

The Plucky Heroine and the Big Bad

by MHaydn

Warning: Our team of writers cannot sustain this story line.

On Our Toes

Chapter 1 of 6

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Chapter 1: On Our Toes

"It can't be."

"But it is."

It was. The occasional droplet appeared on the window as the outer drizzle matched the inner rain in their hearts, not yet reaching storm proportion. They decided to ignore this poetic-conceit affront to artistic sensibilities while they sipped their morning tea and consoled themselves with the thought that the staff side of the office had neglected them because of a burst of creativity that had doubtless produced a plethora of devious plots and exotic characters. They need only examine the notes in the writers' chest for inspiration before adding their special insight and sensitivity that would take the tale to the heights.

"It's empty."

"It can't be."

"But it is."

Cho held out the idea-box. "Look for yourself."

The editor looked.

"It's as exhausted as a frugal lady's purse after a trip to the thrift shop," said Cho.

The editor made a quick recovery. "It's merely the void that's the heart of our fellow writers," she said as her pen graced a once blank sheet of paper.

Is it not a conceit of those of the bolder disposition that that they are guided by their heads and that their thoughts, spun out of the ethereal construct of the universe, will illuminate their lives with a full sufficiency and fill their days with meaning, but after the initial vigor comes the evening, and when they awake the next day, it is to the same landscape, now plucked bare and withering, and does not the whole of this world shrink into the black hole where, had nature been more generous, there would have been a heart.

Inspired by an opening full of possibilities, Cho plunked herself in front of the typewriter. "Boys! Let's continue this tale of a brave heroine. We can make it up as we go along."

"Writing a plucky heroine is easy, but what's going to be the Big Bad?"

Cho looked up in inspiration. "Voldemort's son."

"What?"

Cho smiled. "Voldemort abducted a Miss Universe winner. I told you we could make this up as we go along."

The editor shook her head. "That won't work. She has to be English and England has never won."

"We can take care of the nitpicking details later. Just listen. He's thoroughly steeped in the Dark Arts; it comes naturally to him; and he's a handsome devil: six feet, blond curly locks, piercing blue eyes. But inside this splendid specimen beats a heart burning for revenge. He will tear apart the lives of all who laid his father low. He will make them weep in misery before he consigns them to the lower depths."

The editor nodded. "I see. He will call up monsters, but as he is about to set his diabolical plans in motion, the heroine will win him over, and he will die heroically saving her and her friends from his own monsters. But he needs a reason to be in England."

"We'll think of something. What about a profession that marks him as a brilliant wizard?"

"Good idea," said the editor. "Intellect will boost his provocative sensuality and make his tragic fall more poignant, but it's time for coffee and sticky buns. We'll go someplace new and jot down our ideas before we forget them."

Later, Biff was scanning the editor's opening. "Okay, it's the standard prelude to a plucky-heroine-versus-big-bad tale."

"We can do that in our sleep," said Theo, sitting at the typewriter recently abandoned by Cho.

He watched Skippy take after a squirrel - the dog's legs a blur, the squirrel barely making it to the tree. A few barks as the squirrel chattered and threw a walnut.

The pair continued their walk, it taking them across an open meadow. The wizard stopped to pick and sniff a flower. He pointed with its stem. "There, to the southeast, beyond the mountains that we can see, is where wizards breed dragons. I've always considered that risky, but they cannot give up the drama of it."

It was an innocent day, and they did not see the black speck coming out of the sun until there was a sudden shadow and a dragon zoomed past, tossing Skippy into the air and swallowing him. The dragon came to a halt, its talons digging deep into the meadow as it turned to face the wizard and roar. It was about to roar again when it got a puzzled look on its face. The dragon fell into several pieces as a grey wolf leaped out. The wolf scooped across the meadow grass trying to scrape off dragon gore. It gagged to get the vile taste of dragon out of its mouth. It rushed to the stream to let the water wash across its fur.

It was man's best friend that climbed out of the stream and trotted back to the wizard before shaking himself dry. Now on the alert, the wizard scanned the sky, the woods, and the horizon. He gave the inviting woods and the lovely meadow one, last look before saying, "I think, Skippy, our enemies have found us."

Biff cracked his knuckles before taking his turn at the typewriter.

Like a collie sensing part of the flock was missing, she searched the nooks and closets of the library and gathered the stray boxes. With the instincts of a collie-scholar, she turned her attention to those most in need: the dusty volumes showing signs of neglect.

As she dusted off the volumes she had found in the most decrepit box, a title caught her eye: 'Elementary Transforms,' and she began reading it. She was four pages into the first chapter before the contents overwhelmed her and she began skimming through the book. She sat the book down and stared out the window, not seeing the fleeting clouds or the immobile mountains. It was the logical basis of transfigurations. She had been so dedicated to learning everything in that course that she had not noticed that it was a helter-skelter presentation. True, the hodge-podge had become progressively more difficult through the years, but she now realized that she only had a collection of techniques. She began the first chapter again - this time, making certain she understood every line. Three pages later she quit from exhaustion and realized her daily stint as an assistant librarian was over and she had not even unpacked and shelved one box of books.

She walked the lonely, summer corridors of the school to the faculty room where she laid the Transform book on the table and chose her favorite tea and biscuits.

Alastor Moody entered, took a tea, and noticed the book. "A hard road to hell, lass."

"There's no evidence of evil in the book," she said.

"Nor be there any evidence of good," said Alastor. "It be only you inching your way to heaven or hell or both. And it be the hardest way."

"Both?" she asked. "Could there be the heaven of hell or the hell of heaven? I have never thought about that before. You and this book are certainly mind expanding."

"It be the neutrality that is seductive, but I be only pausing for a cuppa and be leaving any debate to sharper minds."

"Wotcher, Filius," said Alastor on his way.

She bid goodbye to Alastor and hello to Filius Flitwick.

Filius also noticed the book whereupon she asked if anyone ever mastered the contents although some must have because they wrote the book even though it must take a lifetime to comprehend the material. Filius replied that there were people with that talent, but even so, the effort took its toll.

Filius paused to reflect. "As the Tao Te Ching says, those who stand on tiptoe are easily unbalanced."

