"A real adventure," said Cho.

It's the barbeque sauce, I thought.

Her plan was that I visit a friend who worked in the government and afterwards make my way down to the storeroom. It was unguarded, and I could go anywhere undisturbed in an administration if I was carrying a piece of paper with a seal stamped on it. The trick was to act as if getting that piece of paper from point A to point B was the most important task in the world. She would meet me there, and she had a bag spelled to pass undetected through the checkpoints. She gave me a winning smile.

Then, her mood changed.

"Is everything fleeting?" asked Cho.

I was processing that when she said, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't burden you with what I'm thinking."

"No burden," I said. "I was giving it some thought. I had only got as far as 'fleeting with respect to a human lifetime or the age of the earth.'"

"Ah, perspective," she said. "We can dismiss everything we do on a geologic scale, but it's still important to us."

Thinking I would learn more if I let her talk than I would if questioning her, I said, "I hope some things are fleeting. I'm spending my days in the diplomatic corps strutting around like a peacock and trying to keep our distinguished visitors from getting into too much trouble."

Cho brightened. "You want to change too."

She paused. "I took the position in the Archives Department because it offered me a chance to withdraw from the world."

"That can be the right thing to do," I said.

I took a chance and added, "For a while."

Cho nodded. "I may have typed myself as a dull, bookish girl. It's difficult to move to another department. It occurred to me that getting rich might be exciting."

"Is that why you want to locate these old artifacts?" I asked.

"The hardest part of getting rich seems to be accumulating enough to make a start," she said.

"My ancestors, my long ago ancestors, were adventurers," I said.

"You're very understanding," said Cho.

I asked why she wanted to be rich. She said she wasn't interested in being rich, but getting rich looked exciting. Wasn't it boring and bothersome sitting on all those Galleons? I searched my soul and was able to honestly state that I wasn't feeling any acute discomfort.

Her mood changed again.

We had to take a broom ride in the remaining winter light followed by a trip to the store for shish kabob ingredients in honor of those cowboys of the burning sands although I'm not certain they finished with marshmallows the way Cho said the cowboys of the Old West did. That evening, we fired up the fireplace and sampled the American's collection of vintage videos. She had a hard time choosing between 'Son of the Sheik' and 'Destry Rides Again,' but once the movie was under way, she snuggled against me. Okay, I can put up with marshmallows. After she left, the house seemed empty.

Monday morning found me carrying an important piece of paper down to the Archive's storeroom where Cho soon joined me and we begin our search. I was selecting objects of obvious value when I noticed Cho examining a silver globe. She tapped it with her wand. Colors began to appear. Fairy lights performed a stately dance around the shiny sphere.

"We've got to take it," she said. "I know it's not worth much, but think how much it would brighten the life of some lonely lady."

On our way out with a full bag of loot, we took a wrong turn. We were about to backtrack when a Dementor floated out of the woodwork.

"Quick, get behind me," I said.

To my horror, Cho stepped forward and gave a mighty yell. Out popped a swan.

A swan? I thought. *One of those peaceful creatures of nurturing with that graceful figure and elegantly curved neck? What the fuck!?*

The marshmallow bird leaped onto whatever passed for a face on a Dementor, beat the holy crap out of it with its wings, and industriously beaked out the eyeball region. I didn't know a Dementor could whimper.

Barbeque sauce.

As the creature fled, Cho grabbed my arm. "I know you could have done much better," she said, "but your spell is probably so powerful that it would have blasted a crater in the floor, and people would have become suspicious."

"Not quite that powerful," I said.

"Oh, you're so modest. You're wonderful," said Cho, throwing her arms around me.

A little while later, thoughts began to trickle into my brain. Where was I? What was I doing? Oh, right, this lady and I had a sack full of stolen goods, and we should be escaping before anyone discovered what we were doing. I suggested that to Cho.

Everything was going well until we reached the checkpoint and Cho's musical sphere began playing.

I turned on the guard. "I'm paying you good tax money to man your station, not spend your day listening to pretty music. Give me your name and the name of your supervisor. I shall report this."

As he was protesting his innocence, we made our way out of the building, into the sun light, and on to the beach house where we sorted our haul.

From MuseAmusant: Crater, fairy lights, sausages.

Author's Note: Writing this couple got out of hand.