

The Hermann Chronicles

by Fairfield

This tale is for readers interested in adventures and perspectives that a canon character could not reasonably have.

Is the House Cup a rigged game? Is Hermione Granger delusional? Is Harry Potter a bad thing? Is the Order of the Phoenix incompetent? Is the need for a hero a sign of society on the verge of collapse? Can an ordinary student betray everyone?

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Train Station

Chapter 1 of 19

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PROLOGUE

I, Hermann Busch, take quill in hand this fourteenth of July in this year of 1997. It is to write a chronicle of events as I recall them, although the recollection is not in chronological order. Some segments are long; some are short. Some are not for readers of sensitivity. I hope none of them are boring because it was my life, and I would not like to think thus of my life. It is a telling of events between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997, a twelve-month period in which I betrayed everyone who came into my life.

Chapter 1: 1 September 10:00 AM -- 1 September 11:00 AM Train Station

"Ladies," I said, approaching the two girls. They were both pushing carts with similar luggage, except one cart had a cage with one of the ugliest cats on the face of the earth. They stopped and looked at me.

"I'm sorry, but have you heard of Hogwarts? I need to get there," I explained, trying to act as if it were a normal destination.

"We're going there ourselves," said the one with dark red hair. "You can follow us."

The one with the cat cocked her head and gave me an appraising look. "Do we look witchy?"

Uh-oh, I thought, a smart one.

"You have similar luggage. You are of school age. I was told the passage to Hogwarts is in this vicinity," I said. "I took the chance."

I did not say, "Yes, all of you, including that cat, look witchy."

In fact, I thought, you look witchy, you feel witchy, and if I got close enough, you would smell witchy. I think you would taste witchy.

They were looking at me. "Please, lead on," I said.

"Nice looking train," I said when we arrived at the platform. "Thank you for your help."

They just looked at me. I must be making a bad impression, I thought. I'm going to take my luggage and leave as graciously as I can.

"Are you a new student?" asked the girl with red hair.

"Transfer student. Sixth year."

"I'm fifth year," she said.

Was she actually trying to make conversation? "I wanted to come here for my fifth and sixth years, but there are the exams at the end of the fifth year."

"You mean the OWLs," she said.

"I would have to have written them in English."

"Don't you write English?"

"Not well enough to write a good exam. My name is Hermann, Hermann Busch," I added, hoping the conversation would pick up. There was something attractive and interesting about these two girls.

"I'm Ginny Weasley, and this is Hermione Granger. What brings you to Hogwarts?"

"Good morning, Miss Weasley, Miss Granger. I hear Hogwarts is strong in Potions."

Both girls suddenly looked constricted. Mein Gott, what have I done this time? I wondered. I think I'll just blurt out something to hide my embarrassment and leave. "Perhaps, the Potion professor is strict," I said, speaking a little loudly, "but Hogwarts is known for Potions, Arithmancy, Transfiguration, and Charms."

"Herbology is good, too," said Miss Weasley.

Brave girl, I thought. She's trying to keep my clumsy conversation going. "Yes, I've heard Herbology is good, but I don't have any talent for plants or animals." I don't have any talent for girls either, I complained to myself.

"Oh, Care of Magical Creatures is fun. The school is next to a forbidden forest, and the professor is the groundskeeper. We get to see all kinds of animals." Miss Weasley then added, "Have you been sorted into a House yet?"

"No, but I've heard there are four Houses."

"What have you heard about the Houses?" asked Miss Granger neutrally.

Verdammt, that is one sly lady. I gathered my thoughts before speaking. "I know what I've been told about the Houses. I've been told that there's Slytherin, cunning and powerful; Hufflepuff, hardworking with a social conscience; Ravenclaw, intelligence of the analytical variety; and Gryffindor, brave with integrity."

"Which would you like to be?" continued Miss Granger.

"It would be nice to be all of them. In which House are you? How does one get placed?" I replied, trying to slide off the pointy end of the conversation.

"We're both Gryffindors," said Miss Weasley. "You're sorted into a House by a hat that sort of reads your mind."

"Reads my mind! You don't have a House called 'Gottverflucht' do you?"

Did I just say that out loud? I thought. Now, while they're both trying to parse that last sentence, is the time to smile, grab my luggage, and wave goodbye. As I started to pull the trolley away, I heard my name being called.

I turned and saw Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe, and Gregory Goyle. I waved as they approached. They suddenly stopped. "Hermann," said Draco, "what are you doing with the Mudblood and the weasel?"

"Nicknames?" I started to ask, but then I saw the expressions on the girls' faces. I noticed their stances. I recalled parts of a nature program about lionesses. It was not the parts where they were nursing their cute, little cubs. I've got to get out of here, as the Americans say. Where is courage when I need it? Perhaps some formality will let me survive.

I strode forward acting calm, took Draco's hand in mine, placed my other hand on Draco's upper arm, and spoke very sincerely. "Draco, good to see you. Have you been well?" I looked directly into Draco's eyes. I was counting on Draco's breeding to come through. It did.

"Yes, I've been well," said Draco, looking me in the eyes and ignoring the girls.

"Vincent," I said, repeating the performance, "have you been well?"

Taking his lead from Draco, Vincent turned his attention from the girls to me and replied that he had been well.

"Gregory, you look well."

Gregory returned the handshake and asked if I had been well.

"Yes, very well," I said, "I have received excellent care this summer."

Caught up in the spirit of things, Vincent apologized for not being able to invite me to stay at his house for part of the summer. "I understand," I said. "Terrible circumstances."

"By the way," I said, "I understand that if my name is on my luggage, I can leave it someplace to be loaded onto the train."

They pointed out the loading zone, reminded me that I would need my robe for the sorting ceremony, and assured me that the luggage would arrive safely.

"Good, if I arrived at Hogwarts without my luggage, the hat would put me in House Dummkopf."

Draco chuckled and then explained to Vincent and Gregory that if I arrived naked I would be placed in the House for Dumb Heads. They agreed that was funny.

Gott im Himmel, I thought walking back to retrieve the trolley, please, please, let Draco's good breeding hold.

I nodded to the two girls. "Miss Weasley. Miss Granger."

I did the best I could to catch their eyes. "Thank you for all your help."

Miss Weasley actually smiled and waved goodbye.

After Hermann and the others had left, Ginny rounded on Hermione, "You could have been a little more unfriendly if you had worked at it."

"Ginny," Hermione said quietly, "that shy little boy is probably a Death Eater."

"I'm going to board the 'nice looking train,'" said Ginny, walking off in a huff.

After I left the two girls, I pulled the trolley to the loading zone with sweat running down my back. I asked directions to the men's lavatory, calmly walked to the lavatory, calmly entered the stall, and not so calmly heaved my breakfast into the toilet bowl. A little later, I stared at a pale, sweaty face. "Coward," I said to the mirror. "Social incompetent," I said to the mirror.

It would be hilarious if the girls were clairvoyant. Did they hear me wondering if they smelled witchy? I wondered if they had been tasted. Miss Weasley, maybe a little. Miss Granger, little or none. If I were socially adept, I would remedy that. Oh, well, time to face the world. Remember, I could walk out the door and run into the two of them, or Draco, or anything. I adjusted my face to a neutral, pleasant expression and walked out the door.

I was on my way to Hogwarts.

Mein Gott = My Goodness

Verdammt = Dang

Gottverdammt = Gosh darn it

Gott im Himmel = Heavens

Gottverflucht = (The) God-cursed

Malfoy 1

Chapter 2 of 19

At home with the Malfoys

Chapter 2: 1 July 10:00 AM -- 5 July 5:00 PM Malfoy 1

"Hermann Busch, I presume," he stated as he offered me his hand. "I'm Draco Malfoy. This is my mother."

I greeted them, was shown my rooms, and brought back for morning tea. It was a little after 10 on 1 July.

"Draco can take you on a tour of the house and grounds," offered Mrs. Malfoy.

Draco looked as enthusiastic as I felt about a tour of the house.

"Can we ride our brooms on the grounds?" I asked.

Draco perked up.

"Yes," they both said at once.

"Lunch at one," cried Mrs. Malfoy as we took off ... Draco on his fast-looking steed and I on my serviceable one.

I expected Draco to ride sedately until his mother was out of sight, put on a burst of speed around the lake, do a fast climb and dive, and then take an obstacle course through the woods. I was not disappointed. What my broom lacked in speed, it gained in maneuverability. I came out of the woods just behind Draco. The look on his face told me I had been accepted.

My broom work was from training for hunting vampires through the German forests. I was a mediocre hunter, but I was still trained. I didn't see any reason to mention the training. The German Ministry was flexible on the matter. Its position was that the Brits could learn anything we transfer students knew by sending an English student to Durmstrang. We could tell our hosts whatever we felt comfortable telling them. Later, for vampires. Right now, lunch.

Draco was in a good mood after the ride, and it was infectious. He kissed his mother on the cheek and took over overseeing the elves.

"Do you ride?" I inquired.

"I used to, but not anymore," Mrs. Malfoy replied.

"I was hoping you could take us on a tour," I told her, hoping I wasn't being too forward. I glanced at Draco. He seemed to like the idea.

"Yes, Mother," he said. "You should relax and get some air."

"Perhaps you know some scenic spots," I suggested as casually as I could.

"There are some places I would like to visit," she confessed.

"That's great," said Draco.

After a pause he pleaded, "It would be good for you."

"I don't know if I'm up to it," she replied.

"Isn't Hermann a potions master?" quipped Draco, gesturing in my direction. "We could brew you some restoratives."

"I'm not that fragile," she retorted, and then she caught on. "That's a good one," she said, smiling at us.

Draco and I caught each other's eye. Let's leave it at that. Gentle persuasion.

"I hear you play Quidditch," I said, changing the subject.

"Oh, yes!" responded Mrs. Malfoy. "He's the team Seeker." She leaned over and squeezed her son's arm.

"Do you train with Snitch-Birds?" I asked. They gave me blank looks.

"Snitch-Birds," I explained, "are specially bred to mimic the movements of the snitch. Our Seekers train with them."

Draco looked interested, but his mother looked appalled. "You chase those poor little birds around and catch them?" she exclaimed.

"The birds live for it," I assured both of them. "There's an active Snitch-Bird Society dedicated to their welfare. They tried raising them without using them in Seeker practice. The birds died young."

Mrs. Malfoy still looked skeptical.

"The Seekers are very careful with them. It's considered clumsy and dishonorable to hurt a bird. There's an active debate whether or not our Seekers are being trained correctly. We're afraid they won't pursue the real snitch aggressively enough."

"But the birds still get hurt," countered Mrs. Malfoy.

"The injury rate for the birds is much less than for the players, but Quidditch is a sport," I replied. "In sports, people and animals get hurt."

"Could we practice with them?" asked Draco.

"Draco!" said Mrs. Malfoy. "Those poor little birds!"

"We'll be careful, Mum." He turned to me and asked, "Could we practice with them?"

"If you two agree to try them, I can ask the German Ministry."

Draco left for a few minutes. "Do you think I'm being a spoilsport about the birds?" asked Mrs. Malfoy.

"Not at all," I replied, looking into her kind eyes. "I'm glad you're concerned." She seemed to blush a little.

"Do you really want me to ride with you? Do you think I can?"

"Believe me; we both want your company. Take it easy at first."

"You look athletic to me," I added. She smiled at that and seemed to get slightly pinker.

I spent the rest of the day in a reading room, sorting through the Hogwarts' textbooks. The Hogwarts and Durmstrang curriculums were different, and I had to fill in some gaps. As I worked, I noticed the room was cozy. It had lots of natural light, comfortable chairs, a wood floor, and some quiet oriental carpets. Somebody liked this room and had made it friendly.

The next morning after tea, Draco and I discovered that Mrs. Malfoy had dug out and polished her broom. We made a small tour. That afternoon the Snitch-Birds arrived, and Mrs. Malfoy immediately appointed herself their guardian. Caring for the birds was not something she was going to leave to a pair of ruffians.

That afternoon I sent a message to the German Ministry that things were going well. We had been worried. After all, Mr. Malfoy was in prison, along with a number of other people I had planned to visit. The German Ministry and I had canceled all the summer plans. The Malfoys and the Notts, however, had insisted that I come as planned. As far as the Ministry and I could tell, it was their aristocratic heritage. For a thousand years, Malfoys and Notts had been going to wars, revolutions, big game hunts, and adventures. For a thousand years, some catastrophe had just happened, was happening, or was about to happen. It was a way of life to them, and it would not interfere with their hospitality.

A few afternoons later, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle appeared with sacks of old Bludgers. They were Beaters on the Slytherin team. The object of this afternoon's game, the three explained to me, was for Vincent and Gregory to knock Draco and me off our brooms with the Bludgers as we two targets flew about in an area the size of a Quidditch pitch. Draco and I could charge Vincent and Gregory if we felt like it. By the time the rules had been explained, Draco had a feral grin. This aristocratic heritage stuff could be scary. I noticed that Mrs. Malfoy was outside reading in a spot that let her observe everything.

Let the Games begin. Vincent and Gregory were good. There was not any way Draco and I could get close to them, at least not two-dimensionally. The laws of chance said that, sooner or later, Draco or I would get hit ... probably sooner given how good those Beaters were. It was time for Durmstrang defensive tactics. I got directly above them. It's hard to send a Bludger straight up with any accuracy. I dove behind them to the ground where I pushed myself off. As I went past Vincent, I switched hand positions and thrust my broom out like a quarterstaff. It hit the front of Vincent's broom, knocking it out of his hands. Vincent spiraled to the ground. I was counting on Gregory being too surprised to react. I flipped over in the air without reseating myself. In a dive with the broom in front of me, I struck Gregory's broom behind him with a quarterstaff blow. It knocked him off his seat, although he still had both hands on his broom. He, too, spiraled to the ground. I flipped over again, regained my seat, and managed to land not too hard. I only bounced once.

Vincent and Gregory were up, whooping with glee and pounding me on the back in congratulations. They were joined by Draco. I absolutely had to show them how to do that. Those flips, however, did not agree with my inner ear. I stumbled. Somehow, Mrs. Malfoy was there holding me up. I wondered if I was becoming a sissy since I didn't mind at all that Mrs. Malfoy kept a hand on me all the way back to the table. Once back at the table, we returning heroes clicked our mugs together and quaffed a mighty brew.

The cozy reading room became my favorite place. When Mrs. Malfoy and I were alone she talked about her years at Hogwarts, and she asked about Durmstrang. "Do you really emphasize the Dark Arts?"

"Yes," I said, trying to be diplomatic, "but Durmstrang has expanded its courses the last two decades. Defense for the Dark Arts is now part of the Incantation Disciplines along with Charms and Transfigurations."

Mrs. Malfoy nodded and said, "They built around their strong point."

I agreed. "Yes, they first made the Incantation Disciplines world class. Then they decided we needed to relate to the rest of the world, and they built up the Social Disciplines ... magic and non-magic social studies, and magic and non-magic history. These disciplines have recently become world class. We're even doing revisionist history."

"Revisionist history?" asked Mrs. Malfoy.

"The latest study out of Durmstrang argues that the goblins were justified during the last goblin-wizard war, that the treaty ending the war is unfair, and that it should be changed."

Immediately after saying this I realized what a mistake I had made. The Death Eaters did not recognize anyone not a pureblood wizard as having a right to a full and decent life, and the Death Eaters believed in violence and intimidation instead of compromise and peaceful settlement. I expected Mrs. Malfoy, the wife of a Death Eater, to become angry and dismiss revisionist history as Durmstrang craziness, but she thought about it and said, "They're trying to prevent the next war. They want to remove its causes before it happens."

I couldn't believe it. That was one of the most insightful and sympathetic comments about revisionist history that I had ever heard. "Yes," I said.

Of course I was a little disappointed that I had not heard a spirited argument about why pureblood wizards should rule the world. It would have been interesting to get a first hand account of their position.

I admired this lady and liked her company. I tried encouraging her visits by paying attention to her. I made a pest of myself by asking if she wanted any tea and by adjusting the lights for her, but she accepted all this graciously. She even acted as if she enjoyed it. After a while, we were talking about our families. Soon, Mrs. Malfoy was in the room almost all the time I was in the room. I actually got irritated one day when she didn't appear. Strange.

Sorting Hat

Chapter 3 of 19

Welcome to Hogwarts

Chapter 3: 1 September 8:00 PM -- 6 September 5:00 PM Sorting Hat

I entered the Great Hall behind all the first years. It had been a nice trip over the lake. I like boats. I ignored the opening oratory, although it was interesting that it was given by a hat. These speeches were always the same: the founding whomevers and how their thoughts pertained to today's troubled world. It was finally my turn to be sorted. I must have given the stool a scowl because the presiding witch tapped it to increase its size. I would have been sitting there with my knees around my ears.

"Not so fast, Hat," I said as it was plopped on my head.

"I'm sorry," said the Hat.

"It's an Americanism. It means, 'Let's think this over before we do anything precipitous.'"

"We are discussing which house you're sorted into?" asked the Hat.

"Yes."

"Well," said the Hat, "I was about to dump you into Slytherin for impertinence."

"That's what we need to talk about," I said. "Those rash decisions will get us into trouble."

"Very well," said the Hat.

"I understand some Houses are nearly feuding."

"I must admit you've heard correctly," said the Hat, "even though I have given numerous reasons why they should work together and ..."

"Fine, fine," I interjected. "Which Houses are feuding?"

"Gryffindor and Slytherin for the most part," replied the Hat. "Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw are neutral, although they tend to favor Gryffindor."

"There, you see," I said. "You almost threw an exchange student into a besieged House."

I continued, "From what I've heard of the Hufflepuffs, they would tear me limb from limb if they found out what kind of person I am."

The Hat rummaged around a little in my mind. "You have a point there," it conceded.

"How are the Ravensclaws?" I asked.

"Well, they're smart enough to hold their own against any of the other Houses," said the Hat, "and they tend to be neutral because of their intellectual arrogance. As a promising Potions master, you would fit in."

"All right," I shouted, "better be RAVENCLAW!"

"I'm supposed to say that," sulked the Hat.

Two Ravensclaws came down the table to talk to me as the feast started. "We noticed you had quite the conversation with the Hat," said the hawkish looking one, introducing himself as William Broderick.

"Yeah, that was almost a confrontation," said the other one, introducing himself as John Shovick.

I looked back up the table where they had left three girls to come to talk to me. The girls could have come, too. "We were negotiating," I replied.

I gave a friendly wave to the girls, who were watching the proceedings. The one with an abstract air about her smiled and waved back. Ah ha, much more aware of her surroundings than she looked. The one with Asian features wiggled her fingers and giggled. Ah so, the mysterious oriental. The mature looking one flashed me a palm without changing her facial expression and went back to her pumpkin juice. Ah yes, my winning ways.

My awareness rejoined Mr. Broderick and Mr. Shovick as they were telling me about their chess club. I had been dreading this moment. "I wish it were otherwise," I lamented, "but I am poor at games. Besides, I thought I would go to the States. I've been practicing poker."

"Poker?" they both said. "Isn't that a game of luck?"

"Not entirely. Part of the skill is being able to deal with the random element," I tried to explain.

They shook their heads in disappointment and returned to deliver their dismal report of my shortcomings to the girls.

The first class the next day was Arithmancy. I grabbed a desk in the back and had it all to myself. In the middle of one of the derivations, I noticed that the reasons given by the text and repeated by the professor weren't sufficient to establish an inequality. I pointed it out, and the professor agreed. The professor and I wrangled with it until we had the result established.

Padma Patil, a Ravenclaw, and Jessica Cummings, a Slytherin, knew lots of things and understood lots of things. They liked what they had just seen in Arithmancy.

As the professor turned back to the lecture, I noticed the rest of the class was staring at me. Verdammt. I didn't want their attention. I just couldn't bear having the class leave with an incorrect derivation. After a while everyone was again paying attention to the lecture, except for that bushy haired whitsit that I had met at the train station. She kept glancing at me. "Couldn't that snarky witch just lay off?" I groaned silently.

As the class ended and I stepped out the door, she ambushed me. "Do you have some free time? Would you like a coffee?" she asked.

Something snapped. I couldn't take her suspicions anymore. I couldn't take her snooping anymore. "Why? Do you want to spy if I have what you call the 'evil mark'?" I spat at her.

She gasped. She stepped back and turned and ran down the corridor before I could recover and tell her that I regretted saying that.

It wasn't easy to apologize to Miss Granger since she traveled with her friends. I finally asked some people in Ravenclaw where she might be found alone. They rolled their eyes. "It's not that," I explained. "I said something ill considered to her and wish to apologize." They suggested the library. They were correct. It wasn't long before I spotted Miss Granger alone at a library table.

I approached her. She was going to ignore me. I tapped the table, and she looked up. "I want to apologize for my poor remarks after Arithmancy," I stated. She put her book down. "I don't care what you think of me," I continued. "I'm apologizing because I do not like to act improperly." After I said that, her expression changed from hopeful to hurt. Perhaps I didn't handle that very well, I thought, as I walked away.

Gottverdammt, Hogwarts is a lonely place ... am Arsch der Welt. Students who had gone to Salem returned with stories of the open and friendly Americans, of plenty of good times.

It was Charms with the Hufflepuffs. I took a seat in the back. I wanted to hide the fact that I was a slow learner, more accurately, a slow initial learner. I would finally catch up. A sympathetic Durmstrang professor had told me that I internalized knowledge. After internalizing, I could use the knowledge in ways that others couldn't. "Big deal," as the Americans said. The first half of the term was still going to be painful. A friendly and chatty Hufflepuff named Justin Finch-Fletchley had sat beside me. This might be for the best. He didn't care that I wasn't a chess maniac. He would never discover my private life. He wouldn't poke fun at my initial slowness. Perhaps some classmates were better than others.

Transfiguration was with Gryffindor. I chose a desk in the back as usual. I walked Miss Granger with her two friends. I wondered if they stirred her cauldron. I think I would prefer the two-girl type of trio. I looked around the classroom for suitable prospects. This train of thought was interrupted by the swish of a robe as someone sat beside me.

"Is this seat taken?" she asked.

"No," I admitted reluctantly. Her name was Padma Patil, and she knew that I was Hermann Busch.

I recalled that Miss Patil was the mature looking girl at the sorting feast who had found pumpkin juice more interesting than me. I made some polite remarks about the weather still being warm, about Miss Patil being a Ravenclaw, and about the stairs at Hogwarts. I returned to examining the room for prospects for a trio, but had no luck. Oh, well. It was just me and the school work. Classmates wouldn't have any effect on anything.

Padma was disappointed that Hermann was polite, but indifferent, to her. But Padma was grateful that he didn't bite her head off the way he did poor Hermione when she tried to be friendly.

Later was Potions. Draco and I spotted each other immediately. We grabbed the same desk. We gave each other the American High Sign that I had shown him. There was a crack as our palms met in midair. Let the Potions professor glare if he wanted. We were two masters. With a little effort we would rule. We surveyed the rest of the class and the professor with predatory grins. Suddenly, life at Hogwarts seemed livable. Perhaps classmates did make a difference.

Malfoy 2

Chapter 4 of 19

Broomsticks and fantasies.

Chapter 4: 5 July 11:45 PM -- 13 July 2:00 AM Malfoy 2

Within two days of their arrival, Mrs. Malfoy could tell the Snitch-Birds apart and had named them. Draco and I started hearing comments like "Little Frederick hasn't been out in two days, and he needs the exercise." We adapted our Quidditch practice to Mrs. Malfoy's timetable for exercising and resting the birds. By common consent, we kept them in their cages when Vincent and Gregory visited. We finally convinced Mrs. Malfoy to help exercise the birds by telling her that she only had to chase them, not catch them. Draco's mum in hot pursuit of a Snitch-Bird was a moving hazard. We learned to stay out of her way. "Here she comes!" Draco would shout.

* * *

It was the Malfoy custom for Mrs. Malfoy to kiss her son goodnight. One night after she had sent her son off to bed and had returned to the reading room, I said, "You deserve a goodnight kiss, too."

"I do?" replied Mrs. Malfoy.

"Yes," I said, rising and walking over to her. "A kiss is a seal of approval."

"You approve of me?" asked Mrs. Malfoy hopefully.

"We all approve of you," I said.

"That's not quite what I wanted to hear," she said.

I was somewhat discouraged by her last remark, but she wasn't running away. I gently held her arms just above her elbows and planted a kiss on her forehead. "Sweet dreams, Mrs. Malfoy."

"It's Narcissa," she said.

I kissed her on the forehead again. "Sweet dreams, Narcissa."

"Thank you," she said and smiled. She turned and waved as she went to her rooms.

The next morning at breakfast, Narcissa bustled about and hummed to herself.

"You seem happy, Mum," said Draco.

She sat down, looked straight at me, and said, "I slept very well last night."

Later, when the three of us were in the reading room, Narcissa asked if I wanted any tea. She adjusted the light for me. "He's okay, Mum," grumbled Draco, annoyed at the general disturbance.

* * *

The three of us prepared for the return of Vincent and Gregory and the practice of Broom Kung Fu. For safety, we bought six slow but sturdy brooms and padded them. I emphasized that we had to be careful since the moves that we would learn could break limbs and necks. Draco's eyes lit up. So did Narcissa's. Ah, yes, the aristocrats.

It was my first cultural contribution to the Brits. It wasn't a nice song to play for the girls. It wasn't a new dance step to show the girls. It wasn't a pleasant card game to while away the hours until the girls returned. It was a maim-and-kill defense against the dark forces tactic.