Luna Lovegood nodded. "Then I would do well to avoid narrow walkways."

Dusty Volumes

Chapter 2 of 6

Undaunted, our writers press on.

Chapter 2: Dusty Volumes

The editor was shaking her head. "The boys cannot lay off the techno-babble."

Cho was pounding her desk. "They didn't mention the heroine, and villains do not have dogs named Skippy."

"Channel that passion, love," said the editor. "This tale needs the edge."

"What about our ideas from yesterday," asked Cho, "ideas that cost us dearly?"

"I know," said the editor. "We each had a blueberry muffin, three cafe au laits, and a chocolate éclair followed by a snifter of brandy to elicit our inner sophistication."

"What do we do?" wailed Cho.

"We save the undertaking as per usual," said the editor, grabbing a pen and gracing another blank sheet of paper.

When in the course of literary events it becomes necessary for one group to dissolve the artistic bonds which have connected them with another and to assume the responsibility to which the Dictates of Literature and the very Muse of Inspiration entitle them, a decent respect for the calling of their art compels them to pursue a superior narrative with a truthfulness seen to be self-evident and with a commitment to the unalienable rights of Plot, Character, and the pursuit of High Ideals.

"I know," said Cho. "We'll use that extraneous female character the boys introduced to compare and contrast innocence and depravity. That will make the entrance of the heroine more dramatic."

The door opened, and like the evening draft of cold air that comes down the mountain ravine bringing the scent of pine that oft disguises the accompanying chill, the swinging panel on hinges now brought the fresh breeze of a newcomer that did, at least temporarily, disguise all else.

"What a handsome dog," said Luna, dropping to her knees.

"What's his name?" she asked as it deigned to let her scratch his ears while he inhaled and analyzed her essence.

"Skippy."

When Skippy looked at Miss Lovegood quizzically, the stranger said, "He wants to know why a lover of wildlife is spending her summer days cooped up in a library."

"Finances," she said.

"Much the same for both of you," said the head librarian. "He's a wandering scholar who's been invited to stay here for the summer."

Luna broke her gaze away from eyes she could not remember the color of as he nodded to her unspoken question: How is it that a wandering scholar dresses so well?

It was sometime later when Theo looked over the latest development. "The girls took this on a strange tangent, but it might add some interest, and a little work will get the story back on track."

The man who had introduced himself as Jonathan Wilks looked over the scattered boxes and around the rooms now lined with shelves and asked, "Was this always the library?"

Luna said she didn't know to which he replied that assigned rooms in old buildings changed and if these volumes had laid undiscovered next to the library, there might be some real finds in other parts. They looked unsuccessfully for old room assignments until lunch after which Jonathan asked if Luna would like to show Skippy and him the grounds. She took him on the path down to the lake where he remarked that interesting wildlife happened at boundaries: lake and shore or forest and meadow. He asked why no one seemed to go boating on the lake. Luna gazed out over the chill waters that disappeared into the distance and shivered. He draped his cloak over her and walked her back to the faculty room and tea.

"By now I've heard the story of the founders," he said one day, "or more accurately, I've heard the one paragraph summary that everyone seems to accept without question."

"I hear a note of skepticism," said Luna, pausing in her attempted restoration of some mouse-nibbled volumes.

"You surprise me," he said. "You're willing to hold contrary views about plants and animals, but you're saying you never questioned a story that offers a simple view of a complex era."

"I think more than the simple-mindedness of it bothers you," she said.

"Haven't you ever wondered what really happened? Wouldn't it be brilliant if we found the old library with the founders' diaries?"

That afternoon, Luna was unusually quiet as they walked to the forest. As they strolled along the edge, Jonathan suddenly stopped and said, "If you look up in the oak tree we just passed, you can see the eyes of a Lillimeth. But don't startle it. They're an unpredictable combination of shy and dangerous."

Luna looked. "I don't see anything. Are you making fun of me? You must be because Skippy is alert but he's not acting as if anything of any danger to him is around."

"No, he isn't, is he," said Jonathan.

"Okay, you got the story back on track enough that we can advance the plot," said Biff.

The hooded man walked down an ordinary looking street wishing for what he wanted as he had been advised. A building suddenly seemed inviting and he

entered. He strolled through a hallway until he found a door painted purple. It opened and he walked into a Victorian parlor where a lady was seated at a table.

"Miss Parvati Patil, I believe," he said.

"It is not necessary for you to know my name."

The man took a seat. "I have only a simple question. Can you perform a simple procedure: the five-card spread with the minor arcana?"

"Certainly," she said as she handed him a deck and let him shuffle the cards. She cut the cards and dealt,

"The first card represents the present. It is the knight of swords inverted: eagerness to begin an enterprise possibly involving deceit."

"The second card represents past influences still having an effect. It is the three of wands inverted: disappointment, a failed project."

"The third card represents the future. It is the inverted queen of cups: plans will proceed by the treachery of a female. She is fair, perhaps she is innocent of her role."

"The fourth card represents the reason behind the question. It sheds light on the second card, the influence of past events. It is the three of swords: a great loss that remains painful."

"The fifth card represents the potential within and for the inquirer. It is the inverted king of swords: a major enterprise, one that is rash or ruthless. It will be ruthless."

The meaning of the cards swirled before the fortune teller's eyes. Parvati stood and stepped back, away from the hooded figure. "Go."

"How much do I owe you?" the man asked.

"I do not want your money. Go."

Neither Nothingness nor Non-Nothingness

Chapter 3 of 6

The arrival of perspicacity.

Chapter 3: Neither Nothingness nor Non-Nothingness

"We're the first in the office today," said Biff. "We can move this narrative along without having to do any repairing. Have you had enough coffee?"

"I can barely hold a pen," said Theo.

"That's the spirit," said Biff. "Go for it."

"I know you're the outdoorsy type, but if we want to find the founders' diaries, we should stretch our legs by touring the abandoned parts of the castle."

"Some of those places are creepy," said Luna. "Besides, if this castle was really a defensive fortification as you think, then hiding valuables outside would be more secure in case this place was ever ransacked."

"That's true," agreed Jonathan. "That scary forest was probably even scarier a thousand years ago. Do you think a treasure chest would last that long?"

"Magic."

"Indeed," said Jonathan. "The stronger the better. What's the worst part of yon woods? That's where we'll go. And we'll need a divining rod. What about a forked twig from that big willow by the castle? It's supposed to be potent."

Luna considered all the adventure to be found in the deep woods and all the excitement to be found trimming that particular willow before replying. "We needn't rush into this. We could explore a bit of the castle while we wait for midsummer before searching the woods. We can search when the forces of light shine bright."

It was a week later, and they were examining a dungeon room when Luna became uneasy. Jonathan agreed to quit for the day, but he insisted on going back the next day since the founders could have put a repelling spell on any cache. He was checking every nook and cranny when Luna, once again, began to feel uneasy. Jonathan's head jerked up as Skippy positioned himself between Luna and the nothingness in the doorway, a nothingness through which neither man nor beast nor spirit would ever pass, a nothingness spreading into the room. Jonathan regarded it for a moment before chanting.

All conditioned phenomena

Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow,

Like dew or a flash of lightning;

Thus we shall perceive them.

What, thought Luna.

Jonathan held one hand prayer-like in front of his chest.

No perception of self

No perception of non-self
No perception of soul
No perception of soulessness
No perception of being
No perception of non-being
No perception of order
No perception of disorder
No perception of perception
No perception of non-perception.

"Hey!" shouted Jonathan at the retreating formlessness. "Do you know where the founders kept their diaries?"

What, thought Luna.

The next day, they were in one of the abandoned towers, taking a break from the dungeons as far as Luna was concerned. But she jumped and grabbed Jonathan when there was a noise behind a pile of furniture. Their wands were out.

"It's only a mouse," she said as a rodent scurried across the floor to another hiding place.

"Don't hurt it," she cried as Jonathan flicked his wand.

Out popped a white flag with the word "Curses" in red letters.

"That's not funny," she told both Jonathan and Skippy.

After that caffeine-inspired opening by Theo, the muse herself breathed through Biff.

The sun of a northern morning fell upon the early pair as gently as a wifely kiss on her spouse's forehead, and as gently, the wizard's spell snipped a forked growth of green twigs from the top of a willow tree whose mad, thrashing branches sought to beat down the miscreant duo as relentlessly as the rays of another sun might beat down two desert travelers.

"I don't think it likes us," said Jonathan.

Luna, who had been holding her breath, pulled her companion away to a safer distance as soon as he had the leafy item in hand.

"I can feel the power in it," he said as he shaped it to his specifications.

Luna shook her head. "Completing a library set is not supposed to be life threatening, and we've barely begun."

Jonathan was puzzled. It was an adventure they had entered into voluntarily. There was potential for gain, both for themselves and for society. The old manuscripts by the founders would likely contain potent magical prescriptions. Think of the new additions to knowledge. They could shed light on an era clouded in mystery and possibly misinterpreted. Think of the scholarly revelations. The creatures that Luna was having trouble finding might be mentioned in the old works. She would be vindicated. If nothing else, it was a naturalist outing. She was equipped with both binoculars and camera. He had said he would gladly follow any sign of a new or exciting plant or animal.

Luna, for her part, found plenty to investigate at the edge of the forest. She was hugely grateful that Skippy, too, pointed them to many phenomena at the periphery.

"Oh, look," Luna would say, grabbing his arm and pulling him toward Skippy's latest find.

"We got to take this to the greenhouse," she would say, putting her hand on his shoulder in persuasion.

It was a typical morning when Luna woke, and as she showered, she remembered that they would spend the day in the library. She put on her shirt and jeans, paused, and decided to wear a skirt and blouse. She donned her usual pleated skirt with house colors and twirled in front of the mirror before giving it a critical look and exchanging it for a pencil skirt. Did it make her hips look too wide? She examined the slit in the skirt that let her move. Did it show too much leg, not enough? She brushed her hair glossy and wondered if she should use lipstick before hastening to the library where he was already seated at a table examining an old manuscript. She put her hands on his shoulders and asked what he was reading.

The next several days she was asking him where he had been and what he had done, but he answered that he was a mere roving scholar who had led a dull life. She concluded he didn't realize how interesting he was.

"No balance," said Cho upon reading the morning's work. "No balance. The boys are spending their time on a subplot, and they failed to introduce the heroine."

"You're right," said the editor.

How slowly comes the realization, if it comes at all, that an undertaking may have at its core a more serious motive and that this motive may include the darker elements even if the undertaking looks innocent and enlightening -- especially if it is a venture suggested by a person who one finds worthwhile and intriguing and even more especially if this person indicates that he finds his companion interesting and exciting.

"I'll segue in like Biff, but layer in some depth and bring in the main character," said Cho as deft fingers caressed the most balanced keys of the typewriter.

The cloud-drenched market square, like a mind occupied with the coming tasks but receptive enough to admit accompanying thoughts, did admit enough subdued rays that the girl at the table noticed the approaching shadow, and like the mind flexible enough to entertain new elements in its panorama of existence, the girl turned to greet the newcomer.

"Hello, Hermione."

"Hi, Luna."

Hermione could only relate struggling to get various reforms through a bureaucracy while Luna talked about the search for lost knowledge and founder artifacts that took her into the heart of the forest and the depths of the castle.

"Wow," said Hermione. "Are you telling me that in addition to a revision of history guaranteed to create a storm, you're getting a chance to face life-trampling monsters and soul-sucking demons?"

"That's a more accurate description of my life than I want to admit," said Luna.

After some hesitation, Luna talked about her working partner. He was incredibly intelligent, and he was kind and a good listener, but still magically powerful. And he dressed well.

Hermione noticed her friend radiated like never before, but she still asked, "Are you sure he's not a player?"

"I don't know," said Luna.

Hermione reconsidered things. "He might be the one who appreciates you for what you are."

"Now that you bring it up, I've never considered how drab I am," said Luna, realizing there were parts of her existence she hadn't considered. "I've never thought about those things before."

"You're not drab," said Hermione. "You're lovely and intelligent and kind."

But Luna only sat smiling sadly into the distance.

The next day at work, Hermione spoke to an old friend in law enforcement. "Ron, there's a suspicious person looking for forbidden material."