Vincent, Gregory, Draco, and I began the lessons on using brooms for defense by swatting Bludgers out of the way. This developed reflexes, control, and the ability to fly with a broom while not sitting on it. We progressed to using the brooms like quarterstaffs against each other. Like most martial art practices, it was a bonding experience. Nothing beats beating seven kinds of shit out of each other for forming lasting relationships.

* * *

The fourth time I kissed Narcissa on her forehead and wished her sweet dreams, she slid her arms around me and kissed me, very softly, on the lips. I did the same to her. We moved over to the sofa to lie down side by side. We held each other. An hour went by while we held each other. Finally, we parted and went to our separate rooms. The next night she returned after sending her son to bed and declared, "Hermann, I can't do this. You're my son's friend."

I was stunned. I couldn't think of a single thing to say or do.

"Good night, Hermann. Sweet dreams," she stammered, backing away. She turned and ran to her rooms.

"Sweet dreams, Narcissa," I finally got out, but I don't think she heard me.

The next morning Draco looked at his mother. "Mum? What happened?"

Narcissa sat down, glared at me, and said, "I couldn't sleep last night. I had nightmares."

"We'll make you a sleeping potion," exclaimed Draco, looking at me. "We can make it for you today."

"Potions are not what I need," countered Narcissa, continuing to glare at me.

"It'll be okay, Mum," continued Draco, thinking that his mother was just being stubborn.

The best part of me was upset that Narcissa had not slept well. The worst part of me was glad that Narcissa had nightmares. The worst part of me was definitely winning, which under the circumstances was good. I had been hurt last night and wanted to scream at her and say hateful things. If she had spurned me and then had a good night's sleep, I would have gone crazy. The worst part of me noted that she had not spurned me and then lived happily ever after. I could act like a gentleman while secretly gloating about her misery. It wasn't the best behavior in the world, but it was the best that I was capable of at the moment.

We all went to the reading room where Draco and I put together a list of ingredients for some mild potions. Narcissa complained that the sun was in her eyes and then that the room was too dark. The tea was too hot, and then it was bloody awful cold. She would be glad to be rid of us when we went to get the ingredients. We weren't going to leave her alone when we went shopping, were we? Draco and I added the ingredients for some powerful potions.

By noon, Draco and I had a simple draught prepared. Narcissa refused to touch it. I volunteered to test it and to take enough for four hours, until tea time. I thought it best that either Narcissa or I be unconscious. I awoke when the curtains were pulled back and the afternoon sun streamed in. It was Narcissa with a bedside tea service. I started to ask where Draco was, but then I realized that anything I said would give her an opening. Then I realized that not asking would give her an opening too.

"Hello," I said, sitting up. "Where's Draco?"

"Can't I serve you tea?"

"Of course, just asking."

"I think he's out throwing rocks in the lake."

All afternoon? Yes, probably all afternoon, I thought. I could join him. One could never throw too many rocks in a lake.

What was Narcissa doing? Did she really want to see me? Was she teasing me? Did she know how painful it was to see her? Did she know how glad I was to see her? Was she thinking any of these things?

The only clue I had was that Narcissa was keeping out of reach. I wasn't going to lunge for her or even ask her to sit closer. She had told me to go away, and I was going to play the gentleman.

"A Sickle for your thoughts," she said.

I thought of asking her if there was any more marmalade, but then I thought that there was no reason to act cold and callous since I didn't feel cold and callous. I felt hurt, but I didn't want to act that way either.

"Just waking up, not coherent yet," I replied.

My thoughts were that I really, really wanted Narcissa to lunge for me. Her being close but out of reach was becoming too painful. I had to leave before I made a fool of myself. I said, "Thanks for the tea. I'm going to go look for Draco."

That night, Draco persuaded his mother to take some potion.

"You look better, Mum!" said Draco the next morning.

Mrs. Malfoy sat down, glared at me, and said in a steely voice, "I slept just fine."

I was afraid that would happen. Instead of an unhappy lady who was puffy-eyed and incoherent, we had an unhappy lady who was well-rested and keen. Draco and I waited for Vincent and Gregory down by the lake. We heard Mrs. Malfoy screaming about tracking in dirt. We heard Mrs. Malfoy yelling about disturbing the birds. We figured Vincent and Gregory had arrived. We yelled and waved that we were down by the lake. The four of us mounted our steeds and rode out of town, as the Americans say.

We spent the day cruising through various woods and villages. At 4:00 we sent quick-owls to the various homesteads saying that we would return at about 7:00. We then stopped at a tavern that didn't mind younger wizards. After several rounds, it was Draco's turn to go to the counter and get the drinks.

Vincent looked straight at me. "All right, Hermann, what did you do to Mrs. Malfoy?"

"Eh, what?" I stuttered, jumping a bit.

"Don't act innocent," said Gregory. "We can tell something's going on."

"Nothing's going on," I replied.

"We know better," retorted Vincent. "At the beginning of the summer, Mrs. Malfoy was depressed. You arrived, and she perked up. She was absolutely giddy. Then she turned into a bloody awful bitch."

"It's okay, mate. You can tell us what you did," Gregory added, sympathetically.

"I didn't do anything," I said.

"That's what happened!" said Vincent and Gregory together, giving each other meaningful looks.

"You've got to do something, mate!" said Gregory, grabbing my arm earnestly. "You don't mind, do you? I know she's older than you, but she's a fit bird. Couldn't you canoodle her just a little bit?"

"Would you do it for us?" Gregory pleaded.

"Come on, Hermann, snog her brains out," said Vincent, enthusiastically thumping me on the shoulders.

"Yeah," said Gregory, "or we'll never get to visit Draco again."

"I have no idea what you are talking about," I protested. And where did Vincent get that language mix?

Vincent and Gregory were completely exasperated. They were telling me I was the most stupid git on the face of the earth when Draco returned.

* * *

When Draco and I arrived at back at the Malfoy manor, Mrs. Malfoy was waiting on the front lawn.

"Hello, Mum," said Draco, hopping off his broom and kissing her on the cheek ... brave lad, although Mrs. Malfoy's fury seemed to have subsided.

"I want to go jump in the lake," I said. "Seriously," I said, as the two of them looked at me.

"All right!" said Draco. My rooms were closer. We dropped our clothes there, grabbed towels, and ran down to the lake.

We whooped and yelled as we splashed into the water. It was cold. It was a good way to end the day. We trotted back to our respective rooms for warm showers before dinner. Later, there was a knock on my door and a voice asked if I was decent. I opened the door to see Mrs. Malfoy.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Fine," I replied, "and how are you?"

"Good," she said.

"Good," I said.

"Did you have a good time today?" she asked.

"Yes, fine. I'm sure Draco will tell you about it at dinner."

"He never tells me anything."

I was desperately wracking my brains for something intelligent to say, something witty to say, anything to keep her here talking to me.

"I was thinking of asking you a favor," she said.

"Okay."

"It's something you've done before," she said.

"Okay. Sure," I said.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I hope you don't mind," she said.

"Well?" I asked.

"I ... I want a good night kiss."

"Okay," I agreed, looking up and down the hall. No one was around. I kissed her on the forehead.

"I meant later," she said, smiling.

"My mistake," I said.

She hesitated. "I need to check on dinner," she said. She waved goodbye and left.

After dinner, Draco and I kept dozing off while lounging in front of the fireplace. I awoke about midnight to find Draco gone and Narcissa beside me awake.

"Nice room," I said. "I like all the windows, the fireplace, the nice rugs, and the view from the windows."

"I refurnished it several weeks ago. It was being used to store boxes of junk."

"Draco told me that you've been moving things around ... closing the dark, closed-in rooms ... opening the light, airy ones ... sounds healthy to me."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, moving closer to me. She was on her elbow, looking down at me, almost touching me.

"Yes, it's a very good thing to do," I said, encouraging her by lightly placing my hand on her shoulder.

Take it easy, I said to myself. I let Narcissa gently relax and nestle against me.

"Ohh," she sighed, making herself comfortable.

That made it worthwhile, I thought.

"I missed you," she said, giving me a squeeze.

"I missed you too."

"Hermann, I'm really tired," she said.

"You feel tired. You're not just relaxed. You're limp, wrung out."

"Uh-huh," she muttered.

I helped her to her feet and kissed her goodnight.

My thoughts as I walked to my rooms were that being a bloody awful bitch must be exhausting. You're better off snogging. With me, I added.

* * *

I awoke the next morning to discover that things had gone from bad to bad. The misery of rejection had been replaced by the misery of uncertainty. What in the world do I do now? Did Narcissa really like me? What did she want?

One rational thought did come through. Neither Narcissa nor I could ever reveal to Draco that we were canoodling. That meant I had to be prepared to go the entire day without any reassurance that Narcissa wanted to see me again. This was going to be hard.

Pretend you're a Malfoy, I told myself. You're self-possessed, calm, in control, and capable of doing the right thing at the appropriate moment. That helped. Could I keep up the pretence all day?

At breakfast, Draco told his mother that she was looking much better.

Keeping up the "I'm-a-Malfoy" pretence, I said, with complete innocence, "You are looking better. In fact, you're looking beautiful this morning."

Narcissa smiled and thanked us. Draco gave me an appreciative nod. He was glad that his mother and I liked each other and that I was helping keep her morale up. The rest of the conversation was about Draco's upcoming trip to the Crabbes and the Goyles. It wasn't mentioned, but I knew that Mr. Crabbe and Mr. Goyle were in prison. It was mentioned that Draco was one of the few friends that Vincent and Gregory had at school and that his visit would mean a lot to their families. It was clear that Draco

thought the visits would be stressful. Everyone was apologetic that I couldn't visit too, but the Crabbes and Goyles weren't prepared to entertain strangers.

Draco pleaded that I stay and keep his mother company for as long as I could. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," I reassured him.

Draco was leaving at ten o'clock this Saturday, which was the day after tomorrow. Draco's mother spent most of the day organizing her son's trip, bustling about in good-natured exasperation. Draco found life at home comfortable, didn't want to go, and was no help at all. After dinner, we went back to the reading room for a few hands of cards. As Narcissa left to tuck in Draco, she mouthed, "Meet me in the dining room."

That made sense. The dining room was in an out-of-the way place. We didn't want Draco to drop in on us. I waited a while to make sure Draco was safely tucked in. When I arrived, Narcissa was sitting on the floor with her arms wrapped around her knees, staring morosely at the flames in the fireplace. I sat down beside her. This is awkward, I thought. Wait, I thought, be a Malfoy. I willed myself to just sit calmly. After a while, Narcissa turned and smiled at me.

"Narcissa," I said, "are you all right?"

I placed my hand lightly on her neck and gently massaged it. She rested her head on my shoulder. I ran my hand down her back.

"You're very tense," I said. "Would you like a back rub?"

She nodded yes.

"Do you have a blanket?" I asked. "We don't want you breathing dust from the rug."

She got up, gave my shoulders an affectionate squeeze, left, and returned with a quilt. She spread out the quilt, turned her back to me, took off her blouse, and lay down on the quilt ... breathtaking. I ran the back of my hands across her shoulders.

"You have the best shoulders," I said. I meant it.

"Mmmmm."

"Oh, that's so good," she said after a while.

Some time later she felt completely relaxed, and it seemed like the melancholy was gone. I stopped giving her a massage, and I kissed the back of her neck.

"Lie down with me?" she asked.

I kissed her on the back of the neck again and stretched out beside her on my back with my head resting on my hands. I was determined to take it slow and easy.

She slithered over to me and then on top of me. Her tongue flicked out in small devouring kisses. When I looked into her eyes, I saw a hungry reptile. This was incredible, absolutely incredible.

"Hermann," Narcissa asked, "what are you thinking? I know you're thinking something. Tell me. Be honest."

"I can tell you," I said, "but you might get upset. I like what I'm thinking, Narcissa. Remember, I really like it."

"So, tell me."

"Keep in mind, you wouldn't get upset if I thought you were a tigress or an eagle," I said.

Narcissa was giving me her 'I'm being patient, but I'm getting impatient' look.

"I'm looking at a beautiful and affectionate woman, and I get the impression of a great, powerful snake."

"That's different," she said. Thank goodness, she sounded amused.

"You asked. You wanted me to be honest. And I said I liked it," I said defensively.

"Do you really like it, darling?" she asked, cuddling and slithering on top of me.

"God, yes, I love it!" I said.

Narcissa's hair draped over me and her nose touched mine. She had come by herself from a lonely place. Narcissa and I breathed the same air. She wanted someone who could see her. Narcissa touched me with her lips. She had found someone to hold her. Narcissa ran her fingers through my hair. She had someone to unfold her. Narcissa found my lips with hers. She was past all concern. Narcissa's kisses were deep and warm. She was soft and warm. Narcissa was pulled into my embrace. She would never return. Narcissa wrapped herself around me. She would not look for another.

I was entangled enough in Narcissa, her caresses, and her embraces that it took me awhile to realize she was falling asleep on top of me. "Oh, Hermann, you shouldn't have given me such a nice massage. I'm falling asleep. I'm sorry."

It took every gram of gentlemanly behavior I had to release Narcissa and help her to her feet. She wobbled. After I steadied her, I said, "You're exhausted."

I gave her a goodnight kiss. "Goodnight, Narcissa."

"Goodnight, Hermann."

I awoke the next morning, remembered my experiences packing for the summer, and decided not to interfere with the Malfoys. Narcissa and I took a nap between lunch and tea. After all, we had been keeping later hours than Draco. After tea, I went shopping for some potion and household supplies. I agreed to return by half past six. I returned to find Draco in a very impatient mood.

"I said we couldn't open the wine until you got back," said Narcissa.

"I told her we could open the brandy for all I cared," said Draco, a man in an obvious state of stress.

"Okay, okay," I said. "I'll stop and have a glass before I clean up."

"Thanks, mate," exclaimed Draco, grabbing my arm.

Despite his stress, Draco took quite awhile to finish a glass. He appeared happy just to sip a nice wine in our company. I watched as the stress left him. After we finished our first glass, I pleaded the need to wash before dinner. I was told dinner would be early that evening. It's probably to get food into Draco, I thought.

After dinner we were having another glass of wine. The stress of the coming visits, the irritation of packing, the end-of-the-week fatigue, and the wine had taken their toll on Draco. The barriers broke. Draco asked the question that had been constantly within him. He asked the only person he dare ask.

"Do you think my father will get out of prison?" Draco asked me.

Verdammt. Perhaps a formal, academic response would get me out of this one. I reached into the storehouse of knowledge that Durmstrang had obtained from studying the mundane Germans.

"Your father is a prisoner of war being treated like a common criminal," I said.

"Yes. Yes," said Draco, banging the table.

"Criminals are guarded by police. The police are not a military unit. The police might be able to prevent a criminal escape, but they would not be able to withstand a military assault to free prisoners of war," I said, straight out of Middle European twentieth century history.

"A toast," said Draco, raising his wine glass.

Narcissa looked stricken.

Seeking a way out of this supercharged family scene, I pretended I did not notice the turmoil, left the two of them, and made my way to the lavatory.

While splashing cold water on my face in the lavatory, the image that kept coming to mind was Narcissa's lack of enthusiasm about Mr. Malfoy's escape. I remembered a story going around Durmstrang. Several years ago, someone had unleashed a monster, possibly a large snake, on the students at Hogwarts. Several students were injured, although the official claims were that none were killed. Students at Durmstrang were skeptical about the claims of no fatalities. It would take a series of miracles for there to have been no deaths. Part of the story was that Mr. Malfoy was involved in unleashing the monster. What kind of person did that? What kind of person set monsters on students, including his own son?

Speaking of kinds of people, what kind of person stirs up a family and then leaves for the lavatory? My only excuse was that there were lots of sore spots. If I stayed, I would certainly step on more of them. Let the family work it out, as only they could. Coward or wise man? I honestly didn't know.

When I returned, Narcissa was on the couch comforting Draco. Gottverdammt! What had I done?

"I think I should leave you two alone," I said.

"No, please stay," said Narcissa. "Draco is falling asleep."

"I think I unknowingly said terrible things," I apologized. "I had no intention of doing that."

"What you said made Draco feel better," said Narcissa. "He got a little excited. Please stay."

"I did try to speak as a friend," I said, sounding pretentious and lying only a little bit.

I wish I had thought of something better to say, but what I said obviously made Narcissa feel better. For that, I would accept the guilt of a small lie and the embarrassment of a clumsy social response.

"I'll be right back," Narcissa said, lifting Draco with ease and guiding him up the stairs. Of course, she would be like her son ... elegant, but strong. My imagination ran wild. I was doing a delineation of her shoulder and back muscles when she returned and arranged herself between me and the fireplace. The exertion or wine had had some effect. Narcissa was slightly flushed, and her eyes were shining.

"You're very attractive," I said.

"Do you think about me?" she asked.

"Constantly," I replied. "I have fantasies about you." I was soon to regret that last statement.

"Oh, tell me one," she pleaded.

"We are going for our morning ride, but you are wearing a skirt instead of sensible trousers. I'm following, trying to keep up as you race through the woods."

"Yes, go on," she encouraged.

"Well ... um ... the wind blows your skirt up, showing your legs."

"Just my legs?"

"More, actually."

"You mean my knickers are showing. Are you looking?"

"I try to be a gentleman. I'm not strong enough. I stare shamelessly."

"There's more," I said, trying to stay calm. "The way you're riding the broom ... there's a tingling sensation, and your ... your knickers ... everything's getting damp."

"Let me get this fantasy straight," Narcissa said determinedly. "I'm on a wild ride through the countryside, madly cackling and flaunting my limbs and lingerie. I'm in danger of sliding off my broom because it's slimy slick from my unhealthy relationship with it. And you're in hot pursuit, all googley-eyed."

"That's the picture, yes," I agreed.

"Do you catch me?"

"Yes."

"What happens then?"

"I ... I'm not able to control myself."

"You bonk me, right there, on the spot."

"Yes."

"Ahh," Narcissa sighed, giving it some thought.

Narcissa took a sip of wine. "Do you have another one?"

"My deepest fantasy is that you like it."

"I enjoy it when you bonk me?"

"Yes. It gives you great pleasure. Afterwards, you feel calm and happy. You want to cuddle."

"Cuddle?"

"Put your arms around me. Rest your head on my shoulder."

Narcissa took another sip of wine. I waited for what seemed the longest time. Narcissa set the glass aside, moved over to me, and rested her head on my shoulder.

"This is getting to be a nice evening," she murmured. "Tell me another one."

Tell her another one! I could tell her my creative juices were running the other direction.

In desperation I said, "There's the one where you can't sleep, and you order chocolates and small glasses of liqueurs brought to you."

"I'll have to remember that," she whispered into my ear, giving me a small squeeze.

"You think of how it will end ... the stains from the chocolate ... the sticky residue from the liqueurs. You think, why get messy all by myself when I could have some company?"

"That makes sense," she agreed, snuggling some more.

"You bang on my door until I answer. You ask if I'm asleep."

"Right," she said, "as good manners dictate."

"You display your excellent and elegant goodies, ready to be consumed. Pretty, untouched, almost virginal. Longing to be taken out of their wrappers. Ready to be grabbed with hunger. Aching to melt on the end of my tongue."

She raised herself on her elbow, with her hair draping over my face and her nose touching mine. "Are we talking about my chocolate?"

I thought about continuing to be debonair, but I had had enough of fantasy. I wanted to be part of her life. I gently kissed her.

She gently kissed me back. "Do you really like me?" she asked.

"Yes, very much."

"If you're lying to me, I'm going to kill you," she said.

I rolled over so that I was looking down into her eyes.

"Oh," said Narcissa. "Oh, God," she moaned, as she decided to be an unfaithful wife.

I gave her a kiss as hungry as I was and felt her stiffen. I stopped, and then started over by stroking her temples with my fingers. It wasn't until some time later that it occurred to me that yielding to affection was frightening to Narcissa. She had built a solitary life; she had been free; and now she was in an emotional trap. I resisted the urging of the beast within to devour her. I decided to gently encourage Narcissa to be affectionate.

She wrapped her arms around me and she kissed me, just a close-mouthed, gentle caress. Tenderness flowed out of Narcissa as she gave me another one, slowly. I looked into the soft face of a little girl. The little girl was full of soft, warm kisses.

But the little girl had grown up. She knew there was more. Narcissa licked at the corner of my mouth. I smiled, and her tongue glided in. "Careful," I told myself, "easy." With her tongue teasing mine, it was hard not to rip the clothes off this grown up girl.

I nibbled on her from her right ear down her neck to her throat. She began unbuttoning her blouse. Yes, yes, yes, I said to myself, keep going slow. Let Narcissa offer herself to me. Enjoy her undressing herself so that I can have her, so that I can nibble on every inch of her. She took off her blouse for me. She took off her bra for me. She was even more beautiful than I imagined she would be. By now I was stroking the inside of her thighs.

The clinical part of me knew that I had to give her an orgasm by hand. She was too beautiful. I liked her too much. When I slid into her, I wasn't going to last more than a few seconds.

My stroking her thighs got higher and higher. Finally I was resting my hand between her legs.

"Tell me what feels nice," I asked.

"Lower," she said. "Lower. There, darling."

Gently, I said to myself. I started the rhythmic strokes between her legs. I cradled her head in my other arm and continued the gentle, rhythmic strokes. Softly, I said to myself, as I kissed and nuzzled her breasts until I could taste them, while I continued the rhythmic fondling of my lovely lady. Sweetly, I said to myself, as I enjoyed the roll of her hips and her tongue in my mouth. Her skin was flushed. Her arms were around me. She was moving with me. She reached down with one hand and placed it on top of mine. She squeezed her thighs together as she pressed my hand against her.

Narcissa moaned quietly and slowly went limp.

She lay on her back, breathing in short gasps. I sat beside her watching, still holding her. I was worried about how limp she had become. She looked at me and breathed a disappointed, "Don't you want me?"

"Of course I want you. Are you okay?" I replied quietly.

"Yes," she breathed. Looking at me, she took her hand from mine and placed both her hands on either side of her head. Still looking at me, she arched her back and then spread her legs a little more.

I pulled her knickers off and placed my hands on top of hers, holding her down. Breathing hard, she opened her thighs.

She sighed as I slid into her.

I moaned as I entered Narcissa. I couldn't help myself. I thought it would be nice, but I didn't realize it would be this nice.

I looked into her pretty eyes. "Sweetheart," I managed to say.

I liked her too much to do it like this the first time. I didn't want to just hold her down and bonk her. I let go of her hands and lowered myself to my elbows. Now my hands were tangled in her soft damp hair.

I kissed her and whispered, "Hold me, darling."

Narcissa was slow to respond and embrace me. For a few seconds, a wild thought careened through my brain. Hadn't anyone ever held and kissed this wonderful woman while taking her?

Narcissa finally had her arms around me, and I kissed her and pressed gently into her.

Sadly, it was over. It took several seconds before I realized what happened. I was laying on her completely still. There hadn't been any buildup or increase in tension. Just everything feeling nice, and then everything was over.

"You were sweet," said Narcissa as she grabbed her undies and dried herself between her legs. She then looked uncertainly at me where I was still lying on the rug.

"Oh, come on," I said. "You know I want to hold you."

"Please," I said.

She actually giggled as she bounced over and sprawled across me.

Narcissa was in a warm and cozy world when she said, "Hermann ... Honey ... Darling, I have to pee."

Oh my goodness, I thought. Did she just blurt that out? I helped Narcissa up and gathered the clothes.

"Can we use your rooms?" she asked.

I took her hand. She was barefoot and the stone floor was cold. She would grab my arm when she stepped on a stone slab that seemed particularly cold. I couldn't figure it out. My foreplay was clumsy and I had really messed up the sex, but she was keeping a tight grip on me and was acting like a giddy school girl.

"First to the WC," she cried as we entered my rooms. She plunked herself on the toilet without bothering to shut the door to the washroom. I neither looked nor didn't look. There was something intimate about a woman not caring about that. I heard her in the shower.

I wondered if Narcissa thought about how much her behavior had surprised me. Perhaps she didn't think about it. Mein Gott, she's treating me like a husband.

Later, when I got out of the shower, Narcissa was wearing one of my shirts. Her clothes were piled by the door. "Do you mind?" she asked. A little later, we were in bed, her head on my shoulder. I fell asleep running my hand through her hair.

* * *

After Hermann had fallen asleep, Narcissa untangled herself and got out of bed. Narcissa stood in the middle of the room, looking down at Hermann. "You dear, sweet, silly little boy."

She gathered her clothes, made her way back to her own rooms, and went to bed. "I hope Hermann isn't taking this seriously," she said to herself.

She lay there, staring at the ceiling.

Unbidden thoughts came to Narcissa. That little boy has been kissing me good night. I can't sleep well unless he does. That little boy has been snuggling me. I act like a little girl. I miss him when he's not here. I keep thinking about him. That little boy held me, and kissed me, and caressed me until I had an orgasm. I can't remember the last time I had an orgasm in someone's arms. He wanted to hold me afterwards. No one else has ever wanted to cuddle after they fucked me.

She lay there, staring at the ceiling.

After a while, she was sitting on the edge of her bed.

Narcissa sighed.

She left her rooms and waved her wand, putting an unbreakable lock on her door. She made her way back to Hermann's rooms where she waved her wand again, putting an unbreakable lock on his door. No one, except the house-elves, would know where she was, and they would wake her in the morning.

Narcissa climbed into bed with Hermann and wrapped herself around him. This is comfortable, she realized. This is soothing. "Silly little boy," Narcissa whispered as she drifted off to sleep.