Having set the tale on the right path, Cho and the editor took a break for tea. Even two clueless hacks could chronicle the heroine reaching new heights.

And when the other writers returned, they did consider the continuation.

"The girls talk about sensitivity, but they're ignoring emotional consequences," said Theo.

"Even adventure writers could do better," said Biff, churning out a few words.

Jonathan was absorbed enough in his work that it took a while for him to notice that Luna was no longer grabbing his shoulder upon finding a particularly rare book, and she was looking at him quizzically instead of smiling at him from across the room whenever he looked at her. It took him longer to miss her inquisitiveness about his past life. He recalled a gardener who had never thought about a family of bluebirds with their cheerful colors and their omnivorous diet of insect pests until the day he realized they were no longer visiting his plot.

At times, Jonathan thought Luna was even viewing Skippy with suspicion.

As time passed and he did not approach her out of a polite consideration for her feelings, she picked places farther and farther away from him to restore and shelve the new volumes.

Thus, when he dusted off an ancient scroll and almost recoiled from the contents, he did not share it with someone with whom he no longer had a relationship of trust.

"Now that you mentioned it," said Theo, "they didn't give any emotional depth to the new character."

"Maybe they did, but it was too subtle for the likes of us," said Biff.

"Too subtle by half," said Theo. "Let me see if I can write something that connects with us cruder types but still doesn't offend refined feminine sensibilities."

"And I'll write it in sensitive-style," he added.

Fighting down the nagging thought that she was a stalker with the reminder that she was acting for the common good, Hermione Granger managed to be at the tea shop near the bookstore that Luna had mentioned Jonathan favored. She followed him in, and steeling her nerve with her sense of mission, introduced herself to the strange wizard in town.

"I met Luna Lovegood the other day," she said as they ordered tea, "and I thought you might be the one working with her in the library."

"That's true," he said.

"Isn't it dull?" she asked.

"It can be tedious," he admitted, "but there's the possibility of discovering forgotten history."

"History?"

"Yes, what really happened," he said. "You don't think that high academic impulses built that castle, do you, that defensive structure in a remote location?"

"It was a time of turmoil," said Hermione.

As he was nodding approval, she was patting her frizzy hair into a semblance of smoothness.

"Why did the founder's branch of magic survive to become the dominant one in the British Isles?" he asked.

"I hadn't thought about that," she said as she fumbled with the top button of her blouse.

"And now that you are thinking about it?" he prompted.

"Perhaps they integrated all the branches of magic," suggested Hermione.

Her face lit up with inspiration. "That's it. That's the reason for the split, not pure blood, purity of magic."

"Keep going," he said.

"You're going to say the story about pure blood is projecting twentieth century conflicts onto the tenth century." She paused. "More than that, you're going to say my suggestion about pure magic instead of pure blood is merely a variant of the standard story, and it might possibly be something entirely different."

"Very good," said Jonathan.

As a glowing girl tried to look into flashing eyes, her hand idly unfastened the top button of her blouse.

Later, she was back at her flat with Crookshanks and staring meditatively into the fireplace.

Theo took a deep breath before his sensitive plunge into a frizzy-haired psyche staring at her midnight ceiling.

How falsely judged are we who adhere to higher standards by those who do not realize that exemplary conduct benefits all while those who scoff and declare us cold hearted while reveling in the softer feelings do not bother to discern that our conduct is the product of a deep concern for the well-being of all and thus fail to perceive that our center is often yearning for the gentle touch that would be returned many fold upon the one who would take the care to see past the stern exterior to the gentle soul within, a soul that encompasses both great compassion and great rectitude, compassion and rectitude enough to take in even a fiery-eyed desperado whose understanding, if only he would extend it, would let a person considered stern soar to unimaginable heights of intellectual insight and romantic passion and certainly such a wanderer, with possibly a touch of dark in his soul, would benefit more from a pillar of upright behavior than from a spacey girl who spends her life chasing creatures that do not exist, especially when, just for him, the more modest one would bare all and, transgressing to do good, set aside her defenses and let him explore the possibilities beneath her impeccable attire.

Author's Note: In the dungeon, Jonathan mangles part of the Diamond Sutra.

Breaking Fast

Chapter 4 of 6

Events plunge forward.

Chapter 4: Breaking Fast

"They derailed the plot and bungled the side story," said Cho.

The editor nodded. "Even though Luna is a minor character, they should bring out the moral fibre she possess."

Cho sat at the typewriter but gave up. "It's beyond redeeming. It's a mess."

"Grab your purse, love," said the editor. "We'll get an inspirational drink and go somewhere to watch the waves pound against rocks."

"Inspired by the resistance of the cliffs, our own fibre will become tough enough to pound sense into the story," said Cho.

It was later in the morning when Biff and Theo arrived and saw the blank pieces of paper.

"The girls are having trouble with where they took the relationship," said Theo.

"Perhaps some day they will find the Scroll of the Perfect Plot," said Biff.

"They created the problem; they can deal with it," said Theo. "We'll advance the story line."

How often foreboding and prophecy come in our dreams.

Green cloak: You seek to save your life.

Black cloak: I ask if you wish to save your clan. The pursuit is expensive.

Green cloak: We have plenty.

Black cloak: You waste your substance. Rise above the past. Accept the offer.

Green cloak: You believe you can live with yourself after such an offer.

Black cloak: I have already lived with much.

Green cloak: We will continue. We have an operative.

Black cloak: I assume female.

Green cloak: The task requires the utmost in dedication.

Black cloak: It will require the utmost in sacrifice.

Green cloak: Our advantage. You can no longer boast of having the same.

Jonathan threw off his cloak of bed covers and let his feet feel the shock of the cold, stone floor. He splashed his face and stared into the mirror reflecting the morning gloom and concluded the island's rising damp was infecting his spirit. He made his way to breakfast.

It was also morning at the law enforcement office.

"Hermione wants us to investigate someone," said Ron, "some bloke that Luna is infatuated with."

"Luna?" asked Harry.

"I can picture it in my mind," said Ron. "Luna is thinking this bloke is talking to her, listening to her, taking her seriously. He goes looking for wildlife with her; he asks about her life; he keeps glancing at her boobs. Luna is thinking this bloke really, really likes her. She is thinking, oh wow, we can be friends."

"The ultimate female," said Harry.

"At any rate," said Ron, "we're not going to get any peace until we check him out."

"Throw the ball back into Hermione's court," said Harry. "Ask her to pump Luna about the bloke. It should be easy. She probably can't stop gushing about her new found friend."

Back at the castle breakfast table, Jonathan was sipping tea when Luna arrived.

"Jonathan, what happened?" she asked, sitting beside him.

"Just a feverish dream," he said, staring straight ahead.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye. Skippy had his head in Luna's lap. She was petting it reassuringly.

"You need something healthy," she said.

Please, not bangers and mash, he thought, but Luna conjured an orange and suspended it in midair while movements of her wand peeled it. She gave half to him. He watched a girl eat an orange. No suggestive movement of lips around an inserted object. Straightforward consumption. It spoke of normality and stability. But not for him.

Luna pet Skippy and sighed. Skippy sighed. Perhaps not for him either.

The restoration of lost volumes continued with Luna no longer working on the opposite side of the library. At noon, she declared she was going to meet a friend for lunch. As she and Hermione waited for their sandwiches, Luna coaxed her friend into talking about the ins and outs of dealing with an administration. For Hermione, the opportunity to unburden herself to someone who would keep confidences was too tempting, and Luna spent the next hour vicariously living what appeared to be a more normal existence.

Meanwhile, Jonathan, enjoying a pork cutlet and talking to Alastor and Filius, was thinking that if Luna was not going to keep her distance, then he could no longer read the scroll in the library. He was translating the section on using the Void as a source of power and wondering how Anglo-Saxon wizards came by the notion of utter extinguishment.

Later, Ron and Harry evinced disappointment at Hermione's lapse in intelligence gathering.

'Do we really care?' asked Harry when they were back in the office.

"We were able to put Hermione off balance for a while," said Ron. "Count our blessings."

"You're right, mate," said Harry, "but I don't think our luck will hold."

"We may not be able to get out of the hole the girls dug for the story," said Theo, "but we can romp around in it."

"Speaking of holes, it's lunch time," said Biff.

It was a short time later, and Cho was suppressing a scream. The young writer, however, quickly regained her equilibrium in the face of a greater need. The editor's head was buried in her hands and she was declaring that she would never be able to face a blank sheet of paper again.

"Brace up," urged the novice writer. "We have to exhibit the same fortitude we expect from our heroines."

"There's always tomorrow," said the editor.

Some time later, the boys returned to find the manuscript as they left it and the girls closeted in the editor's office.

"What we wrote must have affected them deeply," said Theo. "They're busy putting together a suitable follow-up."

"Aye, lad," said Biff, "but we can't wait for perfection."

Like leopards circling a fence around antelopes, others were clawing in frustration at obstacles and barriers.

"I need your help," said Hermione, sipping her sherry in an out-of-the-way pub. "Luna's not thinking straight, if she ever did, and Ronald can't see what's right in front of him."

"I realize we need to know more," said Ginny, "but I don't know what I can do."

Hermione slammed her glass down. "I know, some relaxing social event, some event that provides a lot of free time for couples. Could we arrange a double date?"

Hermione went on to say that since Luna might be suspicious of her motives, Ginny had to carry out the plan. Ginny was hesitant. She and her current boyfriend were beyond the double-date stage, and she didn't want to regress. And besides, who would they get for Luna. It occurred to Hermione that a midsummer festival was coming up. There would be singing and dancing and displays of new spells and shows of new plants and unusual animals. Couples could spend hours at the event, and Luna would certainly talk about her partner at work. The new plants and animals made the fourth person obvious. The two of them would work on Neville Longbottom.

In another corner of the pub, hooded figures were sipping their beer and contemplating their lack of success.

"He's gone to ground."

"We've searched everywhere a powerful warlock would go."

"He's at some obscure place of no consequence, and there's no shortage of those in Britain."

Making Connections

Chapter 5 of 6

A subtle lemma joins the plot.

Chapter 5: Making Connections

"The girls aren't in yet today."

"Maybe it's writers' block. It can happen to anyone."

"But it's time for some relationship stuff," complained Theo.

"We'll put on our sensitivity cloaks, lad, and divine the inner Luna. We're professionals. We'll unmask the essence of female."

Theo picked up the gauntlet.

Every day, she had been waiting for him at the breakfast table. She had a peeled orange for him, and she had instructed the kitchen staff to have his coffee ready. After all, he was from the continent and he had once mentioned that he had visited the Americas. She examined him for any signs of lack of sleep and watched Skippy's behavior for any signs of nervousness. She thought Skippy would be the best indicator and encouraged him by slipping him tidbits from her plate. Bacon went over well. She began working more and more closely with him until restoring and shelving a box of books became a joint enterprise.

"I like your hair," he said.

The next day, she showed him the Transformation book. She was stuck on Proposition Nineteen.

He flipped through the pages before saying, "That's a major result, but it depends on understanding Assertion Ten which is a favorite of Transformers everywhere, a subtle lemma."

Luna thought it was sad that the lemma had no purpose in life except to establish another proposition, but Jonathan replied that it could stand on its own and, in addition, it was crucial to other notable propositions. He said it reminded him of a certain witch who had value of her own besides being a source of support to those around her.

At this sign of appreciation of others, Luna decided that Jonathan was a sympathetic soul who could be relied on, and she asked if he could take some time in the future to show her more about this lemma. He replied that no lemma could lead a forlorn life if witches of her caliber found it interesting.

Later, they were taking their usual walk to the lake and back before tea.

"The lemma is on its way to something, isn't it," said Luna.

"Yes."

"I feel better now," said Luna. "It's the journey that's important."

"Aargh," went Theo, quitting the typewriter.

"Take a break, lad," said Biff, picking up the discarded gauntlet. "More than one adventure writer has burned out on this relationship stuff."

Like a raft floating over to a pair of sailors floundering in the ocean, Filius Flitwick sauntered over to the table where Ron and Harry were having a noon sandwich and beer.

"Wotcher Harry, Wotcher Ron. May I join you?"