Point Gathering

Chapter 5 of 19

"I keep hearing," I went on, "that at Hogwarts, Draco is not regarded as a kind and loving person."

Chapter 5: 9 September 5:00 PM -- 27 September 5:00 PM ... Point Gathering

"Hi," someone said as they sat down on the other side of the table.

I looked up. "Hello, Miss Patil."

I typically studied in the Great Hall between tea and dinner. The Ravenclaw common room was too quiet, too studious. I liked some background noise.

"Have you worked the third Arithmancy problem yet?" asked Miss Patil.

I nodded yes, sketched how I had solved it, and watched Miss Patil as she worked on it. I had become familiar enough with Hogwarts that I recognized the badge that said Miss Patil was a Prefect.

Several days later, Miss Patil was again sitting across from me doing Arithmancy. She noticed me taking a break and asked, "Are there problems being an exchange

student? What courses are you taking?"

I told her that I did have an unusual class schedule. Because of the differences in curriculum between Hogwarts and Durmstrang, it made as much sense for me to take seventh year Charms as sixth year Charms. I took both. If the classes went well, I would try for a NEWT in Charms at the end of this year. Arithmancy and Transfiguration were subjects that required a more strict order of presentation. The courses at Hogwarts and Durmstrang were similar enough that I could take the sixth year in both. In Potions, both Draco and I took both sixth and seventh year. Seventh year was almost all independent study projects. Both Draco and I realized that suitable partners in advanced Potions were hard to find. We would take advantage of our both being at Hogwarts and sit for a NEWT in Potions at the end of this year. Miss Patil was surprised that a sixth year would be allowed to sit for a NEWT.

The next time I saw Miss Patil, I mentioned that I heard she had a twin sister in Gryffindor.

"Do you want to meet Parvati?" asked Padma Patil, sounding distant and a bit hostile.

"I was just making conversation," I said. "I didn't mean to pry into anything personal."

I wondered why Padma Patil had sounded hostile. The talk in the Ravenclaw Boys' Dorm was that Padma Patil was a serious scholar, while her sister was more socially oriented. Perhaps Padma Patil was jealous of her sister receiving all the attention. I hadn't considered that possibility when I asked Padma Patil about her twin sister because I found Padma Patil much more interesting.

Once Miss Patil was convinced that I didn't fancy her sister, I heard all about her family with little effort on my part. Her family, as I had guessed from simply observing the two sisters, had both wealth and status. The Patils had inherited money and property, and both of her parents worked in the Ministry of Magic.

I noticed that being a Ravenclaw Prefect had its own demands. Ravenclaws were seldom rowdy, and, when they were, usually guilt-stricken afterwards. There were, however, long-lasting feuds of incredible ferocity ... intellectuals. Miss Patil was more of a peacemaker and go-between than disciplinarian. A Ravenclaw was his own disciplinarian, thank you. I wondered if having a twin sister prepared one for settling feuds, but I didn't know how to ask the question diplomatically.

Within two weeks, Miss Patil was also studying Charms and Transfiguration with me. Unfortunately for my ego, she was a quick study. Arithmancy went well enough, but I suffered constant minor humiliations in sixth year Charms and Transfiguration ... so much for the plan of hiding by myself in the back of the classroom to disguise my slow learning skills.

"Could you possibly call me 'Padma' instead of 'Miss Patil'?" my study partner asked. I agreed. "And I'll keep calling you 'Hermann.' Okay?"

The girl I had met at the train station, Miss Weasley, began studying with us about the third week of school. At first, her appearance was intermittent. I had the impression from her comments as she joined us that her friends were squabbling, and it distressed her. By the fourth week, she appeared regularly even though she was a fifth year. Our table and the surrounding tables were calm. No one wanted to disturb Padma, the high caste Prefect.

I would often go to the library and get the reference books while Padma stayed and kept the peace. Padma initially felt she was taking advantage of me, but I reminded her of all the English words she translated for me. She borrowed my Charms book one afternoon and noticed the bookmark in the next lesson. She asked if I was reading ahead. We were alone at the table, and by that time I deemed Padma trustworthy. I told her I was playing a point-gathering game. The professors didn't give points for material they already had covered, but they would give points if a student knew facts that hadn't been covered in class.

"I didn't know you were doing that," said Padma.

"Good," I said. "If someone does too much of it, they become unpopular with everyone, including the professors."

"You aren't going to rat me out?" I asked.

"Is that another Americanism?" she said. "I won't snitch if that's what you're asking."

"I might try this myself," she added.

I told her that would help. If we spread the effort around, it decreased the chance that any one person would become obnoxious.

"An insufferable know-it-all," suggested Padma.

I suddenly felt sympathetic towards Miss Granger who was almost alone in getting academic points for sixth year Gryffindors.

Of course, we got carried away as we talked about it. We imagined a total Ravenclaw effort spread across all seven years and across all classes. We could overwhelm the other houses and walk away with the House Cup. Even if the other houses discovered what we were doing, we could beat them in a sustained intellectual effort. Only the Slytherins offered any real competition.

We came back down to earth. We both knew, somehow, that it wouldn't work.

"That's curious," we both voiced. "Why wouldn't it work?"

While we were pondering this, Mr. Broderick and Mr. Shovick came by to ask if Padma was going to Hogsmeade this weekend. She told them she didn't enjoy Hogsmeade; that joke shops and sweet shops weren't her idea of fun. While Padma was talking to Broderick and Shovick, Miss Weasley came over and joined us. With Miss Weasley there, Padma and I postponed our discussion of the point-gathering game.

Padma and I continued the discussion later in the Ravenclaw common room. We agreed that to succeed only a few students could participate. It had to be kept a secret. Why did it have to be kept a secret? We could beat the other houses even if they found out. It finally dawned on us that it had to be kept a secret because of the professors. We could not trust their reaction to an academic point-gathering game. That was strange because we trusted their reaction to the Quidditch points. Why couldn't scholars train and compete the same as athletes? We decided to get some rest and reconsider everything in the fresh light of day.

Padma went to bed that night tingling. Never before had she examined the social structure of Hogwarts in such a fashion, in a way that called into question the integrity of the professors and the fairness of the system. The examination went deeper than that. It didn't ask for fairness. It tried to determine why fairness wasn't there, just as one might ask why water froze. Once this was determined, the game would be played according to the existing conditions.

The next morning I was in the common room about to go to breakfast when Padma came bouncing down the stairs from the girls' dorm in her night dress and with her hair loose and undone. "I got it," she said, grabbing me. "Quidditch is only a game. Academics are too serious to let one house sweep the field."

"That's certainly an idea," I said. "We'll have to think that one through."

"Wait for me," she said as she ran back upstairs.

She appeared a few minutes later, prim and proper with her hair done up. I shouldn't have seen the two Padmas in juxtaposition. My synapses began firing.

Down brain. Visions of cozy Padma in nightdress with hair undone. Visions of stunning Padma in clothes with hair done. Visions of passionate Padma with clothes and hair and Padma undone. Down brain. It's Padma. She's our friend. She's too serious to care for that. Down brain.

I finally calmed down. I could trust myself not to blurt out, "God, you're beautiful," when I opened my mouth.

At the breakfast table I said, "Yes, I think the answer lies in the difference between Quidditch points and academic points."

"Quidditch has more explicit rules," said Padma. "It may not be exactly fair because of the referees, but a lot of effort has gone into making it a nearly fair game."

I nodded agreement.

"The academic game doesn't have any rules," continued Padma. "It's based on the whims of the professors, and we know that some of them are unfair."

"That's brilliant," I told Padma. She glowed.

"I think it goes beyond having a fair set of rules," I said. "I think there's something to academics being more serious than the game."

"Even though some people would say Quidditch is the most serious activity at Hogwarts," quipped Padma with a smile.

"There would be much less resentment towards an overwhelming Quidditch team than there would be towards overwhelming academic performance," I said.

"An insufferable know-it-all house," returned Padma.

Padma had to run to class. She leveraged herself off the bench with a hand on my shoulder, and then gave both of my shoulders a squeeze.

"I'll see you later," she said as she dashed out the door.

* * *

That night in the common room, Padma and I continued the discussion. Our fear was that once the professors noticed the Ravenclaw lead, the professors would act against Ravenclaw by subtracting points for trivial offenses. Would the professors really act in such a manner? I wondered. Padma and I were assuming terrible things about the school faculty.

"That type of thing has happened before," said Padma. "The Potions professor was very unfair to Harry Potter and his fellow Gryffindors."

I listened as Padma recalled incidents. One time the Potions professor deliberately broke a vial of Mr. Potter's potion and then told Mr. Potter that he received zero points for that day's lab work. It was enough to make one's blood boil. I waited as Padma pieced together thoughts in her mind.

"I got it!" said Padma. "Hogwarts is to Ravenclaw as the Potions professor is to Harry."

It's time for a tangential remark. The story is that Mr. Potter hated the Potions Professor. Did Padma and I hate the school system? No. Gryffindors are brave, but Ravenclaws are built of stern stuff. We begin our mornings with high fiber cereals.

Padma said that the secrecy part worried her. Did that mean that we were doing something wrong? I replied that Quidditch teams kept their new moves secret. Padma began thinking about who might join us.

"There's Cho Chang," said Padma. "She's smart enough and discreet enough, but she has a friend who is a snitch."

"There's Luna Lovegood," said Padma. "She wouldn't tell another student, but she might tell her father, who edits an investigative newspaper."

We could see the headlines: "Academic Conspiracy at Hogwarts: Professors Untrustworthy, Say Students."

This was going to be harder than we thought, but we were captured by the thrill of a dangerous game. If the professors discovered that Ravenclaw was making an organized effort to win the House Cup by academic excellence, then they would make certain that Ravenclaw did not win. Could we do it in a subtle manner that would not be discovered?

* * *

One day Miss Weasley and I were alone at the table when she suddenly asked, "Do you ever take a break from studying?"

"Whenever I can," I replied.

"Next weekend is a Hogsmeade weekend," she said. "Do you have permission to go?"

"Yes, Flitwick told me about the conditions. My parents sent a signed permission form to him."

"Do you plan on going?" asked Miss Weasley.

"Of course," I replied.

It was dawning on me that Miss Weasley was trying to be sociable. I was not responding well. Come on, I thought, Miss Weasley is a friendly person. Where are my manners?

"Are you going?" I asked.

"Yes," said Miss Weasley, perking up.

"What do you like about Hogsmeade?" I asked.

"Well," said Miss Weasley in a flat tone of voice, "there are a lot of nice shops to visit."

"Sounds nice," I said, wondering what I had done wrong. She sounded so friendly a few seconds ago.

"Maybe I'll see you there," I said, trying to salvage some of the conversation. "What's your favorite shop?"

"The best place to meet someone is the Three Broomsticks," rejoined Miss Weasley.

"That sounds nice," I said. Suddenly, the idea of having someone to talk to was very appealing.

"When is a good time to meet you there?" I added hopefully.

Miss Weasley thought for a while. "Well, you've never been to Hogsmeade or the Three Broomsticks. It might be better if someone showed you the way. We could meet here and then go to Hogsmeade."

She quickly added, "We could ride our brooms. It's a very scenic ride. You'll like it."

"Sounds good. What time do I meet you here?"

"Oh," said Miss Weasley, "I forgot. I can't leave until 10:00. I have to see a professor."

"Ten o'clock is fine with me. I'll be at the front gate. Going to Hogsmeade with you sounds nice," I added, making an attempt to be friendly.

At the appointed hour, on the appointed day, Miss Weasley appeared with her broom. She informed me that her name was 'Ginny,' and if I kept calling her 'Miss Weasley,' she was going to scream.

"You know," ventured Ginny after we had ridden a small distance, "some people are afraid you're a dark wizard."

Mein Gott, I'm never going to escape that. I looked at Ginny. She looked curious instead of accusing. Calm down. The girl practically invited me to go with her. She can't think I'm evil. I'll try being sociable.

"Actually, I'm a pale wizard. I don't get enough sun."

"That was terrible," she replied.

"Yes," I said, "but the look on your face after I said it made it worthwhile."

She laughed. "I bet you're tired of hearing that. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

I decided to draw this girl out. She was a fascinating person. "You must be curious for some reason. You don't have to tell me why. We can talk about your brothers instead."

"Do you have any brothers?" she asked.

"One younger sister, starting her second year at Durmstrang. She is good at Charms. She is good at everything. She is excellent at Charms!"

Complimenting a younger sister must have made me seem less dark.

"Hermann, I don't want to upset you. I don't want to make you mad. We're ... I'm just curious."

"You want to ask me something," I said. "I'll try to stay calm."

"You seem to be friends with Draco," she said.

I looked at Ginny. This was something important to her.

"Draco and I are both interested in potions. Very few people are. Naturally, we work together."

"There's more," I continued. "I visited Draco and Mrs. Malfoy this summer as part of the exchange student program. At home, Draco is a loving son, and Mrs. Malfoy is a doting mother. At home, Draco and Mrs. Malfoy are kind and hospitable people."

"I keep hearing," I went on, "that at Hogwarts, Draco is not regarded as a kind and loving person."

I looked at Ginny and said, "I have no explanation for the difference. As far as I know, Draco regards me as a friend and professional colleague. I feel the same about Draco."

Ginny had a thoughtful look on her face. Well, let her think about it. We rode the rest of the way in silence. My attempt at drawing Ginny out had the opposite effect. Smooth move, as the Americans say. By the time we arrived at the teen tavern, I was wondering if she was ever going to speak to me again. If she didn't, I could cross her off the list ... one down, zilch to go.

Once the idea of never speaking to Ginny again crossed my mind, it seemed like a good idea. She wasn't here for my company. She was here to spy on the Malfoys, people who had treated me kindly and who had never done me any harm. How to handle this? Put on an act. Be as friendly and charming as possible. Don't reveal any more information. Get back to Hogwarts in one piece.

Hold it. Calm down. Back up. I had tried to draw her out. I encouraged her questions. By showing that the Malfoys were important to her, she had revealed a lot, although I had no idea what lot had been revealed. All this shows is that I shouldn't be left alone with my thoughts for too long. I need to talk to Ginny. Or somebody. Or anybody.

"Well, this is the place," I said cheerfully as we parked our brooms, glad that Ginny was there to talk to.

"I'm sorry. I'm not being very sociable," said Ginny.

I could have continued being superficially friendly. I tried another tack. "I encouraged you to ask me a question. My friendship with the Malfoys is important to you. You asked me about it and then thought about my answer."

"Are you thirsty?" I asked. "I am."

"Yes," said Ginny giving me a smile.

That was encouraging. Perhaps things aren't falling completely to pieces. After we got a table and drinks, I took a chance and asked, "Do you know why the Potions professor is such an angry man?"

"No," said Ginny. "It's awful though, isn't it? How do you put up with it?"

"He bullies people into performing poorly, and then he berates them for it," I continued. "Back at Durmstrang, the Potions professors were considerate instructors. They were strict because potions can be dangerous, but they were always encouraging. They were tolerant of small mistakes."

"Why didn't you stay there?" asked Ginny. "Not that I didn't want you to come here," she added quickly.

"The Durmstrang professors are good for the first four or five years of the subject. They don't have a good grasp of the higher levels."

"I see," said Ginny.

"But that's okay," I added. "It's the first, introductory years of a subject that are hard. Our professors get us through those. After that, we can master the rest ourselves."

Ginny nodded agreement.

"Of course," I continued, "it helps to have some guidance, even at the upper levels. That's why I'm here. I just wish your Potions professor were more humane."

I mentioned to Ginny that we could do what she liked but I would rather see the countryside than shop. To my surprise, Ginny readily agreed. She told me that several small trips, each ending back at Hogsmeade would make an easy day. The scenery and the escape from the crowds seemed to relax Ginny. She talked about her family, especially her older brothers who were all protective of her. She told me a lot about Fred and George. I think it was because the pranksters were the easiest to talk about.

Occasionally there are ideas that I'm ashamed to have. Protective pranksters. Ha! I'll get their tongue thing and use it on their sister. Poetic justice. These unworthy images produced a huge smile just as Ginny was telling me about one of the twin's escapades. Noticing my big smile, she was glad I appreciated their wit and daring. Wit, yeah. Daring, yeah. Ginny with a goofy grin, yeah. Most unworthy thoughts.

Ginny finally got around to her father and his work having something to with mundanes (Muggles, she called them). Perhaps my lack of reaction to mundanes prompted her next outburst.

"My father likes Muggles," blurted Ginny, looking apprehensively at me.

Suddenly I was walking through another minefield. "There's a lot to be learned from Muggles," I said. "Unlike us wizards, the German Muggles try to keep their kids out of combat."

There was a sharp intake of breath from Ginny. She had a white-knuckled grip on her broom. She looked pale and sweaty. I had obviously stepped on a huge land mine. "Stupid, stupid, Hermann," I said to myself. "You know better than to say something like that when this country is in the middle of a civil war."

"I'm sorry," I said. "That was a stupid thing to say."

"It's okay," she stammered.

"It was a very stupid thing to say, and I regret it."

"Don't," said Ginny. "It means you don't mind Muggles. It means you don't like sending kids into combat."

"I appreciate your trying to make me feel better," I said.

"I'm thirsty," said Ginny. "Are you?"

It was hard not to like Ginny Weasley.

Ginny and I had found a pretty spot that was in the sun and out of the wind. We were on the safer topic of Durmstrang. I told Ginny about the three disciplines of Incantations, Social Studies, and Sciences.

"It must be harder to develop the Sciences," said Ginny. "There are the greenhouses, the animal habitats, and the labs."

I agreed that was the problem. Ginny wanted to know how big Durmstrang was. I told her that Durmstrang was the school for Central and Northern Europe with a population more three than times as large as Great Britain. "My fifth year class had 524 students with about 60 of them from outside the region."

"Outside the region?" asked Ginny.

"Mostly North and South America, the Near East, and Southeast Asia," I said. "We are well known for Incantations and Social Studies." Except among the Brits, I thought.

"I suppose the other regions send their best students," offered Ginny.

Hermann talked about the countryside and what a pleasant day it had been, while Ginny thought about the academic competition at Durmstrang. Hermann talked about the nice tour Ginny had given him, while Ginny wondered about Hermann's class rank.

* * *

"I don't want to talk about it, Ron!" exclaimed Ginny, as she entered the Gryffindor common room, brushed past her friends, and dashed up the stairs to the girls' dormitory. After a decent interval, Hermione followed. Hermione found Ginny peacefully stretched out on her bed, humming a cheerful tune, and leafing through, of all things, a potions book.

"I thought you were upset," said Hermione.

"I don't want to face the inquisition. And I'm tired."

Hermione looked at the potions book. "You must have had a good time. You're tired?"

Ginny described touring the countryside, talking about her family, and asking Hermann if he was a dark wizard.

"He doesn't get enough sun!?" choked Hermione.

* * *

When I entered the Ravenclaw common room, there were cheers and catcalls. You'd think no one had ever accompanied a girl to Hogsmeade before. I took the coward's way out and went to my room. My fellow sixth years followed.

"How was Ginny Weasley?"

"You know how Ginny Weasley is," I told them. "You know she is a nice person."

They nodded yes.

"I think you know she's had some bad experiences in your wizard's war," I continued.

They nodded yes.

"And you didn't tell me about it, you sonsofbitches! You let me go out ignorant! You let me step on every Gottverdammt sore spot that nice girl has!"

By now the Ravenclaw boys' dormitory knew that 'sonsofbitches' was like 'bloody awful prats' only worse.

But it's hard to faze older Ravenclaws. "Did you tell her you were a dark wizard?" they asked.

"You don't tell a girl you're a dark wizard until the third date," I snapped.

When I saw Ginny the morning after Hogsmeade, I was polite and said I had a good time. Ginny was enthusiastic and said she had a very good time, whereupon I became enthusiastic and admitted I had a wonderful time. I was having a wonderful time now. It was Sunday. We had breakfast together, walked by the lake, studied together, and generally spent the rest of the day together.

My fellow Ravenclaws finally had provided information on Ginny Weasley. She went through boyfriends fast. That made sense since she had six older brothers. She was comfortable with boys, and she knew there were plenty of boys. Ours was not going to be a lasting relationship. No reason to put extra effort into it. Nevertheless, it could consume a lot of time. There's nothing like an intelligent and attractive girl to make time fly by.

Draco took some extra effort. At home, Draco had been defined by what he liked: his mother, Quidditch practice, his friends, and studies. At Hogwarts, he was partially defined by his dislikes. I wasn't certain exactly what they were, but they appeared to include a number of Gryffindors and some professors. They certainly included Ginny Weasley.

When Draco asked what I was doing with Ginny Weasley, I began on the side of his dislikes. I said, "I think her friends are about to hex me back to Durmstrang."

Draco agreed that I was in danger from her friends ... and from her brothers, too, if I ever ran into them.

I shifted to the side of what he liked and said, "She asked about you."

That got his interest.

"I told her about our attempt to be professionals in Potions, how demanding and time consuming that was. I told her that it was unusual to find a fellow professional. I told her that I spent the early part of the summer at your home, and that you and your mother had been kind and gracious hosts. That's all I told her. I thought that was enough. After that, she never asked about you again."

Draco remarked that Ginny would not want to hear good things about him. As far as Draco could tell, Ginny's friends were angry at me, and Ginny was annoyed at me. It looked doomed to Draco.

It had been two days since we went to Hogsmeade, we were just getting acquainted, and everyone agreed the relationship was doomed. It was a bit depressing really.

On Monday, the time between tea and dinner arrived, but Padma didn't. That was disappointing, but I could talk to Ginny, who did arrive. It was the same for the next couple of days, and I was getting the impression that Padma was avoiding me. I felt desolate. I thought Padma enjoyed my company and liked talking to me, but I was obviously wrong.

Later I saw Padma talking to some Gryffindor boys. She acted excited and kept touching them as she talked. I felt this incredible pain. I couldn't watch. I nearly ran to get away. This happened several more times over the next several days, and each time my reaction was the same. Finally, my primary objective became not seeing Padma.

Her flirting was understandable. Padma had got up one morning and decided Gryffindors were hot. Her avoiding me was a mystery. Did I do or say something that made her angry? Perhaps I could talk to her sister? I would at least know what had happened. Approaching the popular Parvati Patil in private, however, seemed impossible. I might have to give up on Padma. I wondered if Padma was betraying our point-gathering scheme to the Gryffindors. She could at least tell me she wasn't being a traitor, but she wasn't telling me anything. I had trusted Padma.

One day I walked into the library and there was Parvati Patil studying alone. Miracle of miracles.

I approached and said, "Miss Patil?" She nodded.

"I'm Hermann Busch. I know your sister."

"Yes," she replied coolly.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but suddenly your sister's not talking to me. I just wondered if I did something to upset her."

Parvati Patil looked at me for a while before saying, "You really don't know?"

Of course I know, I ranted to myself, I just wanted to stare at your knockers and chat you up.

Parvati Patil thought for a while and said, "You'll have to ask Padma."

"That's a good idea!" I replied reasonably. "Padma should talk to me and tell me why she's not talking to me. Why didn't I think of that?"

Even Parvati Patil had to chuckle at that one. "Ah, Ravenclaws," she said, grinning.

"It was nice meeting you, and I enjoyed talking to you," I told her.

She cocked her head and looked dubious.

"I mean it," I said sincerely. "I'm really sincere. Why wouldn't I enjoy meeting you and talking to you?"

She looked puzzled as I left. I don't know why. Parvati Patil was as attractive and as pleasant as her sister. She was probably just as intelligent, but she put a lot of time and effort into being sociable and fashionable, which might be the smarter thing to do.

Despite her coolness toward me, Parvati Patil had told me three things. It was something that I had done. It was something big since everyone knew what it was, except me. It was something bad because not even her own sister would talk about it. Perhaps Parvati Patil had told me four things. It was hopeless.

Parvati Patil wanted to grab her sister by her shirt and yell at her: Padma, do something; you're the one he likes; don't let Ginny steal him; don't have a dumb Ravenclaw feud.

The best place to stay away from Padma turned out to be the Ravenclaw common room. She tried showing up and flirting there, but the Ravenclaw blokes were not taking her seriously. Strangely enough, part of me was annoyed at their indifference. Didn't they know how marvelous Padma was? Didn't they know how nice it was to be with her and talk to her? Of course, Padma would turn your life into a living hell for reasons that everyone, except you, knew about.

* * *

It was early Saturday afternoon in the Ravenclaw common room when I met Barbara and Shelly. They were whispering and giggling and occasionally glancing at me. Obviously gathering their courage, they came over to me.

"Do you know Draco?"

"Yes."

"Is he as hot as he looks? Is he really evil?"

I said, "Draco is one potent individual."

How in the world would I know if he's hot or evil? I thought.

"Ohhh," they both said.

I talked about Draco and then said that I was to meet him later in the Slytherin common room to work on potions. I asked if they wanted to come along. I would introduce them.

"Hello, Vincent. Hello, Gregory. Where's Draco?" I said, entering the common room with the two girls in tow.

They told me he was in his room. I left the girls to go prep Draco.

"Draco," I said, "there are two Ravenclaw girls dying to meet you. I brought them here."

"Right now?"

"Yes."

Draco put his hand on my shoulder and gave a nervous chuckle. "You couldn't have handled this a little more smoothly, could you, mate."

"I thought about that, but then I decided on the direct approach."

Draco sat on the bed and put his head in his hands.

"Listen to the scenario," I argued. "They think you're hot but possibly a bad boy. I told them about this summer, portraying you as a loving son with a doting mother, both of you kind and gracious."