He could and as Filius sipped his beer waiting for his fish and chips, they asked why he wasn't showing the new arrival around wizard Britain. He replied that the newcomer was being given the guided tour by Miss Lovegood. Ron and Harry said they had heard about that from Hermione and offered that was a big change on Luna's part. They ordered another beer to keep Filius company and idly wondered what type of wizard would attract a spacey witch.

"He seems an ordinary enough bloke," said Filius, "although he latched onto the standard story about the Founders quick enough, and he's certain there are old documents around that will establish a different version. Overall, I would say he's smarter and more powerful than he wants people to think he is."

The talk turned to his canine companion and his devotion to it. Harry and Ron thought that might be what attracted Luna. Filius thought there was more to it than that. The talk turned to what might develop with the couple.

"It all depends on Luna's emotions," said Filius.

"Then he can only get hurt," said Ron.

"He can only get hurt if he's a romantic wizard," corrected Filius.

To Ron's incredulous look, Filius said, "Not all wizards have romance in their soul."

"Then he would be a monster," said Ron.

"They do exist, as you well know," said Filius. "Isn't that why I'm undergoing this subtle interrogation?"

"I think I'm good for another round," said Theo.

"You should get out more," said Luna. "Just working in the library isn't good for you. There's a Midsummer Festival coming up."

"I've thought about it," said Jonathan, "But it's no fun going alone."

"That's true," said Luna. "It's always more fun with another person."

"Would you like to go to the Midsummer Festival?" he asked.

"I didn't plan to because I thought I would have to go alone," said Luna, "but I've been invited to go with Neville Longbottom and Ginny Weasley and her latest boyfriend."

"Ah," said Jonathan. "Yes, great fun."

The editor and Cho had found their inner strength, and lucky it was for them that their being was centered when they read the boys' morning effort.

Is it not always the way that the search for the true state of things depends on the superior faculties of those often regarded as having the weaker frame, and is it not a consequence of this prejudice against those whose constitution is not considered as robust that their insights are slighted and their warnings ignored even though the accumulated evidence of past experience should inform even those of the stouter but thicker skull that events would have a more favorable outcome were they merely to pay more attention to obviously insightful observations.

The editor passed the baton. "Carry the story forward, love, and remember, we need some contrast between our sweet Luna, even if she is peripheral, and that man beast."

"Oh, Jonathan would have loved to have seen that."

The four were at the Midsummer Festival, and Neville was concluding that Jonathan would love to see every sight under the sun, or moon for that matter, but Ginny seized another opportunity to query her friend.

"Does he like garish things?" asked Ginny.

"No, he has refined tastes, or at least, I think he does," said Luna, "but he can appreciate almost everything."

"We're almost at the plant exhibition," said Neville. "There's a lot I want to see, but the rest of you may prefer touring the animals. I can catch up with you later."

"Is Jonathan into plants?" asked Ginny. "Does he favor the toxic ones? What about animals? I hear he has a pet dog. How does he treat it? Is the dog mean?"

Luna, looking around the crowd and hoping to see Jonathan, barely heard the questions.

Jonathan spent Festival Day mastering the Spell of the Void he had found in the old scroll. He obliterated several boulders before walking deep into the forest. His senses were alert, and he whirled at the same time as Skippy to face a Jikininka swooping down upon them. There was a crack of imploding air where it used to be.

"It was only a predator," said Jonathan. "We need to face real ferocity: herbivores protecting their young."

They came upon a herd of Leshy, and the two largest came at him in a thundering rush. There were two more cracks of imploding air where the Leshy used to be. The herd stampeded in the other direction. *Not bad*, thought Jonathan as he headed back for lunch, still wondering how the ancient Celts came by the idea of being utterly extinguished.

"The girls aren't providing a balanced portrait," said Biff. "It's time for a little playfulness and depth."

"Do Brit witches ever provide a strip tease," he asked as Alastor was pouring a spot of noon sherry. "I need a diversion."

As semi-clad images of the witches on the faculty passed before his special eye, Alastor almost dropped the decanter.

Despite his *risqué* inquiry, Jonathan was lost in a different reverie. He imagined he had been giving Luna gentle touches: a squeeze of the shoulder in encouragement, a caress of the shoulder in admiration, a hand on her back in comradeship. He imagined he had coaxed her into his lap and she had put her arms around him. He imagined he had found the nerve to say she was a lovely lady and he wanted to begin her day by convincing her she was wonderful.

He realized that he was being foolish and that Alastor was asking him a question.

"We need to show that Jonathan is social too," said Biff. "We can't do that if he's stuck in the library."

"I know," said Theo. "I'll show him acting graciously in the most formidable company."

"That will endear him to everyone if nothing else will," said Biff.

That afternoon, after lunch, Jonathan was looking for a shirt, and he had given up on the cheaper shops. For the conservative style he preferred, he would have to pay. He was choosing one when a lady approached him.

"I'm hope I'm not being too forward, but my husband and I have heard there's a visiting scholar at the castle."

"That might be me although I'm a wondering scholar earning his keep for the summer by helping in the library."

A wizard came over and introduced himself as Lucius Malfoy. The lady was his wife, Narcissa. Did he have time for a coffee before returning to the castle?

After ordering, Narcissa remarked that they had heard he was skeptical about the accepted story of the founders. Jonathan replied he had no evidence to the contrary, but the story didn't seem right to him. Lucius and Narcissa admitted they had been in the house most affected by the story. When they were young, it aided the conceit they were different, even superior, but in retrospect, they were thinking it had been detrimental. Being regarded as ruthless schemers was alienating, and it was twisting the students in that house. Jonathan said his search wasn't organized and, after all these years, the chance of finding the old documents were slim. Nevertheless, it was encouraging that others were interested. The Malfoys said that tomorrow was Sunday and why didn't he visit them for afternoon tea.

Jonathan thanked them and mentioned he might spend the rest of the day searching for old manuscripts in the local shops, the dodgier the better. Lucius and Narcissa agreed there was no better way to spend time; they had some suggestions; and if it was agreeable, they would join him.

"I think we've demonstrated he's a splendid fellow," said Biff, "and we're ready to complete the romance by reconciling him with Luna, but the girls introduced this

extraneous element."