"Ohhh," moaned Draco, with his head still in his hands.

"If I was successful," I said, "they think you're a sexy rogue, but a basically loving and loveable rogue."

"You mean," replied Draco, "that I'm a redeemable villain, the stuff of romance novels."

"And guess who wants to redeem you," I said. "They're here. They're waiting for you."

"If we stay calm, we might be able to pull this off," I said. "After all, if you're a loveable rogue, then anything you do is in character. The war between your good and evil parts will have your behavior all over the map. Relax and be yourself."

"Are you telling me that you're nervous too?" asked Draco.

"Of course. The girls are here for you, but I'm not going to abandon you. I'll stay and try to help get the chit-chat going."

Finally Draco said, "If they're not vixens, then they're as nervous as we are. Let's go be kind to two girls."

In the common room, Barbara and Shelly were happily talking to a Slytherin girl I had seen before but didn't know. When the introductions were made, I learned her name was Jessica Cummings.

"We were thinking of walking down to the lake while it was still warm outside," suggested Draco.

"Okay," said Barbara and Shelly.

I was undecided about Miss Cummings. Since she made the other two comfortable, it would be good if she came with us. There was a chance, however, that the three girls would form a group leaving Draco out. I waited until Draco and the two girls were part way to the door. "Would you like to come, Miss Cummings?" I asked.

"Yes, love to," Miss Cummings replied.

Draco managed things very well. He arranged it so that he and the two girls sat talking, leaving me with Miss Cummings. She told me she was from Jamaica, she was a sixth year Slytherin, her interest was Defense Against the Dark Arts, but Hogwarts had trouble getting competent instructors.

"I've heard that Durmstrang is strong in Defense Against the Dark Arts," she said, wistfully.

"You've probably heard that we're strong in the dark arts," I replied. Isn't Jamaica strong in the dark arts, I was thinking, or is it Haiti? Or was I stereotyping?

"Yes, that's what I've heard," she admitted. "Is any of it true? Or can you tell me?" she added.

"Hey, Hermann!" shouted Draco. "I was telling Shelly and Barbara about your knocking Crabbe and Goyle off their brooms."

"Did you really?" asked Miss Cummings.

"You have to tell the story from the beginning," I said. "You have to tell them about Vincent and Gregory bringing over their big sacks of Bludgers."

"Vincent and Gregory?" asked the girls.

"Crabbe and Goyle," I explained.

I went on, "The game, as Draco described it to me, is that Vincent and Gregory were going to aim all those Bludgers at us while Draco and I tried not to get hit."

I noticed that Barbara and Shelly were giving Draco wide-eyed looks.

"Draco," I continued, "was grinning like a cat looking at a bowl of cream. He couldn't wait to get started. I had to run behind a tree and pee before I wet myself. I barely made it."

Barbara and Shelly had their hands over their mouths, trying not to openly laugh at me. That's right girls, I thought, Draco is the brave one, not me. Miss Cummings was giving me a quizzical look.

"I don't remember that," said Draco.

"Lucky for me. You were too excited about getting the game started to notice," I said.

I continued, "After several near misses, I decided that if I was going to get hurt, I would take the opposition with me. I rammed Vincent and Gregory. The three of us went down. I bounced several times, and then Mrs. Malfoy helped me walk back to the house."

"Your mother sounds really nice," cooed Barbara, holding Draco's arm.

"Yes, she sounds very nice," echoed Shelly, holding Draco's opposite shoulder.

I heard Draco telling them about the Snitch-Birds and how his mum took good care of them.

Miss Cummings, still looking skeptical, said, "Is that what really happened with Crabbe and Goyle?"

"More or less," I confessed.

Draco decided it was getting cool. He helped the two girls up, and the three of them walked back to the castle with Draco in the middle holding their hands. Yes, Draco, you're hot.

Miss Cummings wanted to stay by the lake. "Did you really pee behind a tree?" she asked.

"I felt like it."

"Did you really ram those two gorillas?"

"There's a medieval stick fighting technique ...," I started to say.

"Quarterstaffs!" she said. "You used your broom like a quarterstaff. What did you do? Knock their brooms out of their hands?"

"Yes."

"Why did Mrs. Malfoy have to help you?"

"I did some acrobatic, midair flips to catch them by surprise. I was dizzy. And by the way, shouldn't you be wearing a sign that says 'Danger, Inquiring Mind'?"

"I didn't mean to pry," she said, without a trace of repentance, "but you did knock Crabbe and Goyle off their brooms."

"Is Mrs. Malfoy really a loving mother?" asked Miss Cummings.

"Yes," I said. "For Draco, she would take on the Dark Lord."

"Hmm," said Miss Cummings. "The story is that happened to another student. His mother and father died saving him. Harry Potter."

"Never met him," I said.

"He's Hermione's friend," said Miss Cummings.

"Her, I've met," I said. "Is there more to the story?"

"Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley became friends during their first year at Hogwarts. The story is that the Dark Lord keeps trying to kill Harry, but these three always manage to defend themselves."

"And Ginny is Ron's younger sister?" I asked.

"Yes. During her first year she had a tremendous crush on Harry. She still might. Harry treats her like his friend's little sister," answered Miss Cummings.

That might explain some things, I thought. Miss Granger is hostile because she is Mr. Potter's friend and I'm a representative of the dark forces. But why is Ginny Weasley associating with me when she is friends with, and possibly a member of, the most formidable fighting force Hogwarts has ever assembled? Perhaps she still has a crush on Mr. Potter. Unrequited love requires distractions, and what better distraction than a possibly evil exchange student. From the distraction point of view, Draco would be even better, but Ginny and Draco have antagonized each other. I hope Barbara and Shelly work out. Draco could use some distractions.

After a pause Miss Cummings said, "What about Durmstrang and the dark arts?"

"Have you ever heard the word 'relentless'?" I asked.

"That's the first time today," she replied. "What about Durmstrang and the dark arts?"

"That's a good one," I told her. "It's getting cold out here. I'm going in for hot chocolate. Ask me another time."

"Will there be another time?" asked Miss Cummings.

"I don't know why not," I said. Am I missing something here? I was thinking. If she was asking to see me again, then I didn't respond very well. Part of the problem was that I was trying to remain detached. At close range, I found her attractive. I was trying hard not to stare at her legs. She wore a skirt and kept pointing her knees at me. Verdammmt.

On the walk back, I told Miss Cummings about the work Draco Malfoy and I were doing in potions. There was a psycho-active potion that was difficult to make. Two ingredients had to be stirred into the potion at the same time, and they had to be mixed with the potion within a short period of time. Otherwise, the high temperature needed to blend these ingredients would ruin the potion. The problem was that the chemical reaction of these ingredients combining raised the temperature of the potion. Adding them too fast would raise the temperature much too high and ruin the potion. Adding them too slowly would keep the temperature too high for too long and ruin the potion. That reminded me. Draco and I had ordered ice from the house-elves. We planned to fill cylindrical metal rods with the ice and stir the solution with the ice filled rods to keep the temperature down. We didn't know if this would work or not. The key element was to get a procedure with a margin of error so that the potion could be mass produced. At any rate the elves were now waiting with the ice. I asked Miss Cummings if she would mind going with me to help salvage our relationship with the elves. I told her we might have to thank them profusely and then carry off a load of ice. She agreed. She was amused.

Miss Cummings and I arrived at the Slytherin common room with each of us carrying two heavy buckets of ice. Most of the room looked perplexed.

"Oh, that's right!" said Draco. "We blew that one off, didn't we!" he said, using an appropriate Americanism.

It was hot chocolate and cards amidst buckets of ice. We took another walk to the lake, all of us bundled up in borrowed Slytherin cloaks. We dumped the ice in the lake.

After dinner, Barbara, Shelly and I walked back to the Ravenclaw dorm. The two girls didn't say much, just wandered through the halls with a dreamy look on their faces. Barbara and Shelly were holding hands. Was I witnessing a three-way bonding? Whatever was happening, Draco was essential. I had never seen them hold hands before. They started holding hands after holding hands with Draco. Would they start sleeping together if they started sleeping with Draco?

The next day I returned to studying in the Great Hall between tea and dinner. Draco, Barbara, and Shelly came and sat at the other end of the same table, politely leaving room if someone wanted to join me. Ginny arrived, glared at Draco, and sat down. Draco smiled and nodded at Ginny. Ah yes, good breeding. Plus the good company of Barbara and Shelly.

Ginny began filling me in on her life the past week. She was telling me that the Transfiguration professor had been absolutely horrid when the two Ravenclaw girls, who were in the same class, chimed in. Once Barbara and Shelly were involved, Draco became interested. He said the professor must be having a bad week because the explanation for the spell was mixed up. Draco soon had the three girls performing the spell flawlessly. This was rich. Half the Great Hall had watched as Draco Malfoy taught Ginny Weasley a spell. I could even tease Draco later about showing off. I didn't think I should tease Ginny though. Barbara, Shelly, and Ginny were comparing class notes as Miss Cummings arrived and the conversation turned to catching up in potions after having wasted an afternoon. Barbara and Shelly smiled at each other and evinced no signs of guilt whatsoever.

John Shovick appeared and boomed, "Well Hermann, you decided not to let Padma chase you off!"

I managed to smile and say, "Du bist mir ein feiner freund!" ... There was no response to that. ... "Hello, Mr. Shovick. How are you doing today?"

Mr. Shovick was doing very well. Good for him, I thought.

Everyone else looked mortified, except for Draco who looked angry.

"Among us Ravenclaws," I told them, "that is what passes as social graciousness."

Mr. Shovick did give a satisfying twinge on being displayed as Ravenclaw 'savior faire.'

I wished Mr. Shovick hadn't mentioned Padma. It had alienated Ginny, who was now ignoring me. And there was still a lot of pain.

Du bist mir ein feiner freund. = You're a fine friend.

Malfoy 3

Chapter 6 of 19

"The beast slyly whispered."

Chapter 6: 14 July 8:00 AM -- 20 July 8:00 AM Malfoy 3

It was the morning that Draco began his visits to the Crabbes and Goyles. It was the morning after I had seduced Narcissa. I awoke angry because she was not in bed with me. It was an unreasonable anger that confused and frightened me. There's no reason for this anger, I kept telling myself.

There was also a house-elf in my rooms. Despite my rage, I managed to be civil to the elf, even polite. "Good morning, Debby," I said cordially.

"Good morning, Master Hermann," replied Debby, trying not to show that she was pleased that I remembered her name.

"Master Hermann," continued Debby, "Mistress Malfoy wishes you good morning. And Mistress Malfoy humbly requests that you take breakfast in your rooms and meet Mistress Malfoy and Master Draco later."

"That's a reasonable request," I said, to Debby's relief.

Let's avert an international incident by keeping the exchange student away from a hung-over Draco. More importantly, who knew how Narcissa and I would react to each other this morning. I thought I could act the innocent and proper guest, but emotions were running high. Narcissa could be afraid of revealing our affair in front of Draco. For all I knew, Narcissa planned to claw my eyes out and was afraid that might upset Draco. I knew that I had some terrible rage that I couldn't understand.

I thanked Debby for the coffee and orange juice and said I wanted to go jogging to clear my head. I had to figure out what was bothering me. Debby said she would wait for Master Hermann. Debby said there was nothing more important than watching over Master Hermann this morning. I reassured her that I would take a quick jog and return immediately to my rooms for breakfast.

First things first, I thought, as I trotted along. The first thing was all the betrayals. There were four: the Ministries, who expected exemplary behavior; Draco, who regarded me as a friend; Mr. Malfoy, who had extended the original invitation and whose wife I had just seduced; and Narcissa, a lonely woman of whom I had taken advantage. There was possibly a fifth: my parents, who would be disappointed in me.

Okay, part of the anger might be towards myself for poor behavior. But that was more remorse than rage, I concluded, as the jogging cleared my head. Besides, I knew that I was betraying everyone last night, and I even knew why I was betraying everyone. I'm terrible with girls. I can't connect. They don't like me. Being with Narcissa was a chance, perhaps my only chance, to experience that part of life. For my one and only chance to experience that part of life, I had decided long ago that I would do anything and betray anyone.

The specific trigger, I realized, was Narcissa not being there when I woke up. I realized that it was ridiculous to be angry at that since Narcissa had a son to consider. Why was it making me angry? It took a long time to reach the answer since it was something I didn't want to be true. I was afraid of being just a toy to Narcissa, just a silly little boy.

The possibility that I was just a silly little boy to Narcissa was daunting; but now that I knew what was bothering me, I could handle it. I didn't believe I could handle it well, but perhaps I wouldn't make a complete fool of myself ... only a partial fool. Besides, Narcissa was not likely to turn on me until Draco had left. Any apprehension I showed would look like distress that Draco had to leave. Braced by these heartening considerations, I shaved, showered, and ordered breakfast.

* * *

I wished Draco God's speed and good luck for his visits. Draco thanked me and asked that I take good care of his mother. Draco and his mother made their farewells.

"I hate to see him leave," said Narcissa, with her head on my shoulder and her arms around me. Clawing my eyes out was not on her immediate agenda.

"I'm sorry he has to leave, too," I said, comforting Narcissa. To be honest, I was ambivalent about Draco's leaving. This is shameful, I realized, comforting Draco's mother and getting an erection holding her.

If she noticed the erection, Narcissa either liked it or decided to ignore it. "Mmm," she sighed, "you're so nice to me."

"Would you like to go for a ride?" she asked, drying her eyes and shaking her hair back into place.

She returned with her broom, wearing a skirt instead of sensible trousers.

Off she went. She was skillful. The skirt slowly billowed higher and higher, revealing more and more of her shapely legs. Finally it had blown up and around her waist. She followed a convoluted course that let me gawk from every angle ... every angle! The barrel rolls were delicious. What a tease.

I was in hot pursuit when she stopped and complained, "You're not catching me very fast."

"I'm doing my part," I protested. "I'm staring shamelessly. Where's a good place to catch you?"

She zipped ahead to a private, grassy spot. "Oh, Heavens, I was too reckless. My broom crashed!" she exclaimed, spreading a blanket.

I had worn a jacket even though the day was warm. I folded it for a pillow for us. We were lying on our sides facing each other. It was a good position for mutual affection. I held and stroked and kissed Narcissa in an undemanding manner until she relaxed. For various reasons, although I could be completely wrong, I kept thinking there were horrors in this woman's past. Don't push her. Don't corner her. Let her do what she liked, which at the moment was sticking her tongue down my throat. That was not doing my self-control any good at all. She was flushed and panting. I looked into the eyes of a hungry predator and became one myself. I managed to unbutton her blouse instead of ripping it off.

I nibbled my way down Narcissa to between her thighs without bothering with her bra or breasts. I was too hungry. I nibbled my way from her knee up her thigh to her knickers where she moaned as I nuzzled her. I nibbled my way from her other knee up her thigh to her knickers again. When Narcissa moaned again, the hunger became unbearable. I stayed between her legs. Narcissa slid her knickers down, and I pulled them the rest of the way off. I returned to gently licking Narcissa with my tongue. I had no idea what I was doing. I hoped Narcissa would help, and I could stumble through. I did know that I wanted to give Narcissa incredible pleasure. I heard a soft 'yes.' I nibbled Narcissa as she moved. I let Narcissa move until I was licking the spots she wanted. I heard Narcissa gently sigh as I licked her into a soft rhythmic wiggle. I heard Narcissa softly whimper as I nibbled her into a gentle rhythmic writhing.

I noticed that her hands had fallen from my head and that she was still and limp.

"Please, please, let her do it," I said to myself. She did. Narcissa moved her hands to beside her head and gave me a sweet, helpless smile. The predator held Narcissa down and listened to her soft sighs as he entered his sweetheart. I was going to bonk Narcissa, right there, on the spot. I was going to have Narcissa as she lay there, held down with her legs spread. Narcissa looked into my eyes. Yes, watch as I have you, Narcissa. Yes, listen to your sloppy noise, Narcissa. I'm taking you, darling. I'm taking you all spread out and wet, honey. I'm taking you with no effort at all, sweetheart. I'm taking you now, beautiful. Narcissa watched as I had my orgasm.

I lowered myself and held her. I just held her. I wasn't capable of doing anything else.

Narcissa Malfoy, every inch a lady, sat looking out over the lake with her young lover's head in her lap. "You make me happy," she told him.

* * *

Several days later, I was sipping tea under an umbrella at a sidewalk table while Narcissa bought some new kitchen gadget. The elves had broken the old one this morning. There had been some cringing, but Narcissa just laughed and threw the broken tool away. It's hard to tell with elves, but they appeared to be adjusting to a more benign way of life. I was adjusting too, mostly my expectations. In the books, the lady moans loudly, thrashes around on the man's penis, and finally yells her head off when she has her orgasm. I wasn't having any such experiences. Narcissa was quiet, hardly moved, took forever to have an orgasm, and then just went limp. I felt inadequate. I was waiting for some really virile bloke to give Narcissa an incredible experience and then take her away from me.

Narcissa, however, seemed satisfied with everything. When I asked her what I could do different to make it better for her, she was grateful that I cared but got a little upset. She thought everything was fine, was worried I didn't find her sexy enough, fretted that I was getting tired of her, and said she was telling me what she wanted. She finally said the only time she ever felt safe enough to have an orgasm was when she was in my arms, and she hadn't wanted to admit that to me. I felt bad after she said that. I felt that I had violated her. I told her I was sorry that I pushed her into saying something she didn't want to say.

As terrible as I felt, however, her confession removed a burden of guilt. I thought of the things I had done while she lay limp. I wasn't scum taking advantage. I was her trusted lover returning her passion. I decided the only thing I could do was to do my best until Mr. Virile arrived and took Narcissa away from me. Meanwhile, I was finding Narcissa sexier and sexier. I adored her quiet moans. I enjoyed her gentle moves. I relished her sweet, final release and collapse. As I sat musing, I spotted Narcissa walking toward me. Absolutely incredible, the way that woman moves. I waved. She waved back. I love to see Narcissa's face light up and her walk become sprightly when she sees me.

Narcissa sat down and helped herself to my tea. I knew what she was going to say.

"It's time to go home and exercise the birds," said Narcissa, finishing my tea.

"Darling? Why are you smiling at me like that?" she asked.

I took her hand. "Because you're sweet."

Narcissa put my hand in her lap, leaned over, and whispered in my ear, "You can mount your stick and exercise the birds, and then you can mount your bird and exercise the stick."

Good plan!

Despite Narcissa's attractive plan, we ordered more tea, and I waited for Narcissa to tell me about her shopping. After all, she had been away from me for more than an hour. She told me about the stores she had gone to and the things she had bought, and then she relaxed. Now we could go home.

We finished our tea and returned to Malfoy Manor where I installed the kitchen gadget for the elves. After checking that it worked, I noticed that it could be turned upside down and still fit. I put it together wrong and began a long, convoluted explanation why it would work better that way. The elves thought it hilarious.

"That's upside down," snapped Narcissa.

"You're doing it wrong," she complained as she stepped over and installed the gadget correctly.

"Narcissa," I said as I held her shoulders and gently rubbed them to calm her down. "I was kidding the elves."

Later, while she was changing clothes to exercise the Snitch-Birds, Narcissa wondered why she had snapped at Hermann. Why can't I control my emotions anymore? Narcissa gave her appearance one more appraising look in the mirror before joining Hermann and the birds. Hermann was giving them fresh water when she arrived.

Narcissa had moved the birds into the study because she liked their company. She would never get tired of looking at their bright yellow bodies and metallic gold wings. Narcissa loved to watch them move and had built them several large cages. She knew which ones were due for exercise, but she handled them all to check their health. Besides, the birds liked the attention. Last night, while she was cuddled around him, Hermann had told her that he was glad she liked the birds. Of course, she thought. What's not to like? Narcissa believed Hermann to be rather perfunctory about taking care of the birds. "Yes, Lillith, it's your turn today," she told the bird on her finger. "You too, Charles," she said to the bird preening in the other cage. On the table by her reading chair were two recommended books on caring for the birds, an autobiography of a Snitch-Bird breeder, and a dense book on the bird's history.

We exercised one bird at a time since the birds liked the realism of two competing Seekers. Lillith was first. The three of us took a small tour around the lake to warm up. When we arrived at the area marked like a Quidditch pitch, we gave the release signal, and Lillith went straight up and out of sight. Narcissa and I began our ascent looking for her. I spotted Lillith and began the chase. I had to be careful since I knew that Narcissa would happily knock me off my broom. I made ascents fast enough to be breathtaking; I made turns sharp enough to be gut-wrenching; and I made dives steep enough to be hair-raising. Lillith was having a great time. I was running on fear and adrenaline, and I was wondering how Seekers took the stress in a real game. I almost caught Lillith twice, but Narcissa bumped me away. Narcissa was having a great time, too. Finally we signaled Lillith that the exercise period was over. Lillith took a victory lap and then flew back to her cage where she fluffed her feathers and cheeped triumphantly to the other birds that she had not been caught. We did the whole thing again with Charles.

* * *

I was led into a Great Hall with a ceiling high enough to be terrifying. Dozens of Masters, bored with my presence, looked down upon me from their table. Hundreds of robe-clad, impatient with hunger, gawked at me from their benches.

There were the Griffies: home of the brave. And land of the free, I supposed. No divine force, cruel or benign, could place me there, not even in jest. Their courage would be the death of me. I was safe from the Griffie-Freebies.

There were the Slythies: home of the smooth. I would slide into their maw and slip and fail eternally.

There were the Ravens: home of the sharp. I would be sliced by their wit and seen nevermore, nevermore.

There were the Huffpuffers: home of the good and true. Truly, they would huff my evil place down, though it be built like a shit brickhouse. The Huffpuffers were not on.

The voice pierced my head and ferreted out my soul, an insignificant shadow cowering in a remote corner. The voice was going to give me a message.

"Would I slither into the pit?" it asked as the chasm opened beneath me. "Not the Huffpuffers. Not the Huffpuffers," I hissed.

"Would I fly to the razor's edge?" it asked as the void appeared above me. "Not the Huffpuffers. Not the Huffpuffers," I croaked.

"Then the Griffie-Freebies," it announced.

"Gryffindor."

"Oh, shit."

The Great Hall became silent with every eye upon me. Oops, did I just say that out loud?

I awoke, yelling and screaming and thrashing ... and wondering what it meant.

Scared Narcissa. She wanted to comfort me. She thought if I shared the horror it would exorcise the demons, so I related the nightmare.

A little later, she was still whomping the pillows and howling.

"It's not that funny," I said.

Narcissa sat up and tried to keep a straight face. "Gryffindors! Oh, shit! Ha!" she wailed, and then laughed until she got the hiccups. I had to get her some water. I had to rub her shoulders until she calmed down enough to go back to sleep.

I was finally snuggled back under the covers with my little sweetie. My little sweetie nuzzled me and said, "You have the best nightmares."

"I'll be damned if I tell that witch the next one," I swore to myself.

* * *

I could sense trouble coming as Narcissa showed me her jewel collection. I recognized what she was showing me as being top-of-the-line stones in exquisite settings, but there was something missing from my responses, and I knew she was noticing it. The class difference was making its appearance. I was a tradesman's son. Taking my mother into account, as I really should, I was a tradesman's and professional lady's son. Other than a few nice pieces my mother liked to wear, we bought jewels as an investment, the same way we bought potion patents. Intellectually, I recognized a passion for jewels as legitimate, as legitimate as a passion for concocting new potions. Emotionally, however, it was a different story. I tried hard, I really did, but after the fiftieth top-of-the-line stone in its exquisite setting I was getting numb. Besides, Narcissa was reminding me that I could not afford her.

Narcissa tried switching to nightgowns. They had Narcissa in them which helped, but that was also my downfall. After several fancy items, she put on a simple one.

"Maybe this suits you," she said through clenched teeth.

I missed the anger. I was busy staring at Narcissa in a gown that followed her every shape and every move. I was dreaming about waking up to that in the morning. I should have been repairing the situation.

"This is what you like, isn't it?" she said, her face contorted with rage.

She tore it off and threw it to the floor. "You can keep your peasant junk! I like nice things!"

Our relationship was doomed anyway. If this is how it ended, I might as well participate. I stood up and said, "It's not junk. And you look nice in it."

"What would you know! You bloody Potions master! You bloody silly little boy!"

If she got this upset over a nightgown, just how angry could this woman get?

"Thank you for the title of Potions master," I said. "To you, I may be a little boy and I may sometimes act silly, but I am not a silly little boy."

I was getting into it. This woman inspired me. I wasn't making much sense, but I was participating.

"You bloody awful stupid Northern European peasant! You wouldn't know something nice if it bit you!"

"Who's going to bite me? You?" I replied, still calm.

I was starting to think she would.

Very quietly she said, "You can take your even-tempered attitude and stick it up your arse."

I was getting angry at her being angry. "What are you mad about!? I haven't insulted you! I haven't hurt you!"

I was steamed up. "I haven't done one Gottverdammt thing except try to be nice to you!"

I bit her. "I am a silly little boy! Why am I paying attention to you!"

Well. That did it.

I looked at her standing there. I said, "I didn't mean that."

I sat down. I didn't want to fight anymore. I didn't want to leave her. If she got the last word by leaving me sitting there, then so be it.

"Are you still angry?" she asked after a while.

"No," I said.

"Do you want me to leave?" she asked.

"No," I said.

I looked at her still standing there. Why don't I just say what I wanted to say? "I want you to stay," I said.

I got up and walked over to her. "Are you still angry?"

"No," she said.