"It might be extraneous, but now that it's there, it would be artistically incorrect not to develop it," replied Theo, "even though it detracts from the story, and it's going to be challenging maintaining proper narrative perspective."

"I can but try," said Biff.

Is the surface of the Earth naught but a two-dimensional space where random particles will collide, and collide sooner rather than later if various spaces offer attraction? Thus it was that Hermione joined Filius and Alastor when they motioned her over and ordered a drink for herself. They asked if she had spent the day at the Midsummer Festival. She said she hadn't but people she knew had.

Ginny had been furious. "All Looney did was look around for Jonathan. Neville escaped to the botany displays, and my boyfriend was annoyed because he thought I was trying to play matchmaker between two incompatible people. You can spy on him yourself after this."

Ginny had breath for one last plaint. "And you and Looney and Jonathan can take your quest for a subtle lemma, whatever that is, and stick it where the sun doesn't shine."

Recovering from this setback and drawing from the depths of her steely determination, she asked Filius and Alastor why Jonathan wasn't with them. They informed her that he was resting after he and the Malfoys had spent a strenuous afternoon alternating between high-end purveyors of attire and low-end purveyors of old manuscripts.

"Clothes? Manuscripts?" asked Hermione. "What are they trying to hide?"

Alastor shrugged. "Lucius was always a well-turned-out bloke, and they're only going to hide what they've found until they can show it to Andromeda tomorrow."

"Andromeda?" asked Hermione.

"The Malfoys thought it would be fun to host a fancy tea. Narcissa hardly ever gets a chance to show off her inherited china."

"But those dodgy manuscripts?" asked Hermione.

"Narcissa's good with those too," said Filius whereupon he became lost in melancholy reverie. He had always considered the Black sisters as first-rate magical scholars lost to wealth and unfortunate circumstances."

"One last bit," said Theo.

Miss Granger visited Miss Lovegood the next morning.

"If you wanted to see Jonathan, he left earlier. He didn't say where he was going," said Luna. "I wanted to tell him about the Festival."

"I have to tell you," said Hermione. "The Malfoys invited him for tea."

The Malfoys? thought Luna. *He turned down my invitation to go to the festival, but accepted their invitation for tea?*

"I can see you're shocked, but you have to see Jonathan for what he is," said Hermione. "And it's even worse. They're bringing Andromeda into their circle."

"Andromeda is a lovely and gracious lady," said Luna.

"And really smart, too," said Hermione. "She was the star of her house when she was in school."

"Everything," breathed Luna. "Everything to attract exceptional wizards."

"Well, yes," said Hermione, wondering what Looney was on about, "but don't you see how serious this is if they have some scheme that looks innocent enough to rope in Andromeda?"

Hermione noted with satisfaction that the other girl appeared devastated.

Luna *was* deep in thought. *I practically begged him to take me to the festival.*

"I'd like to skip this side story, but the muse just suggested a way to connect the plot lines, and I can't ignore it," said Biff.

"We are but slaves to our craft," agreed Theo.

The hooded figures were, once again, ending the day in a dark corner of a pub but, this time, with some joy in their hearts.

"Our sources tell us there's a bit of commotion in the halls of officialdom."

"It seems some lady is suspicious of a stranger."

"Nothing else is happening. It's got to be him."

Fireworks

Chapter 6 of 6

The suspense builds.

Chapter 6: Fireworks

"How do you feel about writing a character development scene?" asked Biff.

"I'll give it a try," said Theo.

It was Sunday afternoon, and Andromeda was pouring Jonathan another tea. "Have you had a chance to see much of our country, or have you been busy in the library?"

"Just the library and the nearby countryside."

"Is it much different from where you were?" she asked. "Or were you in a lot of different places?"

"A number of places," he said. "Most of them a safer place to put a school."

"Even that castle is dangerous," said Andromeda. "You're being careful, aren't you?"

"He's been looking for documents about the founders," said Lucius.

"What interests you about them?" asked Andromeda. "Are they similar to the founders of other schools you've visited?"

"He's skeptical about the standard story of the split," said Narcissa.

"Oh, that thing," said Andromeda. "I accepted it when I was in school. We were just naïve children. I haven't thought about it since, but it would be quite a revelation to discover that's not how it happened."

Narcissa spoke up. "Skippy is certainly well behaved. I was afraid he would chase the peacocks."

"Maybe he likes bigger game," joked Lucius.

"Do you prefer bigger game, Skippy?" asked Andromeda.

Skippy's eyes met Andromeda's.

"Oh, I thought Lucius was joking, but he might have been serious. Does Skippy prefer bigger game, Jonathan?"

"Skippy is a faithful companion," said Jonathan.

"He looks independent," said Cissy. "Now, brooms always come when you call."

Jonathan nodded in pleasant agreement before saying, "That makes me curious. Can one teach a broom tricks?"

"I like the way your mind works, old chap," said Lucius. "Let's try it and see."

They began by having brooms soar and do acrobats at the wave of a wand. The brooms seemed to enjoy it. Next, they experimented with training the brooms to perform complicated routines by a simple command. Some brooms were amenable and others not.

As they were resting, Lucius mentioned he had been trying to formulate potions for fireworks. Jonathan suggested sending the pyrotechnics aloft on a bewitched broom.

"Something for Guy Fawkes Day," he said.

"But that was explosives in the cellar," said Narcissa.

"But we're wizards," said Jonathan.

"Ah, the inverse, splendid," said Andromeda.

Jonathan indicated the cracker plate. "Do you think our aerial display could match the pattern in this china, subtle but striking?"

Narcissa sat upright and refilled his teacup.

Lucius was eager to begin, but didn't think they should undertake anything as tricky as fireworks in their fatigued state. Jonathan agreed to appear next week to help.

"What about Saturday brunch?" suggested Andromeda.

As he was leaving, Jonathan realized he had spent several hours not tormented by thoughts about a certain witch.

"At last," said the editor. "The boys are advancing the plot, and they wrote it as an innocent encounter. Our heroine can show her mettle by uncovering their nefarious intentions."

Those who imagine themselves keepers of moral rectitude often inveigh against gossip, and while we might agree that malicious things are sometimes better left unsaid, we must not lose sight of the contribution that the flow of information makes to the functioning of society, and that this information plus the social cohesion that it fosters do make a better life for us all as we struggle to make sense of the world around us and make correct decisions despite the miasma of ignorance and misleading pronouncements in which we must all lead our daily lives.