"Do you mind?" I asked, putting my hands on her waist.

"No," she said.

I kissed Narcissa on the forehead. "Can I hold you?"

"Yes."

I took her hand, walked over to the chair, and sat down.

"May I?" she said, pertly, as she sat in my lap.

"Maybe we need to do something different," I said. "It's great being here, but something different would be nice."

"You think we should separate?"

"No. Never," I blurted. "We do something different together."

"Okay," she said, relaxing. "We had a fight and said nasty things, but we still want to be together."

"Yes," I said.

What wonderful thing, I wondered, what wonderful thing did I ever do to deserve Narcissa Malfoy?

"There's Diagon Alley," said Narcissa. "It has lots of shops. It has Gringott's, the bank. You could get your school supplies."

"Yes, although I don't know what else I need. The German Ministry tried to supply me with everything."

"What about a Hogwarts robe? Do you have several of those?"

"I have some Durmstrang cloaks."

"They'll want you to wear a Hogwarts robe to class. After you're sorted, the House Crest appears on your robes. We can go to Diagon Alley and get you fitted."

Clothes, I thought, we're going to go clothes shopping. Well, that should make her happy.

She got up, put on a blouse, and was stepping into a skirt when she looked at me. "Are you watching me dress?"

"You're too attractive. I can't keep my eyes off you. I am shameless in your presence."

She smiled as she picked out a belt and chose a comfortable pair of shoes very practical when going shopping, these women.

We went to my rooms where I shaved and took a quick shower. When I came out, still drying my hair, Narcissa was sitting on the bed. It had been long enough since the fight had ended that we had forgotten about the beast within. We didn't realize that it was still there and rising.

The rational part of my mind registered how she had dressed. The soft colors of her skirt and blouse complemented each other and flattered her complexion. I knew she had put on simple white silk underwear. That woman was going to drive me insane.

The beast responded, "We can have the little witch. We can take the snake. She will be ours."

The beast slyly whispered, "Take her by being gentle. Let Narcissa be the hungry one. The snake within will deliver her."

I didn't put on any clothes. I just plunked myself down on the bed beside her and continued to dry my hair.

Narcissa ached. She wanted Hermann to soothe her feelings. She wanted him to release her from the tension still inside. They had made up and appeared to be friends, but the snake had hissed and struck at him. Narcissa reached out, placed her left hand between Hermann's shoulder blades, and gently rubbed his back. Hermann looked at her, smiled, and went back to drying his hair. Narcissa put her head on Hermann's shoulder.

I stretched out on my side of the bed, and let Narcissa stretch out beside me. I arranged the pillows so that we could lie side by side facing each other. I stroked her hair.

"Darling," I said as she cuddled and nuzzled and put her tongue between my lips. I moved my hand to her back and let her feel me pressing her against me.

"You're such a darling," I said as she pressed against me and wiggled and slid her tongue into my mouth. I moved my hand down to her hip.

I placed my hand on her silk underwear and held her as her moves changed into Narcissa's slow, sensuous slither.

I knew what she had in her underwear, and I knew the look on her face when I enjoyed having it. The image gave me an enormous erection. I moved her hand down to hold the erection. I coaxed Narcissa into kissing it. I watched the back of her head as she delicately kissed and licked me. I wanted to grab her head and push myself all the way into her, but I just stroked her hair and told Narcissa she was wonderful. "Remember," I told myself, "keep it gentle."

Her gentle methods worked fine. "Narcissa, I'm coming," I said loudly enough to warn her.

Narcissa gave one last lick and then watched, pleased at what she had done. "Oh, my," Narcissa said softly. She stretched out beside me on her back and gave me a big smile. Narcissa raised her hips, slid her knickers off, and dried me with them. Narcissa had gone back to nuzzling me when she said, "I don't do that very well."

"How can you say that? I squirted all over the place."

She smiled. "But, I didn't..."

I kissed her. "It's okay." I slowly kissed her again. "That's fine." I lovingly kissed her again. "Whatever my little witch wants to do," I said, kissing her again.

"You're very loving, darling," I continued to reassure her. "You're very sexy."

"Remember," I told myself again, as I nearly went wild looking at her, "gently, go slowly, gently."

I teased her by giving her light kisses on her neck and throat. I was rewarded by Narcissa tearing off her blouse and bra and pressing me against her breasts. I softly put my tongue to first one nipple then the other. I was teasing Narcissa. I held Narcissa by the shoulders so that she could not press her breasts hard against me. I finally relented, sucking first one breast and then the other while Narcissa sighed, "Yes," and held my head. My free hand was roaming all over Narcissa, all those parts that drove me wild her flowing hair, her sculptured face, her elegant neck, her shapely shoulders, her finely muscled back.

Narcissa rolled on top and looked into my eyes. I could see the coiled snake within. May the gods help me, I loved it.

Narcissa, flushed, sweaty and panting, said, "'Your little witch' wants you to eat her."

She nuzzled me a little more. "A witch a day keeps the doctor away," she breathed into my ear.

"You taste good too," I told her, rolling back on top of her.

"How do I taste?" asked Narcissa.

"Witchy," I said, sticking my tongue in her navel until she giggled. "Essence of witch."

I teased Narcissa even in this. My hands spread her open, and my tongue moved across her most sensitive and vulnerable spot. I kept up the light touch even when she moaned and demanded more. I knew I was taking a long time, but I didn't care. I was enjoying every second of it. The long, slow teasing had produced an incredible tension. Narcissa pressed my head into her. I heard a soft, sighing moan. Her thighs gently gripped my head. Then she slowly went limp. I moved to cradle her head in my arms.

I whispered to her that she was my darling, that she was beautiful.

I lay on my back and coaxed Narcissa on top of me. I held Narcissa's hips. I watched Narcissa's loving face and affectionate eyes as I slid into her. She was never more beautiful. She placed her legs on top of mine. I could feel the whole woman do her languid, sensuous slither.

She slithered on top of me. Her tongue flicked out as she moved. A slow flick, again and again, tasting me. She started squeezing with her thighs. Then it was happening together. A slither from her hips to her shoulders, a squeeze of her thighs, and a flick of her tongue. Over and over the snake writhed in the grip of coitus. A slither from her hips to her shoulders, a squeeze of her thighs, and a flick of her tongue. She was breathing more heavily. Narcissa writhed in copulation. A sensuous slither from her hips to her shoulders, a gentle squeeze of her thighs, and a slow flick of her loving tongue. She was sweating. It became more urgent. It became demanding, muscular slithers from her hips to her shoulders. It became intense squeezes with her thighs. It became predatory flicks of her tongue. When it happened, her mating was subtle and languid, but Narcissa's entire being rippled and contracted and squeezed. As she went limp, I could feel her heart pounding.

A few seconds later, as Narcissa returned to consciousness, Narcissa found that Hermann was still holding her and inside her. That makes it even better, Narcissa realized, as a warm glow spread through her.

Narcissa lay blissfully on top of Hermann feeling incomplete. She had surrendered to Hermann. Now she wanted the same from him. Narcissa would not feel soothed and reassured unless Hermann lost himself in passion for her.

"Oh, yes," sighed Narcissa as Hermann rolled on top of her

He actually thinks I'm pretty, she thought. He likes looking at me. He likes seeing my legs spread for him. He likes watching himself enter me. He likes feeling me get slimy slick for him. He likes the wet noise I make.

I like it with Hermann.

A candle beside Narcissa and Hermann threw their shadows on the wall. Strange shadows. Almost menacing shadows. A snake. A bird of prey. A bird of prey with a snake in its talons.

Narcissa could tell when Hermann changed from enjoying having her to wanting to have her. He was lightly on top of her, gently kissing her, and quietly moaning with her. I want all of him: the conversational Hermann, the companionable Hermann, the loving Hermann. I need the animal Hermann. Narcissa felt Hermann change from wanting to have her to needing to have her. He couldn't stop. He couldn't help himself. He felt vulnerable, but he couldn't resist Narcissa. He groaned as his snake wrapped herself around him and he surrendered to her. Now Narcissa felt complete.

Yes, thought Narcissa, this is how a wizard treats his witch, yes.

Kata

Chapter 7 of 19

"I thought about my father, who had become involved with my mother."

Chapter 7: 30 September 8:00 AM -- 20 October 5:00 PM Kata

The phrase at Durmstrang was Hackenschneiden. It was never said aloud or in public. It sent a chill down most people's spines. It certainly sent a chill down mine. To stay in certain circles, I had to go on one. I knew that if my parents ever discovered what I did, I would be taken out of Durmstrang, permanently. I went anyway.

I remember my hands were sweaty enough that I could barely ride my broom. I remember screaming and slicing a vampire into small pieces ... out of sheer terror. My fellow dueling club team mates were impressed. They said I looked like a windmill with blades. They were afraid to help. They were afraid to come close. That's me: a danger to friend and foe alike, the most feared sword in all Germany.

After graduation, I would face a year of compulsory service with the German Wizard Assault Teams. Their weapon of choice is an automatic rifle. German wizards, being a romantic lot, insist on the Kalishnikov. The vampires don't have a chance. With the combination of wood, silver, compound, and explosive bullets that they use, neither do werewolves, giants, wizards or anything else they've met. The teams practice the combined-arms of defensive spells, hurled curses, and suppressive fire. The purpose of

an official vampire hunt is an exercise in field operations: intelligence, communications, and coordination of units. The teams recently learned how to stun vampires, and they can include prisoner-of-war training in the exercises. I've heard that prisoner-of-war training with a bunch of vampires is harder than one might think. Durmstrang students believe the War Department secretly releases the vampires after the exercises.

Returning to the topic at hand, I needed a room at Hogwarts in which to perform kata. I dared not go back to Durmstrang completely out of practice. In Salem, students could join a kendo club. There were tangential thoughts about other All-American delights: pizza, General Tso's chicken, and tacos. I searched until I found what appeared to be a suitable room. It was almost hidden. I didn't care to be public about this. I unpacked my bokken, my wooden samurai sword, thinking there was no reason to wave around a lot of sharp steel. I practiced a simple kata with a bokken until I was no longer completely clumsy. Then I practiced with my katana, my long, steel samurai sword that I had used on the vampire. I sought out Professor Flitwick for his advice. When I performed for Professor Flitwick, I used my katana. I might as well let Flitwick and the room know what I was about. I think the Brit expression is 'Full Monty.'

"Beautiful. Deadly," said Flitwick.

"You have chosen well. This room is an armory where the castle guard used to practice. They believed that gaining proficiency at arms improved a person's character. This room believes that, and it welcomes you."

"Who knows? You might believe it too," he added, giving me an amused look. "The room doesn't have a door. Do you want one?" he asked.

"No," I said. "At Hogwarts, doors take on lives of their own."

Flitwick nodded in agreement.

The room was in an out-of-the-way location; hence, I was not likely to be discovered. To keep people out while I practiced, I used one of Durmstrang's students' favorite souvenirs from Salem. It was bright yellow tape with black lettering that said, "CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS."

I tried to keep a balanced physical program, alternating days of kata with days of calisthenics and jogging. It was not fun. Mien Gott, I hate pushups. Various martial arts have exercises where the practitioner begins in a relaxed position, often sitting, and moves quickly into block and counter. Most attacks occur when we're unready, when we think we're safe. These exercises are exhausting. I was finishing a sequence of them when I saw the bushy haired whatsit staring at me from the door. Well, that was just ducky. I had confirmed her opinion of me that I was someone who would suddenly attack for no reason.

Two days later, I was halfway through a kata when I realized there were several people watching me from the doorway. I finished the kata, did my bow of appreciation to the room, turned and bowed to the group at the door, and noticed they were leaving. I stood there for a while, disappointed that they did not stay to return my greeting. I could hear voices as they left.

"What's he waving that stick around for?" said a male voice.

"It's a sword," said a female voice. "Did you see the way he moved? He would be across the room slicing your arm off before you could say '*Expelliarmus*.'"

"All I saw was a bloody stick," said the male voice.

From the tone of the voices, it sounded, to me, like another argument between a smart girl and her dumb boyfriend. A selfish inner voice said, "Hey, I'm not stupid. I like smart girls." A more reasonable voice replied that there might be a lot of affection and passion between them.

I performed the last kata that I had planned to practice that session. Halfway through, I noticed that someone had returned and was watching. When I finished the kata, I bowed and said, "Hello, Miss Lovegood." By now I had learned the name of the abstracted girl at the sorting feast.

"Hi, Hermann," replied Miss Lovegood. "Can I do that with you?"

"It's called a kata," I said. "It's a fixed sequence of moves practiced to acquire grace and balance, although it embeds real combat techniques."

"I can see that, Hermann," Miss Lovegood told me.

Of course she could. Miss Lovegood stepped into the room, paused to absorb its ambience, and bowed. I gave her my bokken to examine. Miss Lovegood cradled my bokken and hummed to it. She went to the window and examined the trees in a small copse nearby, paying particular attention to an oak tree. She cradled my bokken again, hummed to herself some more, and then swung my bokken around. Miss Lovegood went to the window and pointed her wand at the oak tree. There was a snap, and a dead branch floated over to the window. Quick movements of her wand had the branch stripped, debarked, and trimmed at both ends. Miss Lovegood levitated the core of the branch into the room. She cradled the branch, hummed to it, and then set it on a table beside my bokken. Careful movements of her wand planed and shaped the branch. When she finished, she had a bokken that was slightly slimmer, but five centimeters longer, than mine.

I watched Miss Lovegood as she swung her bokken and copied some of the moves she had seen me make. I groaned inwardly. Here came another lesson in humility. In Potions, I had to keep up with Draco. In Charms and Transfiguration, Miss Patil was not speaking to me, but was outperforming me with great glee. In Arithmancy, I had to compete against every smart kid in school. For kata, I had someone with both natural grace and a killer instinct.

"Has anyone ever told you that you're deadly?" I asked Miss Lovegood.

"No," she said.

We started on the first kata. A few days later, padded uniforms and equipment arrived from Germany, which meant Miss Lovegood and I could whack away at each other. It was ever so much fun. Why wasn't Miss Lovegood a boy? Why did I have to have a bonding experience with a girl? Another heartbreak on the horizon. To whom do I complain about this? It would have been okay if I had considered her just another boy, but I didn't. I couldn't. Among other things, she took really good care of me after she whacked the holy crap out of me. From Samurai to Nightingale, all purpose Luna. I cringed when I saw the bruises I gave her. "Witch beater," my mind screamed at me. Despite all the fuss we made, it was only small bruises. If Miss Lovegood had been a boy, neither of us would have noticed anything.

Luckily, she was in a different year, in different classes, and I could spend a lot of time away from her. Unluckily, I ruined the opportunity to keep her distant by inviting her to study with Draco and me. What was I thinking? Draco was helping Barbara and Shelly prepare for their OWLs. The first several study sessions with Miss Lovegood were awkward, but after they adjusted, Barbara and Shelly discovered that Miss Lovegood was as gifted academically as she was athletically.

I had heard the comments about 'Loony Luna,' but she didn't make that type of impression on me. She did have some strange habits in dress and behavior, although nothing like some of the wilder students at Durmstrang. I was certain that some of them were half feral. I thought the same about some of the Durmstrang professors. It must be that Northern isolation that gets to us. Perhaps Miss Lovegood was stranger when younger and more isolated. She and Barbara and Shelly had become friends and study partners. Hence, Draco was her friend. Draco, as an aristocrat, had a tolerance of unusual behavior, and he had a calming effect since he radiated ability and confidence. Then there were the martial arts. The healing power of its discipline, the healing power of its outlet for anger and aggression, is often underrated.

Miss Lovegood's father edited a newspaper that presented an alternate point of view. She was happy to discover that I was skeptical about the official version of events. In fact, I couldn't understand the acceptance of it at Hogwarts. History at Hogwarts was taught by a ghost who believed he was teaching facts. Miss Lovegood, however, was disappointed to learn I was also skeptical about unofficial versions of events.

"Just what do you believe?" she asked, completely annoyed with me.

"Not much," I replied. "I'm lost in a sea of misinformation."

Our most ferocious squabbles, the ones that left Miss Lovegood absolutely enraged, were the discussions about the existence of certain animals. I readily admitted that new animals were being discovered all the time, but these animals were microbes, or insects, or animals in the ocean depths. I admitted it possible, but declared it unlikely, that large animals were living undiscovered in the plains and forests of Sweden. We finally agreed that I wasn't making fun of her or her father. I was just skeptical.

"Okay," said Miss Lovegood, "you don't want to lie to me about what you believe."

"Well," I said, "you don't want to lie to me about what you believe."

That didn't stop the squabbling, but the arguments weren't going to drive us apart. Later, it dawned on me how much that meant to me. She also told me she preferred 'Luna' to 'Miss Lovegood.'

One week after Luna started kata, I was sitting in the Ravenclaw common room after lunch.

"Um, Hermann?" I heard a female voice say.

It was the girl with oriental features at the sorting feast. I knew her name was Shan Li. Miss Li had learned that Miss Lovegood and I were practicing martial arts, and Miss Li wanted to join us.

"Where's Miss Lovegood?" I asked.

"Luna's in class all afternoon," said Miss Li, "but I'm free."

I went to my room to get my bokken. When I returned to the common room, she was looking at a poster on our bulletin board. The first frame of the poster showed a student standing before the Transfiguration prof, with the student waving his wand as if he were conducting the William Tell Overture in five seconds. The second frame showed an exhausted student, while the prof had turned into a voluptuous babe. The caption was, "Horatio Ravenclaw gets his 'O' in Transfiguration."

"Horatio is a legend, even amongst us Ravenclaws," I informed her.

"I can see that," said Miss Li.

Miss Lovegood had told Miss Li that a bokken was easy to make.

"It was easy for Miss Lovegood," I said.

Miss Li nodded appreciatively.

"Do you really call her 'Miss Lovegood'?" asked Miss Li.

I admitted that I called her 'Luna.'

"Then you can call me 'Shan,'" said Miss Li.

Her school uniform told me Shan was a Hufflepuff Prefect. Shan told me she was seventh year and the sister of Su Li, a sixth year Ravenclaw. I did wonder why a clannish Hufflepuff spent a lot of time with Ravenclaws, but decided Shan would tell me if and when she felt like it. I didn't automatically assume Shan spent time with the Ravenclaws because of her sister, since sisters are often glad to be in different Houses.

In the practice room, I showed Shan the basic grips, the basic moves, and the first part of a kata. It was as I feared. Shan was at least as graceful as Luna. Now I faced two tigresses. Later that evening, Luna took Shan to the copse of trees, and Shan made her bokken. It was a little shorter and a little straighter than mine. Luna later told me that making a bokken was easy for Shan. I put on a brave face and told Luna that was great. Yes, two tigresses.

It's a short step from beating seven shades of shit out of each other to studying together. Shan was going for a NEWT in Charms, and she needed a study partner. Shan wondered if I would be willing to make the sacrifice. I wondered why the Hufflepuff boys were not lined up for this opportunity. Perhaps they thought it would be difficult to study with Shan Li. Hogwarts Charms versus Shan's charms was no contest. Study? What study? I agreed to study with her because there was no graceful way to refuse. I discovered that Shan's brilliance more than made up for my immature lapses of attention.

Shan told me about her NEWT goals. I was impressed. She wanted to know why a Durmstrang student was not in Defense against the Dark Arts. I had to admit that I had tested out of those Hogwarts courses at the end of last summer. She was impressed that I was going for NEWTs in Charms and Potions even though I was only a sixth year. I tried to tell Shan about different curriculums, and I tried to tell her that I wasn't doing much else. Shan wouldn't listen. Shan got it into her head that I was like her. Well, actually I was similar, except in the beauty department. Shan talked about being totally focused on academics. We acknowledged the price for that dedication. We talked about the pressure, about the cost in friends and relationships, and about the unbalanced life. We even touched on the backlash, the times we acted like silly little kids.

This wasn't doing me any good at all. It was bad enough that I was finding Shan attractive. Now I was admiring Shan as a person.

Being Shan's partner in Charms did give us an opportunity to play an aggressive point-gathering game. Flitwick assumed our fencing competition had spilled over into the classroom. There's nothing personal about this, I reminded myself, as Shan scooped me twice in a row. I was too chagrined to appreciate how attractive she was with her winning smile and bright, predatory eyes.

Luna and Shan had learned the first kata and wanted to start on the second. I shuddered. The first kata was simple, with the katana held in what most people regarded as the normal way to hold a sword. 'Yang' was the term used at Durmstrang. 'Yin' was the term we used for the second kata. The katana was held like a dagger with the edge facing out. At first, Durmstrang students thought it looked ineffective, but then we learned what a skilled 'yin' swordsman could do. The 'yin' practitioners became the most formidable opponents. Now I was about to demonstrate all this to Luna and Shan, who, quite frankly, scared me.

The fencing was crazy. The three of us went at each other like berserkers, and then we went, "Oh no, I didn't mean to hurt you. Oh, I'm so sorry."

Martial arts practice was okay. Studying and talking together was okay. The amount of time I spent fantasizing about Luna was not okay. I even had the occasional fantasy about Shan.

Why did I have to contend with classy women, whom I could not get out of my mind? I thought about my father, who had become involved with my mother. Was involvement with classy women a family curse passed down through the male Busch line? I would corner my father the next time I saw him. Not warning me about this was parental negligence.

Raving about fantasizing was fun, and raving about a family curse was fun, but I knew deep down that thinking about Luna and Shan kept me from thinking about Padma, which was painful.

Clearwater 1

Chapter 8 of 19

"Romance is the cruelest gift."

Chapter 8: 20 July 10:00 AM -- 2 August 5:00 PM Clearwater 1

"Oh," moaned Patricia Clearwater as she laid her head on my shoulder. "Oh, what would my husband say?"

Well. How had things come to that?

* * *

It began 20 July 1996. I had left Malfoy Manor that morning and had finally entered my London hotel room in the early afternoon. There was time to leisurely unpack and soak in a tub before meeting Mr. Clearwater at six. I was nervous, of course. He worked in the British Ministry of Magic, while I was a technically oriented student in Potions and Arithmancy. He had a wife; a twenty-year-old daughter, Penelope; and a ten-year-old son, David.

Luckily, I was not dependent on the Clearwaters for anything. The German and British Ministries wanted to use me as a mutual contact. I agreed, although I thought it would be better to send a diplomatic person and had said so. I also agreed there was no harm in my meeting Mr. Clearwater. Perhaps they thought something would work out socially. If it did, Mr. Clearwater would be someone in the British Ministry acquainted with a Durmstrang student. If not, the London hotel room was part of a permanently rented diplomatic suite, and there was plenty to see in both magical and non-magical London. The German Ministry was encouraging. "Relax a little before your new term," they told me.

There was a serious aspect to this visit. The German wizarding community, concerned about the coming civil war among the British wizards, was desperate to open all channels of communications. One of the fears among the German community was that most Brits probably thought all Durmstrang students were potential Death Eaters. The German Ministry wanted to dispel this preconception, and they wanted to know more about the English factions. Both sides regarded me as an intermediate that looked innocent and harmless. My message to both sides was that there was a good reason I looked innocent and harmless.

With all these thoughts to calm my mind, I met Mr. Clearwater, and we proceeded to his house. After introductions and some preliminary drinks, the Clearwater family and I were having dinner.

"Penelope's seeing Percy Weasley," said Mr. Clearwater. "He was Head Boy at Hogwarts."

"Penelope's got a boyfriend," interjected David. "If you bother her, he'll curse your bits off."

"David!" said Penelope.

"Don't worry, Hermann," said Mrs. Clearwater. "Percy will have to find his first."

"Mother!" said Penelope.

I took a page from the Malfoy book.

I saluted David with my wine glass. "Thanks for the warning."

I saluted Mrs. Clearwater. "Thanks for the reassurance."

I saluted Penelope. "Grace under stress."

Harold Clearwater broke in.

"We don't talk like that," said Mr. Clearwater to his son, "especially to guests."

"We shouldn't make comments about Percy," said Mr. Clearwater to his wife.

"You need to be more articulate with your brother, and you shouldn't shout at your mother," said Mr. Clearwater to his daughter.

"Your attempt at being a gentleman was well intentioned," Mr. Clearwater told me, "but my family's poor remarks didn't deserve a chivalric response."

I ripped a chapter out of the Malfoy book.

"Yes," I agreed. "I should have given my response more thought. It's the change of company. I've been with the Malfoys, and the aristocrats have a wider range of acceptable behavior. It will take a while for me to adapt to more civilized standards. I should begin here."

"Yes," said Mr. Clearwater, "that's the proper attitude."

Mr. Clearwater and I made a toast to improving my social skills. Penelope and Mrs. Clearwater were looking at me in wide-eyed disbelief. "Here's to the Malfoys," I said to myself. "I couldn't have handled this without your expert tutelage."

Mr. Clearwater then turned his attention to my attire. He was certain that I needed some proper British clothes. Mrs. Clearwater said she had several days free and could help me shop. Mr. Clearwater admitted that his wife could probably help. It was too bad that he was tied up at the office at the moment. Both Mr. and Mrs. Clearwater agreed that it would take Mrs. Clearwater several days to introduce me to proper British fashion.

After dinner, Mr. Clearwater retired to his study to catch up on some paperwork. Penelope remarked that her father worked very hard and wanted to know if she could corrupt me and her mother with an offer of brandy. The two of us were easily corrupted. The fourth of our group, David, was entertained by my stories of games and broom rides with Draco, Vincent, and Gregory. He had heard stories about the Malfoys, Crabbes, and Goyles from his mother, his sister, and his friends. He was amazed that someone could associate with them without getting killed. I assured him that I had only been mildly damaged. David went off to bed thinking that maybe I wasn't a complete prat. That left the far-more-interesting Penelope and her mother.

Penelope opened by assuring me that her life at Hogwarts had been dull and boring. I said that was student life everywhere. She should try Durmstrang where the only excitement was how crazy we would get during the winter. I told them about building the ice chute from the Boys' Dorm to the Dining Hall. The idea was that we could get up in the morning and then slide down to breakfast. Penelope and her mother expressed polite disbelief. I told them we even had guards (our version of Prefects) posted to levitate the younger students who missed the curves. That brought out that both Penelope and her mother had been Prefects at Hogwarts. I listened as they engaged in a friendly rivalry about who had to contend with the worst miscreants. I listened to their mutual complaint that Slytherin and Gryffindor Prefects were often worse than useless. They had both been Ravenclaws. It was late when I left. I assured them, most sincerely, that I had not been bored. Mrs. Clearwater worked in the mornings. I would meet

her in the afternoon to begin getting my wardrobe in proper shape.

"If you can," I told her in sudden inspiration, "wear casual clothes. We can go boating, punting."

Mrs. Clearwater arrived a few minutes after noon the next day. Witches are not bothered by London traffic. I had spent the morning preparing and knew exactly where to go. We had a salad for lunch. We were soon on the water. I moved the boat away from the dock and heavy traffic. Mrs. Clearwater was a good sport and agreed to try punting. I told her that she could take it easy, that we weren't in any hurry to get anywhere, and that she should observe how the proper Brit dressed for punting. After all, that's what we were here for.

Later when we were having tea, Mrs. Clearwater asked if I was of age since I had been using magic. I told her that the German and English Ministries, along with my parents, had signed the papers making me a legal adult. It was standard for Durmstrang exchange students. Mrs. Clearwater said she had had a wonderful time and, yes, she had carefully observed the proper clothes for punting. She asserted that she was on duty at this very moment ... observing the proper clothes for strolling past a tea shop. What would her husband say if she were with me and not looking at clothes?

Mrs. Clearwater took Wednesday off from work to take me to a museum. She declared it a good place to observe a range of fashions. By early afternoon, we were strolling through the museum holding hands.

"What would my husband say?" said Mrs. Clearwater as she took my hand.

Later, Mrs. Clearwater put her arm around my waist in front of an exhibit. "Oh, what would my husband say?"

Friday noon when Mrs. Clearwater arrived at my hotel room, I was still adjusting my tie in the mirror.

"I don't think my husband would like this," said Mrs. Clearwater as she stood behind me and put her arms around me.

Was Patricia Clearwater only reacting against her husband? Couldn't she act on her own? Well, perhaps not. I would have to accept her as she was. I turned around to face her.

"Oh," moaned Patricia Clearwater as she laid her head on my shoulder. "Oh, what would my husband say?"

"He would say you shouldn't let me hold you," I said, putting my arms around her.

"Mmm," went Patricia.

"He would say you shouldn't let me stroke your hair," I said, running my fingers through her hair.

"He would definitely say you shouldn't hug me back."

Patricia put her arms around me and snuggled against me.

"He would warn you about listening to me when I told you that you were a beautiful and classy lady."

"You're so sweet," sighed Patricia.

"He would say 'Patricia, make sure you don't kiss him.'"

Patricia put an arm around my neck and lowered my head. She nibbled on my lips. She gave me a sensuous kiss that said, 'This is what I'm like, soft and yielding.' Her tongue was between my lips.

"He would tell you to not let me take liberties with you."

I ran my hands over Patricia as I waltzed her to the bed. I let her fall back on the bed with her feet still on the floor.

Patricia held my head as I nuzzled her.

"Your husband would say, 'For heaven's sake, Patricia, don't unbutton your blouse.'"

I looked at her and said, "Unbutton your blouse, honey."

Patricia unbuttoned her blouse.

"Your husband would say, 'For heaven's sake, Patricia, don't unfasten your bra.'"

I looked at her and said, "Unfasten your bra, sweetheart."

Patricia unfastened her bra.

I tenderly took care of one breast and then moved to the other. Patricia was moaning.

"Your husband would say, 'Okay, stop right there. Don't show him your nice legs.'"

"Show me your nice legs, darling," I said.

Patricia pulled up her skirt. I put my head between Patricia's slightly parted knees and began kissing her inner thighs. Patricia opened her legs wider.

"There," your husband would say, 'I tried to warn you. Once he sees your lovely legs, he's going to go wild.'"

I leaned over Patricia and said, "I want everything."

"Your husband would say, 'Don't lift your skirt higher as you're now doing. If Hermann sees how shapely you look in your knickers, he'll get a tremendous erection. There, you see his trousers bulge. You know what he's thinking. He wants in your knickers. He wants to take what you've got in your married knickers. Look, he's pulled out his cock. He tells you it's for you. Isn't it beautiful? He's sliding up between your legs. He's pulled aside your underwear. He's listening to you grunt as he splits your slit. He's listening to you moan as he slides his beautiful cock into you. He's all the way in. You're mounted. He's mounted you. He looks into your eyes, the eyes of a married woman he's mounted. He looks into your eyes as your defenses go down. He listens as you whimper for him to take you, to fuck you. He knows he has you. He watches your body move for him as he takes you. He tells you you're such a darling as you moan for him. He tells you how lovely you are as he hears you get sloppy, squishy wet for him. He can see and feel your moves become more urgent as he has his way with you. He enjoys listening as your moans become animal grunts. He feels your legs wrap around him, and he knows your toes are dancing at the ceiling. He watches your face contort. He presses into you as you thrash your legs and squirm on his cock. He sees your helpless smile. He knows he's taken you. He hears you cry out. He calmly enjoys your unfaithful orgasm. Your married thighs squeeze him. Your married vagina creams and caresses his beautiful, sweet cock.'"

I looked at Patricia's flushed face, her shapely legs, her knickers, and her pretty hairy slit with my erect prick in it.

When Hermann lavished attention on her breasts after asking her to remove her bra, it entered Mrs. Clearwater's mind that Hermann really liked her. She gave in to her impulses and ran her fingers through his hair. She gave in to temptation and moaned as Hermann made her feel like an attractive woman.

When Hermann had nibbled his way up her thighs, it entered Mrs. Clearwater's mind that Hermann liked her enough to make her be a naughty girl. She sighed with the wicked pleasure of spreading her legs for him.

When Hermann mentioned her knickers, Mrs. Clearwater kicked off her sandals at the spiciness, and when he mentioned getting in them, Mrs. Clearwater was wriggling her toes. If Hermann had cared to look, he would have noticed that her dancing toes were even pettier than her knickers, and her toenail polish was the same bright color as her knickers. Mrs. Clearwater had dressed very carefully that morning.

When Hermann pulled out his cock, it entered Mrs. Clearwater's mind that she wanted him, and she wouldn't resist if he made her be a wicked lady. Mrs. Clearwater gasped at the shock of penetration. Mrs. Clearwater moaned with deep, primal pleasure as she accepted Hermann inside her. She moaned with the deep, primal pleasure of being wanted and desired.

When Hermann's calming voice told Mrs. Clearwater she was mounted, it doubled her pleasure of being wanted and desired. When Hermann's lovely voice told Mrs. Clearwater that she was yielding, she looked in his eyes to let him know that it was sweet to be wanted. She felt filled with the sweetness of his desire for her. She felt sweetness beyond belief as she yielded. She whispered that Hermann should take her.

When Hermann described his taking her, Mrs. Clearwater was captured by Hermann's loving depiction of her unfaithfulness. She felt deliciously evil as she whimpered for him to fuck her. She enjoyed the guilty pleasure of moving with him as he took her, the guilty pleasure of moving with someone who wanted to have her. She was his lovely, darling, married mistress. She was a gentle lady listening to the wet noise of her infidelity. She felt naughty and became demanding as she let the pleasure increase. She was a bad little girl down to her pretty little toes that were waving at the ceiling. Her sounds became animal grunts and her face contorted as the wicked pleasure he gave her became almost agony. She smiled helplessly at Hermann as she was gripped by the searing, painful joy of forbidden copulation. Mrs. Clearwater cried out at the spicy intensity of her unfaithful orgasm. Her orgasm became even more intense when Hermann held her like a lover, a lover who was savoring her sex, who was savoring her sex as worthwhile and precious. Hermann was the only thing in the world. She clung to him with her arms as he made her feel wonderful. Her lovely legs and pretty vagina squeezed and caressed him with the joy of being appreciated.

For Patricia Clearwater, the world and its problems had vanished in the delight of being wanted, and the accumulated tension of years had disappeared in the wonderment of being cherished. Patricia Clearwater now wanted Hermann to complete his possession of her. She ached for him to find his release inside her. She ached to be sexy for him, to be the one he wanted.

I was still looking at Patricia's flushed face, shapely legs, knickers, and hairy slit with my erect prick in it.

"I want to have you," I told Patricia, moving my prick slowly in and out. When Patricia felt slick again, I took my prick out of her, pulled her knickers off, and placed her entirely on the bed. "You're a married woman, and you shouldn't let me do this, Patricia," I said, putting my hands on her knees and opening her legs. "You're somebody's wife, and you shouldn't let me hold you down," I said, putting my hands on top of hers and holding her down. "I'm putting my prick between your married legs. I want to slide in and take you and make you be unfaithful. Your husband would say, 'Don't let him slide in and have you. Don't be unfaithful for him.'"

"You're very pretty, Patricia. Be unfaithful for me."

"Take me, darling," breathed Patricia hoarsely.

I'm lucky, thought Patricia, glad that Hermann was entering her again. Hermann is doing and saying everything I could hope for. When he pulled out I was empty, but he's back inside. He is taking care of me. He is being nice to me. He wants me. Hermann is being a perfect gentleman.

There was the sloppy fun between the spread legs of a married lady, the contented sighs of a woman being unfaithful, and the quiet joy of having someone's wife.

* * *

The next day was Saturday and I was once again invited to dinner at the Clearwaters. I arrived at six. Harold was working in his study. Patricia had planned a relaxed evening with a spaghetti dinner. The sauce was being kept warm. The pasta would be cooked when we were ready to eat. We would get our vitamins munching on vegetables and sipping wine while Patricia, Penelope, David, and I played cards.

Dinner was ready, and Harold joined us. The spaghetti was okay, but surely their guest deserved something more elaborate. We were smart not to rush into buying clothes, but we didn't seem very efficient. We accepted all this as constructive criticism. Harold was doing the best he could for us before he had to return to his study.

After dinner, it was brandy and charades. Patricia was in one of her moods. I got a piece of parchment with her handwriting that said "Don Juan." I greeted, snogged, and left several imaginary women. Patricia and Penelope applauded my efforts. The pantomime now included ripping imaginary blouses and running my hand up imaginary skirts. My eyes were popping open and my tongue was darting out at the delectable discoveries. Patricia and Penelope cheered. "Oh, come on," I finally said. They guessed "Casanova." I was crushed. I should have begun by saluting a statue.

Harold, Penelope, and David all became very sleepy and retired early. Was this Patricia's doing? Had she slipped anything into their drinks?

Patricia wanted to take the stairs to roof of their apartment building to see what stars could be seen in the middle of London. She said she was a hopeless romantic.

"You were a perfect gentleman all evening," she told me when we were half way up the stairs.

"I hope no one noticed that I've been staring at you all evening," I replied.

She stopped and ran her hand through her hair. "Were you really?"

I held her hand as we climbed the rest of the stairs. What was I to this lady? A Harold substitute? Why was he neglecting his witch? Was he neglecting his witch? Was Harold in love with someone else? Did Patricia care for Harold? Did Patricia care for me? Was she lonely and frustrated and anyone would do? Did she need the spice of an extramarital fling? I decided to try the risky business of light romance. Why couldn't I be happy just seducing her?

"What would my husband think if he knew I was looking at the stars with you?"

Patricia had brought a blanket. I stretched out on it. "Perhaps he would think that you just wanted to show someone the stars. Company is nice under the stars."

I waited patiently, wondering if I was doing everything all wrong. I hoped she would talk to me and tell me about herself. I liked Patricia. Eventually Patricia was lying on her side facing me with her head propped up with her hand. She told me that at Hogwarts she liked Herbology, Care of Magical Creatures, and Charms. She didn't think she would like Magical Creatures now because the professor was irresponsible with dangerous animals. It had ruined the course for Penelope. She was really proud of how well Penelope had done at Hogwarts. Penelope was very capable, and she was earning her own living by working for several stores. She didn't think Penelope would stay at home much longer. She wasn't sure David was going to do as well at Hogwarts. Harold had wanted a son, but he hadn't touched her since David.

I told her about my younger sister who seemed to be good in everything, about the effort at Durmstrang to expand their curriculum, and about coming to Hogwarts for Potions. By now Patricia's head was on my shoulder, and she was falling asleep. I took Patricia back to her apartment, assured her that I had enjoyed a wonderful evening, agreed that she could kiss me goodnight, and returned to my hotel rooms.

Yes, I had enjoyed a wonderful evening with Patricia. Did I regret not seducing her? No, but I regretted not getting the whole package of enjoying a nice evening with her, spending a cozy night with her, and finally sending her off to work the next morning a bit late and flushed with sex ... passionate sex with her wizard. We'll embarrass the

kids.

It was Sunday. I had spent the previous evening with the Clearwaters. It had been cards, dinner, charades, and conversation with Patricia. The message from Patricia arrived at noon saying that she and Penelope wanted to get out of the flat. I replied that if all else failed, we could have tea and oranges and watch the boats go by on the river. So we did. They were still skeptical about the ice chute at Durmstrang. I reassured them, if that's the appropriate phrase, that things at Durmstrang got crazier than that. The major obstacles facing the ice chute were the bridges over the corridors. The Professors refused to detour around our engineering marvel. No, no one got hurt sliding down to breakfast. People did get hurt when we chose sides and played 'Vikings Storming the Glacier' on it. No, I didn't know why Vikings would want to storm a glacier. I could tell them that Vikings were inordinately fond of oranges. Yes, Vikings were, and, yes, I could peel Patricia and Penelope another orange. Penelope wondered if Vikings were inordinately fond of tea. We talked about it and decided Vikings hadn't invented tea yet.

* * *

There is a quiet sadness in romance two people more vulnerable than usual and older women more vulnerable than girls. Patricia entered my rooms Monday and held me and cried quietly on my shoulder. Then we moved over to the couch and held each other.

Patricia thought we should go boating. I moved the boat around aimlessly. Patricia and I were hardly aware of where we were. The other boaters waved at us and maneuvered around us. Still in a daze, we left the boats to go shopping. We were at a large store, and amidst the bustle she took me into a small dressing room with her.

Patricia Clearwater had always been disappointed in her figure. She had always felt that it was not round enough, not full-bodied enough. Now, for the first time, she found herself not caring. Her body was what it was, and she would offer it to Hermann. He would surely accept it; and having accepted it, he would cherish it as he should. In the delirium of romance, anything else was unthinkable.

Now with contentment running through her veins, Patricia told her lover that he was her darling and placed his hands on her breasts. She sighed as he fondled them gently and with great appreciation. As he should, she thought. Patricia unbuttoned her blouse and opened her bra so that Hermann could get his hands directly on her breasts, so that she could feel Hermann's hands on her. Her lips caressed his. The thrill of his touch started between her legs, ran up through her central core, and escaped as a low, yearning moan. She ran her hands through his hair and then guided his lips to her breasts. His lips and hands tingled through her until she knew an empty ache. "Come into me," she told him. She felt him enter her and pierce her inner being. The thin tendrils of his possession spread through her and blanked out her conscious thought and snuffed out her remaining willpower. The thin tendrils of his possession gripped her in their insistent rhythm, and she was dimly aware that she was moving with their demands, and she was dimly aware that she couldn't do anything else. She did not know that she cried out his name as, in this time of no-time, Patricia experienced a blinding flash, a warm liquid sensation, and a slow return to consciousness where she discovered that she was squeezing Hermann in a dying series of contractions. Hermann held her, as he should, while Patricia peacefully returned to the real world. Hermann led a dreamy-eyed Patricia back to his hotel room. They collapsed together on the bed and held each other.

Romance is the cruelest gift, raising hope out of the silent heart, mixing calm and lust, stirring cold feelings with warm thoughts. Her life had kept her safe, covering pain in a layer of forgetful routine, providing a little joy in measured amounts.

* * *

The rest of that week Patricia and I spent all the time we could together. That Saturday and Sunday, Patricia planned to visit her parents. Friday afternoon, Patricia and I were having tea and dutifully observing the latest British fashions.

Patricia, out of who-knows-what depths of insight and acceptance and jealousy, suddenly said, "Have you seduced Penelope yet?"

"What?"

"I said, 'Have you seduced Penny yet?'"

Tricky question. A simple 'no' would mean 'not yet.' Telling her that I had no such intentions might insult her daughter. I decided to go on the offensive.

"Are you tired of me?" I asked.

"No," said Patricia, "but you do know Penny's been looking at you."

"I hadn't noticed," I said truthfully.

"I think you're going to have trouble with girls," said Patricia.

She paused and said, "In a way it's good. You want your partner to be willing and aware of what she's doing." She looked at me sadly. "But you're going to have trouble with girls."

* * *

My mistakes with Patricia were the mistakes of a young, self-centered wizard. I told myself that Patricia deserved affection. My selfish reason was that I wanted Patricia to want me as much as I wanted her. I wanted Patricia to be thinking of me when I entered her. I wanted Patricia to moan my name in passion. My weakest excuse was that no one else was romancing her and making love to her. I did occasionally wonder what was wrong with British wizards, but then I recalled that I was the one doing wrong.

Confrontation

Chapter 9 of 19

His evil heart doth deserve to be extinguished

Chapter 9: 21 October 10:00 AM -- 30 October 4:00 PM Confrontation

"Have you seen the Hogwarts Greenhouse yet?" asked Shan.

It was after a morning kata practice. Luna wanted to hurry to join Barbara and Shelly for tea and study. Shan and I were putting the equipment away.

"No, I don't even know where it is," I said.

Shan gave me a disappointed look, as if I had confessed to never looking at the stars at night. Since I didn't have anything planned for the morning that I couldn't postpone, I agreed to meet her after I had showered and changed. I would have preferred coffee and Arithmancy, but Shan looked very earnest.

"I've always liked the greenhouse," said Shan.

We were walking through the flowering plants. I supposed Shan was giving me an easy introduction to the delights of botany. I recognized the poppy, a favorite for many potions masters.

"Even when the rest of my life was messed up," said Shan, "I liked the greenhouse and did well in Herbology."

If this was conversation time, I was willing to prompt her. I had assumed a Hufflepuff Prefect had led a nearly perfect life.

"It took me two years to adjust to Durmstrang," I said. "I did okay the first two years, but I didn't really study. For my third year, I decided to apply myself to see what I could do."

"My first year was terrible," said Shan. "I was a problem child. My second year I worked very hard, too hard I think. But by the third year I was more balanced."

We had entered the section of the greenhouse where the value of the plants was in their roots.

"From problem child to isolated swot," said Shan. "The other Hufflepuffs didn't know what to make of me."

Shan stood on a stool to reach a watering can. Why do girls always look attractive when they're standing on a stool reaching for something?

"My sister had fewer problems," said Shan.

"School is good for some people," I said, wondering what kind of family life the Li sisters had.

"That's true," said Shan, smiling. "I think the professors really care about us in their own stern way."

We joined Draco, Barbara, Shelly, and Luna in the Great Hall. Shan for tea and Magical Creatures; I for coffee and Arithmancy. I thought about Shan and Su having a better life at school than with their families.

* * *

Later that day, I turned a corner to discover a confrontation. Vincent, Gregory, Draco, Barbara, and Shelly were facing eight other students. All wands were out. My physical position was several meters behind Draco and company. I dropped my books on the floor, threw my arms into the air and said, "What is this? Why are you people blocking the hall?"

My billowing robe hid that I had drawn my wands. Keeping the several meters distance, I took a circular path around the two groups. In the other group were Luna, Shan, Ginny, Hermione, three Gryffindor boys, and a young Ravenclaw.

When I had flanked and was slightly behind Luna and company, I called out, "Hey you, the boy with the red hair and freckles, are you Ron Weasley?"

"What's it to you?" he replied, facing me.

"It's just amusing," I taunted him. "You're going to die the way you lived, with a stupid look on your face."

That did it. Now Ron and Ginny were facing me. Hermione must have some emotional connection with Ron because she was facing me too. Since I was the last one who spoke, the young Ravenclaw was facing me. Luna and Shan always had been facing me, no doubt wondering if I had a wand kata.

That left the other two Gryffindor boys facing five opponents, and those two Gryffindor boys were distracted because I was behind their backs.

"Where's the Gottverdammt professors! Where's the Gottverdammt professors!" I screamed silently.

Finally, one appeared. It had to be the Head of Gryffindor House. Gottverdammt, again!

"What's going on here! Explain yourselves! Put those wands away!"

"We're having a confrontation," I said.

"I can see that for myself," she snapped. "Ten points from your houses for each one of you."

"If I may," I said, "I think the young Ravenclaw was an innocent bystander caught between us."

"Ten points restored to Ravenclaw," agreed the professor.

"After all," I drawled, "he's not a combative Gryffindor."

The taut nerves of the professor snapped. She turned on me. "Detention, report to Flitwick."

Success, I thought, as I gathered up my books amidst the puzzled looks of the other combatants. Now all I need is a convenient place to lose my lunch.

* * *

The next day, one hour before tea time, Luna and Shan found me in the common room. They were definitely unhappy.

"Hermann," they said, "we've got to talk to you."

We walked down to the lake for privacy.

"Hermann, why did you do that yesterday? Why did you make everyone so mad at you?"

"It was to get the group's attention," I said. "After I insulted Ron, six of you were facing me, and only two of you were facing Draco and the other four."

Shan suddenly stopped and said, "Of course, we were stupid."

"It was 'divide and conquer,'" said Shan to Luna.

Luna said, "But you were facing six people."

Comprehension dawned and Luna said, "That's right. You would have used only defensive spells."

"I wouldn't have lasted very long."

"Long enough," said Shan.

"What would you have done if insulting Ron hadn't worked?" asked Luna.

"I would have done something that would have had all eight of you facing me in total outrage," I said. "My next step would have been to give the two of you a pimple."

"What!"

"Right on the end of your noses."

"Give us a pimple!" they both screamed as they pushed me into the lake.

I was thinking of taking them with me, but I tripped over a rock and splashed into the water.

"Heartless!" I shouted at them. "The squid and the current could take me anywhere. I might not be able to find my way back."

They glowered at me with folded arms.

Lines from an Appalachian folk song came to mind, 'Pretty girls have hearts made of stone; Dark Hollow will be my new home.'

The unfairness of it all hit me between the eyes. "I have drifted for days and days. The fish have eaten my clothes. I'm lost. At last, I spy land. For modesty, I cover myself with a leafy branch."

There wasn't much nearby. I picked up a twig.

"This twig represents a leafy branch," I told them.

"Okay," said Luna, bringing her imagination into play. "That twig represents a leafy branch, and you represent a pathetic wizard."

I stepped out of the water, held the twig in front of my groin, and addressed them:

Oh great Merlin above

Grant swift thoughts

And ready tongue

To this rude traveler

Cast upon these strange shores

The visions now before him

Confirm his long passage

Over the world's vast and briny deep

To a land of beauty and enchantment

Never would such sweet images appear

On the tawdry shores of mortal man

But only in the realms of the gods

Could such fit birds appear

May Merlin grant that their hearts

Are as kind as their faces are flawless

Let their souls melt in pity

As I desperately chat them up

"I vote we throw him back in," said Luna.

But Shan had other ideas:

Nay sister tis an occasion for a boon deed

As the twig cannot hide his shriveled member

His honeyed words cannot hide his base nature

His evil heart doth deserve to be extinguished

Cast back upon the vast and briny deep

He would but drift and prey upon the innocent

He clearly has no higher purpose

Than endless rounds of slap and tickle

Luna agreed with Shan's assessment. Luna suggested a plan:

Then let's away with him to our father's castle

We will feed him the treachery he deserves

When he is gorged with wine

And his member high in hope

We will have our sport at his dismemberment

I considered the options. "I think I'll stay right here in this sodding lake, if you don't mind."

Later, back in the Ravenclaw Tower, I had showered, changed, and was being plied with hot chocolate and biscuits.

"Do you think," said Luna to Shan, "that if we grabbed all the biscuits, he would lapse into free verse at his plight?"

"Creativity under stress," agreed Shan, grabbing the biscuit tin and looking at me. "I want a sonnet."

I could only lament:

Amidst our pleasure

They plot against me

Woebegone am I

To suffer such words

Shan took the biscuit tin, hid behind a chair, and announced, "Hermann will never find me here."

Backlash, I thought. Bunch of silly kids, I thought. Some younger Ravenclaws were pointing at another chair across the room and telling me Shan was behind it. I promised to do dire things to Luna if Shan didn't give up the biscuits. Luna cried out for mercy and swooned.

I looked at Luna sprawled across the couch. Boy, did I look. I decided I was on the wrong side.

"At a time like this," I pontificated to the younger Ravenclaws with my finger in the air, "a handsome hero arrives to save the princess."

I galloped around the room until I found the princess who had fainted away.

"The cure for this is a good snog," I declared. "It's recommended in all the best books."