"If the boys can't champion our intrepid witch after that lead-in, they should turn in their license to write," said Cho.

Later, the boys were reviewing the latest.

"I can't face moral rectitude without another espresso," complained Theo.

"Brace up, old bean," said Biff. "Let the hot brew of femininity be your pick-me-up."

Hermione was gratified that Luna took Jonathan consorting with the Malfoys seriously although she couldn't figure out why the other girl was obsessing about Andromeda.

She needed more information, and she went immediately to the one who could let her observe anything that happened on the Malfoy estate.

"Dobby is not certain he should spy on his old family," said the elf.

"It's for their own good," said Hermione. "They're being led astray again. You don't want that to happen, do you?"

"Well, no," said the elf.

"It was bad enough when it was by a Brit wizard, but this time it's by a smooth operator from the continent," said Hermione. "He even has Luna thinking he's innocent. Imagine how much trouble he could get the Malfoys in before they suspected anything."

"Dobby hadn't thought of that," said the elf.

The next day she took her revelations to Ron and Harry, but they weren't convinced there was any need for alarm.

Back at her flat, she confided to Crookshanks. "I had hoped those two had matured to the point they recognized the need for prompt action, but alas, they're still a disappointment. Well, we'll gather more evidence and convince them. I can only pray that they'll see reason before it's too late."

"I've been thinking about Jonathan and the Malfoys," said Theo.

"Great," said Biff. "Let me take care of the aftermath of the Midsummer Festival and try to do something coherent with the touchy-feely stuff the girls left dangling."

Monday morning, Luna skipped down to the library as brimful of expectations as a carelessly filled teacup.

"Good morning, Jonathan."

"Hello."

"Did you go to the Midsummer Festival? I didn't see you there. Neville and I went to all the booths. It was lots of fun. And Neville got to see a lot of new plants."

"That's great."

"What did you do all weekend? Are you going to show me that subtle lemma Saturday? Neville's got to run errands for his gran. I'm free."

"I went to a tea party. I'm going to another one this weekend."

"Oh," said Luna.

"Aftermath done," said Biff. "Touchy-feely undangling next."

She was strolling through the streets and pausing to look in the shop windows.

"Are you really interested in the latest astrolabes? Be you taking up forecasting the future?"

She turned to face Alistair. "Until you pointed it out, I didn't realize what I was looking at, but now that you mention it, do we really want to know the future?"

"Some be believing that if we're forewarned of catastrophe, we will be braced to face it," said Alistair.

"Do you see only doom in your future?" asked Andromeda.

"How quickly you be turning the conversation personal. Foresee you a time for a cup of tea before fate descends upon us?"

"Together, we will defy it," said Andromeda.

Mellowed by a hot brew, the conversation turned to the Sunday afternoon of training brooms. Alistair thought it a most entertaining idea. Andromeda opined that Jonathan and Lucius inspired each other. Alistair expressed the hope that Jonathan finally relaxed. The man was wound tight enough that he had to snap. Andromeda asked if he were talking about himself.

"Quite the probing lass, aren't you," remarked Alistair.

"Were there any significant events that gave you your current attitude?" asked Andromeda. "There had to be. How long ago did they happen?"

"Perhaps longer ago than I care to recall."

"During your school years?" asked Andromeda. "Are your parents still alive? Did you lose friends to the Dark Side? Family?"

At this, Andromeda stared wistfully into the distance until Alistair said, "Who knew that training brooms would conjure up melancholy memories. Be there regret from last Sunday? Did you get to participate?"

She shook her head no before adding that she would like to try but didn't want anyone to laugh at her clumsiness. Alistair assured her that he wouldn't laugh and she could enjoy his ineptness. She placed her hand on his and declared he had made a promise he had to keep. There was a field a short distance away that was safe from prying eyes. They could gather some old brooms suffering from neglect and give them a chance to learn new tricks. With the universe back in balance, Andromeda declared that Lucius and Jonathan deserved their time together. There were lots of things Lucius wanted to forget. She was certain there were thoughts that Jonathan wanted to escape from.

"Aye, lass, there be a subtle lemma," said Alistair.

"I've never heard Luna called that before," said Andromeda.

Biff gave the story line over to Theo. "Go get 'em, tiger."

The next Saturday saw Jonathan and Lucius concocting strange powders and Andromeda telling her sister about Alistair and teaching old brooms new tricks. Narcissa was telling her that was wonderful, hoping Alistair would soon man up and get in her sister's pants.

It was time for a demonstration.

"Boys will be boys," said Cissy.

Andy agreed.

The trained broom rose high into the sky before blossoming into a brilliant red and yellow display.

"Can we try?" asked the girls.

Jonathan and Lucius admitted they had been working on a packet they called the Big Bang, and they were pleasantly surprised when Cissy and Andy agreed that a fiery affair should end with a grand climax.

As quietly and as full of dread as a mouse who had been spying on a symposium of hunting weasels, Hermione took Dobby by the hand and retreated from the mysterious, but obviously sinister, display of pyrotechnics.

"Back to the integration with minor characters," said Theo.

The hooded figures had gathered in the local pub as usual, but this time, there was reason for hope. Their informants in officialdom had reported that a witch was causing a commotion about some stranger. They were certain it was the one they were trying to locate because nothing else could be happening on this backwater island. The information so far was that he was involved in academia and with some rich family. The witch causing the commotion was working with an elf, and they would be easy to track.

Biff had thought out the next segment. "Now's the time to write something surreal, not a task to be undertaken lightly."

Hermione went to bed troubled, certain that the sport with the brooms was part of a deadly plan.

Thousands of brooms were in the air ... the castle defenses were down ... Justin Finch-Fletchley was calmly lecturing on the offense overwhelming the defense ... Malfoys the potion masters ... brooms tearing through hallways like demented hornets ... explosions clearing the rooms of blood traitors ... all her friends falling ... they were coming ... she was grateful she didn't have to witness any more of this life.

She sat bolt upright in bed. "That's why Jonathan is here. That's what he came to Britain to do."