"Ohhhh," said all the younger Ravenclaws as they crowded around for a good look. I was proud of them. Ravenclaws evince curiosity at an early age.

"Here're your bloody biscuits," said Shan grabbing my arm.

"Wait," I said. "The handsome hero hasn't saved the princess yet."

"Yeah," protested both young and old Ravenclaws. "He's got to save the princess."

"I'll save the princess," said Shan.

"Ohhhh," went all the Ravenclaws, as they jostled each other for a good view.

Shan sat beside Luna, patted her hand, and told her the bad man was gone.

"That was anticlimactic," complained some of the younger Ravenclaws

* * *

When I reported to Flitwick the next day two hours before tea, he wanted to know what I had done and why. After all, this was my first loss of house points and my first detention. I gave him my version.

"Interesting," he said.

He also had an interesting detention for me. He had been in contact with Durmstrang, and they had informed him of my slow initial learning problem. He wanted to see me do Charms now that I had internalized it. I had to start at the very first lesson of the year and perform every spell that had been presented for both classes. He wouldn't let me progress to the next one until I had done the previous one perfectly several times and given complete explanations. We did take a break for tea. I entered the Great Hall for dinner, wrung out and soaked with sweat. Draco, Barbara, and Shelly looked at me with alarm and motioned that I should join them. Barbara and Shelly sat on either side of me, ready to brace me if I fell. Draco sat opposite me, making sure I got everything I wanted to eat. I saw Flitwick at the professors' table assuring the Head of House Gryffindor that I had received a severe detention. Well yes, but also one that included expert tutoring and an excellent review of class material. I noticed, with some satisfaction, that Flitwick looked a little fatigued himself. The Head of House Gryffindor was frowning at me. She didn't entirely approve of a detention that could put a student at the head of the class. A petty, inner voice said that Padma's days of taunting me in Charms was over. Another inner voice reminded me that I was still thinking about Padma, and it was still painful.

John Shovick stood up, looked at me, and boomed out, "Well, Hermann, are you going to hide behind the Slytherins?"

"That's a good idea!" I shouted back. "It's very comfortable here!"

"Draco! No!" cried Barbara and Shelly, standing and putting themselves between John and a wild-eyed Draco.

My reactions were slightly slower. I stood, faced Draco, and said loudly enough for the entire hall to hear, "The prat's not worth it!"

I paused. Nothing happened. I sat down and said, "Has anyone seen the bloody cherry tarts?!"

Draco sat down. Barbara and Shelly returned to their seats. The cry went up from the four of us about getting some bloody cherry tarts. The Slytherins made sure we got them. Jessica Cummings delivered mine personally.

As dinner ended, Luna and Shan came over and sat with us, and then we walked to the Ravenclaw common room holding hands. I protested that I wasn't an invalid. My real protest was that I didn't get to hold hands with Luna and Shan all the time.

* * *

The next day in seventh year charms I got the first question, but Shan was stumped on the second. I jotted the answer on some parchment in front of us. Shan's hand shot into the air for some points.

"It's only a game," I whispered, appreciating Shan's winning smile and bright, predatory eyes.

* * *

There remained Mr. Weasley. Luckily, I saw him when he was with his two friends. He would feel secure enough not to kill me on sight. They could restrain him.

"Good morning, Mr. Weasley," I said.

He was speechless.

"I don't regret insulting you because that was necessary at the time, but I would like to say that I didn't mean what I said."

Mr. Weasley had recovered enough to glare at me.

"I have no reason to think anything bad about you, and I've only heard good things about you. I would be happy if you took that as an apology for what I said."

Mr. Weasley and his two friends looked perplexed. I left.

* * *

Draco and I had made enough progress to apply for several patents, but we had a disagreement. Draco kept telling me that I could have the patents. He was independently wealthy and didn't need the additional income. I kept telling Draco that bad times were coming and secure assets could be a lifesaver, but Draco wouldn't listen. Like all boys, I knew where to go for help. My mother. My mother, yes, would love to visit Mrs. Malfoy, and Mrs. Malfoy, yes, would love to hear about the potion patenting business. Invention was unpredictable. Our patent could be worth much more to a company that had products different from my father's company. Business was unpredictable. The simplest items could be worth the most money. Most important, to Mrs. Malfoy, were continental assets that could not be touched by any government, unless the governments broke the treaties.

Reich sein ist nicht genug, mann musst auch Geld in der Schweiz haben.

No one was interested in the chaos that would follow breaking the treaties, not with the purity and safety of potions at stake. The treaties involving potions, including payment for patents, had survived several global conflicts during the last century. Mrs. Malfoy, unlike her son, realized what catastrophes could occur during a civil war. Draco felt that we had all ganged up on him, and he was grumpy for a while. Mrs. Malfoy, however, wrote Draco a letter that described what had happened. Draco, on the basis of his own talent, without the backing of the wealth and influence of the Malfoy family, while still a student, had added to the wealth and security of the Malfoy family. Mrs. Malfoy was proud of her son.

* * *

The disagreement with Draco was getting out of control. We hadn't worked together or spoken for several days. We snarled as we passed each other in the corridor. It came to a climax one evening at dinner as we were sitting alone at our respective House tables and brooding. It began with a few snippy exchanges and ended with our standing and hurling deadly insults at each other.

"Common Tradesman!"

"Bloody Aristocrat!"

BANG!! BANG!!

BANG!! BANG!!

Draco and I sat down to observe our handiwork. The students were on the floor behind the benches. The faculty were on their feet with their wands out.

I had been showing Draco some of the more exciting parts of elementary mundane chemistry. Take different metals sandwiched between pads soaked with acid. Run wires from the two different metals into water, collect the gas in a sturdy bottle, and cap the bottle. When the bottle is uncapped in front of a flame, the gas in the bottle changes back into a few drops of water, and the air rushing in creates a very satisfactory noise.

The first to recover were Barbara and Shelly who rushed over to Draco to check that he was all right. The second to recover were the faculty who shouted "Detention!" in unison, a Hogwarts first. We might make the history book for that one. There was some disagreement about the nature of the offense. We weren't dueling, and we hadn't used spells or firecrackers. There was no magical or chemical evidence left at all. There were four empty bottles, but what did that prove?

The Potions professor and Flitwick conducted a joint detention where Draco and I demonstrated the chemistry. The other professors evinced a disappointing lack of intellectual curiosity and humor.

The day after the big bang and expansion of life at Hogwarts, Draco and I were mucking out a pen. The Creature professor complained that he couldn't get any of his regular classes to do it properly on account of their fear of being bitten and stung, but it shouldn't be a problem for two students brave enough to pull off the best joke ever right in front of the entire faculty. Draco and I initially suspected sarcasm, but concluded the Creature professor was sincere. He was impressed, and his allowing us into this pen was his way of paying us a genuine compliment. He insisted we have tea with him when we had finished. The Creature professor laughed till tears ran down his face whenever he thought of the mock duel.

We were carting away the last of the muck when we saw two girls approaching. We identified them as the fashion plate Gryffindors.

"Don't they attack you?" asked Lavender and Parvati.

"We stunned a couple of them when the professor wasn't looking," I said.

"You missed the best part," said Draco. "We levitated one of them into the middle of the herd, they had a tremendous row, and since then they've been quiet."

The girls' sympathies turned from us to the creatures. "Oh, the poor things."

Yeah, right. Draco and I offered to help the girls into the pen to comfort the poor things, but the girls didn't want to get their new shoes dirty. They had come to thank us. They had been worried there wouldn't be any excitement this year, and they wanted to know what we were going to do next. Would we tell them? They wouldn't tell anybody. Draco and I, thinking about the pen we had just cleaned, asked them if somebody else would be willing to provide some entertainment.

"But you do it so well," said the girls.

Lavender and Parvati did have one suggestion. They thought we should have provoked a shouting match with Harry Potter. Ginny, Ron, and Hermione would have flocked to Harry's side, and then the four shots would have been for the four Gryffindors. Draco and I admitted that Lavender and Parvati had given the scenario comprehensive and deep thought. By now the combination of animal aroma and perfume fragrance had us inclined to compliment the girls and to entice them into providing us some entertainment. The girls, however, kept to the topic at hand. The topic was that if Draco and I had a sinister plot, then Hermione would spend her time figuring it out instead of driving everybody crazy with study plans. Harry and Ron would scurry around getting into trouble instead of studying, which they hated, and they could stop moping about their romantic lives. Finally, the brave Gryffindors would triumph, gathering many House points and giving everyone immense satisfaction.

"Do you typically manage to do all that?" I asked Draco in genuine admiration.

Lavender and Parvati, in a fit of desperate honesty, admitted that a well-behaved Draco was making everyone confused and nervous. We told Lavender and Parvati that our plans were still at a sensitive stage, and we apologized for the slow fruition of this year's villainy. We didn't want to admit we had no plans because we wanted to see the girls again and perchance whiff their animal aroma with perfume. They were disappointed we didn't share our plans, but said they understood. Draco and I, still under the influence of animal aroma and perfume fragrance, watched the two attractive Gryffindors walk away. We had thoughts about expanding their universe by treating them

to a big bang, but had kept it under control.

"Do you ever think about being sorted into Gryffindor?" asked Draco.

"Interesting House," I said.

Draco and I trudged to the tea party sadly singing, "Im Hogwarts der ist kein Bier." The professor heard us, and we had to teach him a stanza in English.

In Heaven there is no beer

So drink it while you're here

When we're no longer here

Our friends will drink our beer

Herr Professor Creature ... thinking about the mock duel, his clean pen, and the drinking song ... told us that we were 'jolly good fellows ... for Slytherins.'

Appalacian Folk Song: 'Cora is Gone' by McLeod

Reich sein ist nicht genug, mann musst auch Geld in der Schweiz haben.

It's not enough to be rich, one must also have money in Switzerland

Clearwater 2

Chapter 10 of 19

"Girls tell their teddy bears everything."

Chapter 10: 3 August 9:00 AM -- 9 August 5:00 PM Clearwater 2

It was Saturday, and nine in the morning. This Saturday and Sunday Patricia was visiting her parents. I was just getting up when I got the message.

Dear Hermann,

Can I visit you today? I will knock on your door at half past nine.

Yours truly, Penelope Clearwater

She left me enough time to shave, shower, and dress. I greeted Miss Clearwater when she arrived and offered her a chair and a cup of tea.

"I shouldn't have bothered you on such short notice, but I thought you might like some company on a Saturday. It does look like a nice day today. Did you have something planned? I hope I'm not interfering with anything, but if you're going somewhere I could help you locate the place. Or if you'd rather be alone, I have things I can do. Have you had breakfast yet? I haven't. I was going to have breakfast with Percy, but that didn't work out. Does this hotel serve breakfast? I suppose it does. It looks like a hotel that would do everything for you. Or do you have some favorite place for breakfast? Maybe you like to eat alone, and I could return later. I don't want to be a bother, but mother said you were very understanding about everything. I was going to spend the day with Percy, but he decided he had to go to the office today. He has so much work to do. He has a really responsible job, and everyone's counting on him. That leaves me free for today. I was going to have breakfast with him, but I was put out when he announced he was going to the Ministry today. He would want to look at the Museums again because they're educational. I wouldn't mind doing something else. Is there anything you would like to see? I should be more understanding about Percy, but we haven't done anything together in a long time. I accused him once of seeing another girl. Have you seen much of London yet? There's an awful lot to see. I hope you don't mind my coming by to see you."

"It was kind of you to think of me, Miss Clearwater," I managed to squeak out.

The positive response stopped her monologue. She became the poised individual one would expect of a Hogwarts ex-prefect.

"Do you have a suggestion for breakfast?" I asked. "I would like to see some new places in London."

Yes, she had suggestions about where to go and what to see ... lots. I tagged along, amused at being a Percy substitute. I was amused enough that I complimented Miss Clearwater on her choices, amused enough that I wracked my brain for good questions that she could answer.

Perhaps I was too good a Percy substitute. By early afternoon, Miss Clearwater was saying, "Oh, Hermann, come look at this," and then taking my hand to pull me someplace. By late afternoon, Miss Clearwater was saying, "Come see this, Hermann," taking my hand, and then holding my hand as she showed me her latest find. By late afternoon, Miss Clearwater was saying I should call her 'Penelope.'

This could get frustrating, if I didn't keep my sense of humor. I was Penelope's teddy bear, something to hold until her Percy arrived. If I made the mistake of taking this seriously, it would be a painful experience.

"If I were with Percy, my family would be expecting me to be home soon," Penelope was saying. "I just sent them a message that Percy had to work, and I was spending the day by myself. I told them I would be home later."

Penelope must be thinking that the Percy substitute was more of a swinger than Percy.

"Do you like dining casually? I hope you're not bored," said Penelope.

"Do you know a spaghetti house?" I replied, thinking that Penelope must be desperately lonely to act in such a manner.

"Oh, that sounds great," said Penelope.

Penelope had spent the day being an excellent tour guide. Relaxing over dinner, she talked about herself. After Penelope left Hogwarts, she had initially worked in the Ministry with her father. She didn't say it explicitly, but I got the impression that Mr. Clearwater was a super file keeper with nearly perfect memory and no imagination, an indispensable cog. Penelope, after mastering the job, found it too boring to stay. Penelope was now keeping the books for several shops on Diagon Alley and in Hogsmeade.

"I suppose you think that's a boring life," she asked me.

"No," I replied. "You're an independent business person, responsible for the well-being of several shops."

"Are you doing anything tomorrow?" asked Penelope as the salads arrived.

"I hadn't thought about it," I replied.

Penelope looked disappointed. Did I just miss something?

She complained about the problem of gaining the trust of the shop owners. They were all afraid she would reveal their transactions and their secrets. I told her that there were professionals who did similar work. There were contracts and codes of conduct. It was a respected profession, and my family could provide her with some information. We could write them tomorrow. My mother was the one to ask.

"Your mother does this type of work?"

"Yes."

That made me a trusted person, too trusted for my comfort. I heard about her fights with Percy and her father over not working for the Ministry, over how she was wasting her talent and throwing away her life. Girls tell their teddy bears everything.

The spaghetti restaurant was in a trendy part of town. There was a cinema nearby that showed classic flicks. The feature was 'Dracula,' starring Bela Lugosi ... irresistible. Penelope insisted on sitting in the back row of the theatre, which surprised me since I thought she was nearsighted.

During the scene with the coach ride to the castle, Penelope grabbed my hand when the bats appeared. That was understandable. I didn't understand, though, why she kept a grip with one of her hands even after the scary scene. Or why she intertwined our fingers, especially when she did it in such a relaxed manner. Even so, I had to admit that she had nice, elegant fingers, and it gave the comfortable feeling of a couple sharing a night out. She crossed her legs and placed my hand in her lap where I could feel her softness and her warmth.

"That's unfair, girl!" silently screamed her teddy bear, as her teddy bear got an aching erection.

She clutched my arm and buried her face when Dracula's mistresses appeared. They don't have anything on you, Penelope, I grumbled to myself as she pressed my hand into the three way junction of lap and thighs. As an experiment, I leaned my head over, touched and caressed her head with mine, and then returned my head to its upright position. Retaliation was immediate. She shifted in her seat, laid her head on my shoulder, and managed to press her breast against me.

That was too much. Notify the Geneva Convention. Exchange students are not to be subjected to such agony. My erection was pressing against my trousers hard enough that I would never get the zipper marks out.

She hid her face and pressed against me as the world's horniest bat arrived to sink its fangs into a fair damsel. That scene has to be symbolic. I'm not projecting anything onto the screen, am I? That's only a prelude to the torments Miss Clearwater deserves, my frustration said, as I fought down the impulse to sink a few fangs into Penelope Van Helsing. My frustration went out of control. I hope you're damp. I hope you're soaking wet, you witch. I hope you run home and jump under the covers to find release. No, worse than that. I hope you run home, jump under the covers, but the bat doesn't come for you. You spend your life among staid men afraid of what you'll become if you taste the delights of fangs and surrender, among staid men who cannot distinguish between becoming a complete person and becoming a creature of the night. To prevent that, they will wave the cross of rules and propriety at you. To prevent that, they will drive a stake through your heart, killing the love and affection that makes it all enjoyable.

So there, Penelope Clearwater.

My more reasonable voice was telling me that my predicament was my fault. I had agreed to be a Percy substitute rather than spend the day alone. I had spent the day stroking Penelope's psyche. It was easier than I thought it would be, and it was more fun than I thought it would be. I had suggested the horror flick with its sexual themes. My real problem was Percy envy.

There was one more plaintive wail. She was twenty ... only four years older than me. What was I going to do? Rob the cradle?

I moved my hand from the hothouse of Penelope's lap to around her shoulders, which didn't help. It was more chaste, but more possessive. I liked her shoulders and the feel of her hair. The end result was my admiring more of Penelope. In some ways, I was a really good Percy substitute.

We parted for the evening with Penelope saying she would appear at ten the next morning. That would give us all day to write the letter to my mother.

* * *

It was Sunday morning and nearly noon. I had expected Penelope at ten and was beginning to worry. I had mentally gone through several versions of the letter to my family. I hoped they would want to help. I thought they would be eager to help. I wondered if they minded helping. Perhaps with Penelope, I would find the right way to write the letter.

There was a knocking on the door, and I looked out to see Harold Clearwater and some other bloke. I guessed the other bloke to be Percy Weasley, and I was not wrong. What were they doing here? Was it about Patricia or Penelope or both? It didn't look good. I opened the door, and they burst in.

"What time did you meet Penelope yesterday?" asked Harold Clearwater.

"I didn't look at my watch," I said. "Why are you asking?"

"First she said she was going to be alone," said Harold Clearwater, "and then she said she met you."

I waited. I wasn't going to volunteer any information.

"What did you do with Penny?" said Percy Weasley.

"I'm a visitor," I said, still determined not to say much. "We talked about London and what to see."

"She said she was alone," said Harold Clearwater. "I want to know when you met her and what you did."

"I'm not on a tight timetable right now," I said. "What did Miss Clearwater say?"

"She says she met you, you talked a while, and then you wanted to take her to a restaurant and a cinema," said Percy Weasley.

That's not the way I remembered it, but now I had some idea what Penelope had told her father and boyfriend.

"Okay," I said. "Is there something wrong? Has something happened?"

"Now she wants to be an independent bookkeeper and leave her job at the Ministry," said Harold Clearwater.

"She had a promising career at the Ministry," complained Percy Weasley.

I now realized that I was being blamed for Penelope's career decisions. Penelope had already left the Ministry, but they were blaming me for that, too. I was dealing with reasonable people. That was nice. At least I knew what was bothering them. If I were Mr. Weasley, I would have other worries.

"We talked about a number of things," I said, "but not much about the job at the Ministry. Tell me about the job at the Ministry."

To my relief, that worked. Mr. Clearwater and Mr. Weasley were willing to believe that I had talked Penelope out of her job at the Ministry because of my ignorance about the Ministry. They set about convincing me that the English Ministry of Magic was the best place to work, especially for a talented and hardworking girl like Miss Clearwater. I listened patiently. At least I pretended to listen patiently. Mr. Clearwater and Mr. Weasley finally left, convinced that I now realized that my talking Miss Clearwater out of her job at the Ministry was done out of ignorance.

I would have to write the letter to my mother alone, but first I would have to recover from listening to Mr. Clearwater and Mr. Weasley. Mein Gott, no wonder Penelope had left the Ministry.

* * *

Everything was quiet for a few days as Mr. Clearwater and Mr. Weasley stormed around. Tuesday, Patricia Clearwater came to see me. Trust the older ladies for superior maneuvering. The last few days, however, had taken their toll on Patricia.

Patricia was complaining that I hadn't been taking her anywhere, that I was ashamed of her. Did I think she was an old hag, that she was ugly? Didn't I want to be seen with her?

A rational part of my mind wanted to remind her that she was a married woman, and we had to be careful. An even more rational part of my mind told me that this was not the time for rationality.

Patricia had flung herself across the bed in her despair at being unwanted. I approached cautiously.

"I'm sorry I haven't been taking you places," I said, starting to massage her shoulders.

"You do know that wherever we go, everyone is jealous of me," I told her. I said that in all sincerity.

She moaned contentedly as I worked my hands down her back.

"Let me think of something," I said, continuing the massage. By now, she was stretched out on her stomach on the bed. She was wearing only her knickers, and I was between her legs rubbing her back.

I waited until she was relaxed, forgiving, and looking sensuous before saying, "I know. I know what to do. I'll treat you like a little wifey."

That sounds dull, thought Patricia, making the softest of moans when Hermann placed his hands above her knees with his thumbs on her inner thighs and lightly moved his hands up her legs.

"Everyone will know that you're with me, that we're a couple. A husband isn't going to walk around frustrated. He knows enough to seduce his beautiful wife and have her before going anywhere."

That's smug, thought Patricia, spreading her legs wider as Hermann ran his hands up her thighs again.

"You're so sweet," I said, kissing her and moving her knickers aside.

That's forward, she thought, arching her back to permit easier entry.

"You're such a darling," I said, entering her.

What makes him think I'm ready? she thought, gasping as he entered her slick wetness and mounted her round softness with one effortless push.

"Oh, Patricia, you're wonderful, honey, " I said.

This is too routine, thought Patricia, moaning as he made the routine and rhythmic moves of a hubby having his wife.

You can't just calmly take a woman, thought Patricia, rotating her hips in rhythm with his wonderful, insistent demands.

What makes him think this is going to affect me? thought Patricia, filling the room with the wet sounds of a mounted wifey.

No one's going to respond to restrained sex, thought Patricia, writhing as the restrained strokes teased her.

There nothing exciting about domestic stuff, thought Patricia, giving hubby the pleasures of the uncontrolled thrashing of a devoted wifey.

No one's going to go wild over this, thought Patricia, clutching the bed covers and sobbing with the intensity of her mating with her adoring hubby.

Whatever happened to passion? thought Patricia, feeling wonderful as the last waves crashed through her and she lay on the quilt, breathing hard and enjoying her peace and stillness.

That arrogant bastard, thought Patricia, hoping hubby would treat her to another round of smugly possessive sex.

I held and kissed my flushed and sweaty wifey as she enjoyed the afterglow of mating. I held her and told her that she was sexy, that she was a darling, and that there was no one else like her.

When I pulled out of her, she was disappointed. "Aren't you coming? Don't you want me?" she asked.

I told her that mature women were much sexier than men, and I had to save something for after I had taken her out.

"After you've taken me out?" she queried.

"Yes, that's the plan. You're glowing now because you've just had sex with your loving partner, and when we're out you're going to glow and act like a woman who knows she's going to be seduced when we get back. Everyone will know you're with me, and everyone can see I'm very happy you're with me."

Patricia looked interested.

"You were worried that I didn't want to be seen with you," I said. "Let's cure your worries."

I made a production out of it. I took Patricia into the shower with me, and I covered her with soap. Of course, I had a reaction to that, and Patricia kidded me about virility.

I dug out the black silk lingerie for Patricia that I had bought and then hidden in a paper sack under a pile of shirts. I had checked the size of the clothes she wore last week while she wasn't in them. I told her that I hadn't found time yet to gift wrap her new lingerie.

"That's exactly like a husband," she informed me.

Glad that I was playing the role so well, I choose a standard uniform of my blue blazer, light blue shirt, grey trousers, and tie. We took the mundane route of the lift and then walked through the hotel lobby. Once we were outside I informed Patricia that every eye had followed her through the lobby and had identified her as my mistress. I assured her that I was not kidding.

First, some tea. I suggested that she help me buy a tie, and then I would buy her some lingerie. I told Patricia that I had memorized the brand and size of the black silk lingerie she was now wearing. Would she like white or Ravenclaw blue or bronze? I also suggested that when we returned to my rooms we have sex like an old couple, lying side by side facing each other.

"You mean ho-hum sex?" she asked.

"Yes," I whispered in her ear. "Like I've already fucked you thousands of times, like I'm going to fuck you thousands of more times, and this is one more time I'm having you."

The vision of all that routine passion had its effect on Patricia. The rest of the day she crossed her legs, held my hand, rested her hand on me, and pointed her knees at me like a devoted wifey.

As I was selecting a tie, the clerk approached, looked at Patricia, said, "Are you helping your s...?" looked at Patricia and me again, gave me a solemn nod, and returned to the counter.

I choose a dark blue, rough-textured tie with a pattern of repeated small, bronze thistles. It was severe, but classic. The clerk looked at Patricia and commented on my good taste.

In the lingerie shop, I explained to the sales girl what I wanted while Patricia stood regally by my side.

"Could we see them in white, off-white, blue, and bronze?" I asked.

Patricia held the individual garments to her face to check compatibility with skin color.

"This one?" asked the sales girl.

"Yes," I said placing my hand on Patricia and giving her a small squeeze. "This is what I want."

Patricia radiated mature sexuality.

By the time I paid for the selection, the sales girl was entranced. Obviously I was buying lingerie for my lady. Obviously my lovely lady had a lovely time while I was getting every lovely thing in her lovely lingerie.

Time, once again, for tea and biscuits. Patricia wanted the private table in the corner where we could hold hands. Later, I was the model of propriety as we walked through the hotel lobby and entered the lift. Patricia snogged me all the way to our floor. By the time I had the door locked, Patricia was down to black silk and was hauling me into the bedroom. This was almost too successful. I hadn't yet removed my blazer, and Patricia was guiding me to her silk covered breasts.

Wait. This isn't too successful. Nothing bad can happen. I'll get everything I want, the way I want it. Do it like a hubby, I reminded myself. Calmly take her.

I forgot about my blazer as I made contact with the silk. Yes, there are lovely things in Patricia's lingerie. I was a grateful cat licking a shapely bowl of cream. I licked her neck while I gently pawed both breasts and felt her respond as the silk moved across her nipples.

Every part of Patricia was lovely and alive. I casually kissed and caressed whatever was handy as Patricia frantically worked at getting my blazer, tie, and shirt off. Before Patricia got to my trousers she was on her back and incoherent as I fondled and licked her breasts.

I remembered the shopkeepers, the people in the tea shop, and the guests in the hotel lobby. They had seen Patricia and me together, and they had expectations. They could tell by the way she walked and acted that she would soon be moaning and writhing. I had promises to keep.

With no hurry, I removed her knickers, spread her legs, parted her folds, and scouted the promised land with my tongue. The shopkeepers nodded approval as Patricia moaned and gripped my head as my tongue touched the promised land. The people in the tea shop smiled knowingly as Patricia writhed, arched her back, and groaned as my tongue entered the promised land. The guests in the lobby sighed with relief as Patricia cried out my name and squeezed me with her thighs as my tongue took the promised land. I had delivered the promised Patricia smiling, flushed, and breathing hard.

I removed the rest of my clothes, and we were lying side by side.

I whispered in her ear, "Having sex with me is part of your life. I've had you a thousand times, and I want to have you again. It's soul-satisfying to have you."

I continued, "I'm going to have sex with you a thousand more times, just with you. You're special to me."

What happened next is merely a routine, domestic scene. He ran his fingers through her hair ... the hair he knew so well ... the hair that let him identify her across a crowd of people. She held him and let him calm her and soothe her. She let him slowly began their intimacy. When she felt comfortable enough to want more, she sighed with contentment, pressed against him, and gave him small, welcoming kisses. He welcomed her in kind, and then nibbled his way down her neck to one of her breasts ... the breast of his athletically built lady ... a breast he constantly claimed was the right size and shape for him. After all, he had chosen to romance her with full knowledge of her figure ... a figure he liked. He had chosen to romance her because she was an intelligent, classy lady ... a lady he wanted for a companion ... a lady to whom he wanted to give pleasure.

His companion held him and moaned as he kissed and caressed her breasts. Exciting sex is supposed to be unrestrained, thought his companion, as she responded to his restrained attention. Wanton desire grew in his lady until she could no longer resist. She took his cock in her loving, gentle fingers and then slid down to take his cock between her warm, moist lips. She liked kissing her lover's beautiful cock, and the feel of it in her hands and mouth inflamed her. She wanted his cock inside her. When he spread her legs and entered her, it was the best thing in the world. His wanting to have her was better than an orgasm. The thought that his cock was only for her and they would do this over and over again made it twice as sweet. He was inside her making the insistent moves that had his companion making her distinctive sounds of coupling. It really isn't that exciting to be taken in a calm, unhurried, self-assured manner, she told herself, as his calm, self-assured moves stripped away her rationality. She could only feel her need to have more of him.

The thought that he was her loving hubby bored into her mind. He knows what I'm like, and he accepts me, she thought. I can't do anything wrong for him. I can have him any way I want to, and he'll like it.

She rolled on top of him, straddled him, and moved for him the way she had always wanted to move. Her hair hung down over a face shaped by her passion. Her body twisted with the urgent demands of her unbearable need. Her hair tossed and her face glowed with desire as she performed her wild romp on her sweetheart. She let herself grunt and moan with lust as she thrust herself on her darling's cock. Her moves became wild enough that he had to hold her to keep inside her. She pummeled him

with the uncontrollable demands of her coupling. She cried out his name as he gave her the sex she wanted. Her vagina fired the signal to her brain, and she cried out incoherently as the mind-blinding message erased her thoughts. She collapsed on her lover. Her thankful spasms of gratitude milked him dry as he gushed inside her.

Ah, yes, at home with Patricia.

I held Patricia as she gradually recovered. I had expected no less from my intelligent and classy lady ... my lovely and worthwhile companion.

It was a soul-satisfying experience. Patricia was special.

Potion Accident

Chapter 11 of 19

"Intelligent women are the bane of my existence, although I would not have it any other way."

Chapter 11: 31 October 9:00 AM -- 1 December 5:00 PM Potion Accident

Several days after the demonstration of elementary chemistry in the Great Hall, I was taking notes from a book in the library. The book couldn't be checked out, and I was stuck in the library, which I hated. One feature of the library was Miss Granger, who was now bearing down on me. She wanted to know if we could talk. We moved to a remote table. I was thinking that I should let her talk, let her get it all out. Perhaps it would reduce the hostility. Of course, it also made me vulnerable. Since I wasn't angry at anyone, except possibly myself, I wouldn't be a match for a lioness who was angry.

I took a chance. "Did you come to ask why I insulted Mr. Weasley?"

She nodded yes.

I had already told Flitwick, Shan, and Luna. It wasn't a secret anymore. I would give up the advantage to help prevent more confrontations.

"It was to get your group's attention," I said. "After I insulted Mr. Weasley, six of you were facing me and only two of you were facing Draco and the other four. I was hoping I could defend myself against the first round of curses. I expected to go down against the second round."

She was listening intently.

"During the first round, I expected Vincent and Gregory to charge like bull elephants. The two Gryffindor boys facing them would have to take them out. Draco, Barbara, and Shelly would take out the two Gryffindor boys."

She was nodding agreement.

"During the second round, I would fall, but three of the six facing me would be taken out by Draco, Barbara, and Shelly. That would leave Draco and the two girls facing three opponents. Most likely those three opponents would include the young Ravenclaw. Victory to Draco."

"But you would have fallen," said Miss Granger.

"Yes, but I didn't expect to be killed, except maybe by Mr. Weasley," I said. "And during the entire confrontation, I would have used only defensive spells."

"Only defensive spells?" she asked. Then the answer hit her. "Of course, the best thing you could do would be to simply survive."

I may as well spill everything. "Besides, I didn't want to cast a spell against anyone. Who would be my target? Luna? Shan? You?"

"What would you have done if insulting Ron hadn't worked?"

"I would have done something that would have had all eight of you facing me in total outrage," I said. "My next step would have been to give Hermione Granger a pimple."

"What!"

"Right on the end of your nose."

Something about Miss Granger was inspiring. I continued, "An evil, Durmstrang pimple, a landmark pimple. A picture of it, along with your face, would be in the next edition of Hogwarts, A History."

"I'm going to sit here and study so that I can warn other people about you," she told me, pulling out her books.

"It's my duty as a Prefect," she added, looking up from her parchment.

A thought flickered through my mind.

Terrible my plight:

Mistrusted by all,

Chained by a book witch,

Bound to a table.

Miss Granger was looking at me. Should I share my thoughts? I wondered. No, I decided. I had seen her with her friends. Miss Granger was for the likes of Weasley, the Lion-Hearted ... not for sensitive souls like me.

"Silently lamenting," I told her.

She rolled her eyes and went back to her parchment.

I had finished taking notes from the library book and was getting up to leave.

"Have you done your Transfiguration homework yet?" asked Miss Granger.

"No."

"I thought not," she said. "You don't have a partner. Well, it's no wonder."

Miss Granger continued to describe my fine qualities. "You were slow at the beginning. You're catching up, but you still need help. I have my books with me, and we can find an empty classroom. I'm sure you'll do okay with a little prompting."

"Your kindness touches the hearts of wizards everywhere," I informed her.

The Ravenclaw couple at the next table could stop their snickering, I thought.

Miss Granger continued to gather her books. I became impatient with my charitable help-mate.

"Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table."

"What?" said Miss Granger.

The two Ravenclaws lost it.

Hi ho, hi ho, to transfigure we will go, I thought.

"I have measured out my life in Transfiguration spells."

That, Miss Granger could relate to. At last, I had made a connection. Thank you, Tough Shit Eliot.

"Would you like some help carrying all those books?" I asked.

As we searched for an empty classroom, Miss Granger's face was furrowed with thought. Finally, she spoke:

"In the quiet classrooms of my mind,

Through the silent corridors of my soul,

I have measured out my life in empty spells."

"Not bad," I told her.

Wow, I thought. I didn't realize Miss Granger had such a warm, radiant smile.

Of course, I had to keep all this in perspective. Her brow had furrowed for quite some time before coming up with the free verse. I could not imagine Miss Granger doing the revisionist analysis of Hogwarts that Padma had done.

* * *

I was taking a different route to class along almost abandoned corridors when I heard a moan. Thinking it might be someone in trouble I peered into a room. I recognized Mr. Shovick. He had his back to me, and he was embracing Miss Cummings, running his hands over her clothes. She didn't see me because her eyes were closed. I watched as Mr. Shovick unbuttoned Miss Cummings' blouse. He reached in. I saw her breast fall out. She moaned again as he placed his mouth on it. His hand was under her skirt. I stood beside the doorway, out of sight, unable to move in shock and pain. I heard what sounded like scuffling and then Miss Cummings' soft, but sharp, grunts as Mr. Shovick penetrated her body. I was finally able to move away, nauseous and dizzy.

The next day in the Great Hall I saw Miss Cummings look expectantly at John Shovick as he entered. I saw her pain as he ignored her. I wanted to smash John Shovick's face in. Miss Cummings noticed me, came over, and sat down.

"So," Miss Cummings said, "you just watched John snub me."

I was still too shocked and angry to answer.

"I bet you can guess what happened, can't you," she said.

"Can I get you anything, Miss Cummings?"

"What?" she asked. "A brain? Another life?"

She turned angry toward me. "You can figure everything out, can't you. You always know what's going on, don't you. You know everything and can figure out everything. Except Hermann. You don't know Hermann, do you. You can't figure out Hermann, can you."

I waited. Had I done something to hurt this woman? She hadn't been with that scumbag John Shovick because of me, had she? That was too painful to contemplate. Besides, it couldn't be true. Girls don't like me. I couldn't have anything to do with this.

Miss Cummings gave me a contemptuous look, got up, and left.

Just to explore a train of thought, I wondered what would happen if girls did like me. Did Miss Cummings get involved with John Shovick because I had ignored her? A much more painful idea hit me. What about Padma? Had she flirted with other boys because she liked me? Padma's beauty would make her very successful. I felt sick. I resolved to go down no more abandoned corridors and to look into no more rooms. I didn't want to know what was happening.

It took a while for emotions to subside and reason to return. Miss Cummings hadn't intended to make any sense. She just wanted to lash out after Mr. Shovick had snubbed her, and I had made the mistake of being polite to her because I liked her. Because I liked Miss Cummings, I had put myself in the position of being the 'nice little boy.' Well, it was a mistake anyone could make. I now knew not to make the mistake again with Miss Cummings ... and to be more careful with other women in the future.

The day after lashing out at me, Miss Cummings came over and sat at the table where Draco, Barbara, Shelly, and I were studying. She kept glancing at me, but I knew she

was just looking for a 'nice little boy' to belittle. Although it was extremely hard to be impolite, I ignored her. She finally left.

There were an odd number of students in sixth-year Potions, and Miss Cummings was paired with Mr. Shovick and Mr. Broderick. The next Potions class, Miss Cummings was working with the two of them as before. I figured Miss Cummings was accepting her relationship with Mr. Shovick. Before the week was over, Mr. Shovick would have her legs spread again.

* * *

The next day I was headed toward the front gate when Miss Granger left her friends and asked, "Are you going for one of your walks?"

"Yes."

She was standing there looking at me.

"Would you like to come?" I finally said.

I had to wait while she got her coat. I stood by the front castle gate where I had once waited for Miss Weasley. I tried not to think that I wished then, and wished now, that I was waiting for Padma. I was in a somber mood by the time Miss Granger arrived.

"I'm surprised you waited for me," said Miss Granger.

We walked towards the forest.

"I wanted to talk to you," said Miss Granger, "if you can stop carrying on about giving me a pimple."

"Are you still obsessing about the confrontation?" I asked.

"You outmaneuvered us," she replied. "You turned an even match into a one-way match."

"It wasn't an even match," I said. "Draco had Vincent and Gregory and two scared girls. If your group had backed up, out of physical reach of Vincent and Gregory, the other side wouldn't have had a chance."

"It started with Grabbe and Goyle bullying a second year," Miss Granger protested.

"I guessed that. That's what I told the professor," I said.

"If you're romantic," I said, "think about Barbara and Shelly. They stood with Draco against the most formidable fighting force Hogwarts has ever seen."

Draco had shrugged off the confrontation, but Barbara and Shelly were angry and had told Vincent and Gregory to stop getting everyone into trouble. Life was getting interesting for Draco. After the mock duel, Barbara and Shelly had been glaring at me until other students started telling them how 'cool' their boyfriend was.

"Why did you provoke the professor? There was no reason for it," said Hermione.

"I may have misjudged that," I admitted. "As the confrontation ended I was thinking that it might not be clear on whose side I was. Fence straddlers are hated by everyone. Besides, instead of Mr. Weasley killing me immediately, he would gloat while I was on detention and kill me later. That would give me a chance to apologize to him and escape death. But it's possible the situation was not that serious, and I caused myself unnecessary pain."

* * *

Brown smoke billowed out of the cauldron. Draco and I were backing up fast. Barbara and Shelly, screaming and waving their wands for containment spells, had us by our collars and were pulling us back even faster. We cleared the room. Barbara and Shelly sealed the lab, neutralized the brew, and took Draco and me to the infirmary. We were examined and pronounced okay, more or less. When she learned what we had been doing and the ingredients involved, the nurse took Draco and me into a private room.

"You're going to find this hard to believe," she informed us. "Quite frankly, I find it hard to believe, too, but for the next week the two of you are going to be twice as randy as usual."

She was right. Draco and I did not believe it possible. She was right. We were. Ah yes, the exciting field of psycho-active potions.

I remember when I was six years old my father spent a week in bed crying. My mother told us that his eyes were irritated. It was a good story for a six-year-old boy and his two-year-old sister. After witnessing several Potions accidents at Durmstrang, I realized it was probably more serious than irritated eyes. My mother convinced my father to change from psycho-active to a less risky field of Potions about the time I entered Durmstrang. "It's a young man's game. You've already made lots of contributions. You should save what remains of your health."

I was away from home most of the time after that, but my sister said that he had stopped having his bouts of bizarre behavior. My sister said our mother was more relaxed and much happier. My sister also told me they were more passionate these days. I replied that she was a little young to be thinking those things, but she just stuck out her tongue at me. The family was glad my sister's talent was in Charms instead of Potions.

* * *

True to her word, Miss Granger plunked herself beside me the next Transfiguration class.

"You look like you need some help," she said loudly enough for the entire class to hear.

She inspired me. Besides a squawk, I managed to emit, "What's this, the 'Sisterhood for the Protection of Evil Wizards?'"

"We're very active these days," she announced to the entire class.

She eventually asked me to call her 'Hermione' like everyone else.

During one class, we were turning innocent pebbles, which had never done anyone any harm, into beetles. I told Hermione about the mundane biologist who, at the end of a long career, was being interviewed. The newspaperman wanted to know what a lifelong study of biology had taught the old professor about the mind of the Almighty. I imitated the professor's creaky old voice, "Well ... Ee seems to be ... inordinately fond of beetles."

It was a case of bad timing. Hermione couldn't stop laughing.

"Fond of beetles!" she yelped in glee, zapping an innocent rock into a ferocious specimen.

"Beetle!" I yelped, along with a curse that splattered its constituent goop over the nearby students.

"Ewww! You mucky beast!" yelped Hermione at me.

"Detention!" yelled the professor at me.

"Are you Gryffindors always such bad luck?" I hissed at Hermione.

"You hiss like a Slytherin," hissed Hermione.

"That's the first nice thing you've said to me," I hissed back.

Working with Hermione in Transfiguration wasn't all bad. By that time I had internalized the Hogwarts approach to Transfiguration, and I was keeping up with a smart partner. Besides, I could play an aggressive point-gathering game in Transfiguration. The Professor and the other students misinterpreted it as personal rivalry. "I'm only doing this for House Ravenclaw," I reminded myself, smirking back at Hermione's glare as I scooped her for the third time in a row.

Draco and Hermione were a problem. Room temperature dropped when those two got close. I did have to use a different study place when I worked with Hermione, which made me feel like a traitor. I patched up everything with Draco by constantly offering to introduce him to more girls. Quite a number were jealous of Barbara and Shelly. Draco, however, was very happy with Barbara and Shelly: he really wasn't interested in any others, and he certainly didn't want to upset Barbara and Shelly. I found his faithfulness endearing. Draco, bless his heart, was a two-woman man.

Hermione discovered that she did not have to prompt me to do the work in Transfiguration. I, after all, was here partly to take advantage of one of the best schools for the subject. After a number of discreet inquiries and leading questions, Hermione decided I had nothing against mundanes ('Muggles' she called them). She relaxed. She talked about her first eleven years and about her summers. Like Shan, she talked about the sacrifices for high performance: the anxiety, the cost in terms of relationships and friends, and the cost in terms of school-age activities.

As for her two best friends, I think Hermione decided to be selfish in Transfiguration. She really liked the subject and reveled in not being held back by her study partner.

Something had to go wrong amidst all this cozy fluff.

It was time for nature to balance the benefits of working with Hermione. It did so with a vengeance. I was starting to like Hermione Granger. I was starting to find Hermione Granger attractive. Here comes more pain, I realized, as I fought to keep my feelings hidden and under control. I'm not a lion tamer, I thought. I'm not good with animals. Hermione Granger already has a boyfriend. To top everything off, this attraction was occurring while I was still suffering from the aftermath of the Potions accident. I wish I could say that I howled at the moon, but it was scarier than that. I kept dreaming about Hermione showing me her secret tunnel, being able to get past her whomping defenses and enter it if I touched her right spots, and ending my journey with Hermione shrieking. I had no idea what that dream meant. I howled at the moon, too.

Nature added one more cruel twist. With genuine admiration came genuine concern. Hermione did not seem to have any periods of childish behavior or any form of release from tension. I was certain she was going to crack or explode. I wished that I was her friend and that I could provide some relaxation for her. But I wasn't and I couldn't. I could only watch in frustration and hope her two friends were doing something.

* * *

Draco and I had a busy and productive week in Potions. Later, we were back studying in the Great Hall, catching up in the other subjects. It was halfway between tea and dinner when I closed my books and stood up.

"Are you taking a walk?" asked Shan.

I nodded yes.

"It's cold out," said Shan. "I'll go with you if you walk through the greenhouse."

I agreed even though I preferred the cold air to wake me up. Shan wanted to show me her favorites, the medicinal plants.

"I'm surprised you're not taking Herbology," said Shan. "Don't you like plants?"

"I'm indifferent to plants," I said. "But you're right. A lot of people in Potions take Herbology and Magical Creatures."

"I thought they would," said Shan.

"It helps to know about them," I said, "but I'm not interested in taking care of them."

"But taking care of them is the fun part," said Shan.

"It's the brave part, too," I said in sudden inspiration. I was afraid Shan was thinking of me as a cold-blooded, uncaring twit.

"You should see the animals that the professor brings to class," replied Shan with awe.

Shan showed me some medicinal plants. I let her handle them since she knew how. I knew there was a fine line between most medicines and poison. Shan put the plants back, and then looked as if she was thinking something serious.

"When school started, you were good friends with Draco Malfoy," she said. "You still are."

"Yes," I said.

"Now you're studying with Hermione Granger in Transfiguration. You and Hermione squabble, but that's superficial," said Shan.

It didn't feel superficial to me. Shan wasn't on the receiving end of Hermione's jibes.

"They have different backgrounds," I said, "but they're both intelligent, determined people."

"Of course she's just a study partner. That doesn't mean Hermione could be a ... a friend ... or anything else," said Shan.

I felt thick. I thought Shan was curious about working with both Draco and Hermione.

"If you're curious about working with both Draco and Hermione," I said, taking an oblique approach, "the answer is that I work with them separately."

"If you're wondering about the pure wizard thing," I said, "my background is mixed."

I told her about the Potions wizard and the mundane business lady working together and then getting married.

"That's just like my parents," said Shan. "My Muggle father ran a nursery, and my mother was good in Herbology."

"Are your parents still alive?" said Shan. That was almost immediately followed by, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that."

"They're both alive," I said, "but I think I'm going to hear some sad news about yours."

"They're both dead," said Shan.

I said that I was sorry to hear that. We walked back to the Great Hall. Now I was wondering more than before about school being better than family for Shan and Su.

* * *

The effects of the Potions accident were wearing off in a series of excruciating nightmares. Late one night, I was sitting on a couch in the Ravenclaw common room. I was afraid to go to bed.

I awoke, observed the starry sky, and wondered why I was not freezing on a winter's night in Ravenclaw Tower. I noticed that someone had covered me with a blanket, but I was warmer than being covered by a blanket. There were two people under the blanket with me. Luna and Shan were sleeping with their heads on my shoulders.

Luna rested her head in Shan's lap and spread her legs so I could enter her.

"We will scale the heights and plumb the depths that only your crazy brain can follow," Luna told me. "Fly with me, prey of hungry thought, bird of wild patterns, storm of strangeness. You know the missing parts of my life. If we are torn apart, I will be gone."

Shan rested her head in Luna's lap and spread her legs so I could enter her.

"Come with me, and we will ride across the desolate plains of my soul," Shan told me. "We will weep the deepest tears and know joy unknown to those who only smile and laugh. If we are torn apart, I will be dust in a grave. Our souls will be gone."

I awoke, observed the starry sky, and wondered why I was not freezing on a winter's night in Ravenclaw Tower. I noticed that someone had covered me with a blanket, but I was warmer than being covered by a blanket. There were two people under the blanket with me. Luna and Shan were sleeping with their heads on my shoulders.

* * *

"This seat looks empty," said Su Li, dropping her books beside mine in sixth-year Charms. "The Hufflepuffs say you're absolutely horrid, so just watch yourself."

"It was a misunderstanding," I said.

The incident with the Hufflepuffs had occurred while Draco and I were recovering from the Potions accident and were randy instead of our normally calm and composed adolescent selves. I had been in the Great Hall studying ... not gawking at the girls as it looked ... studying. I was listening to and then participating in the conversation of two Hufflepuff girls who were talking about the next Hogsmeade weekend. I was trying to invite myself to go with them when they told me they would like my company, but they were meeting their mums. I said that was even better. Were their mums as cute as they were? True to their House, the girls left in a huff and a puff. Later after a Charms class, Mr. Finch-Fletchley, who usually sat with me in sixth-year Charms, asked me if I really tried to go out with the two girls' mums. He gave me the startling news that their mums were mature women.

"Don't you know?" I said. "Mature women are the best."

Mr. Finch-Fletchley looked skeptical.

"They're friendly and kind hearted," I continued, "and if they like you, they'll lavish affection on you. First you get their big sloppy wet kisses, and then you get their big sloppy wet ..."

"Argh," went Mr. Finch-Fletchley, hiding his head and covering his ears.

When the shock wore off and he was able to look at me again, I winked at him.

"Oh!" he said. "It was a joke. You were kidding. I'll go tell everyone."

Yes, I thought, tell everyone. Especially tell all the attractive mature women that I'm not interested.

Since then the Hufflepuffs, including Mr. Finch-Fletchley but not including Shan Li, had been avoiding me. Shan Li knew that I was joking. At any rate, there was an empty seat waiting for Shan's sister.

Su Li as a partner in sixth-year Charms worked out well. Su was competent, and we could play the point-gathering game since Flitwick assumed the fencing competition was spreading to the entire Li family. Su Li got into the spirit of the game. She went as far as pulling my hand down, jumping up and down in her seat, and waving frantically. Then she smirked at me when Flitwick called on her. I supposed the old goat thought she was cute.

"It seems Mr. Busch has the answer," slowly drawled Flitwick one day in sixth-year Charms.

The class turned to look at me. I had one hand in the air and the other hand holding a book in front of Su's face. She was waving frantically.

"I would call on Mr. Busch's partner," said Flitwick, "but I can't see who's there."

"I'm not speaking to you," growled Su, looking straight ahead.

* * *

"You're very lucky to have Barbara and Shelly to watch over you," said Shan.

I nodded. Draco and I had spent the entire Saturday in the lab doing variations on a procedure to test its robustness. Shan had wanted to see the lab and had spent the day reading and gossiping with Barbara and Shelly.

"They told me about the serious accident you had," she said. "That was the same time you offended some Hufflepuffs and started studying with Hermione Granger."

"Yes, weird behavior," I admitted. "But you said plants and animals are dangerous, too."

Shan cocked her head to give that some thought. She finally said, "There's something refined and concentrated about Potions. You take all the deadly stuff from plants and animals and mix it together. Besides, Barbara and Shelly told me that you and Draco were working in a dangerous field psycho-something."

"Psycho-active," I said.

After finishing in the lab, the five of us had collapsed in the Slytherin common room, which was close. Draco showered and changed, he and the two girls cuddled for a while, and then they left for some place private. Not that I was jealous or anything.

I was alone with Shan. I sensed an Asian dragon coiling around me. The young, innocent, Hufflepuff Prefect breathed fire. "Did your father work in psycho-active potions? Did he have periods of strange behavior?"

Intelligent women are the bane of my existence, although I would not have it any other way.

"That was one reason it took me two years to settle down at Durmstrang," I replied. "I grew up thinking that men should occasionally act crazy for no reason."

"And now you're going to do the same thing," she said.

"Barbara and Shelly think that Draco's really brave," sneered Shan.

This was a side of Shan I hadn't seen. I wondered what was going on. I said, "Draco and I decided what we were going to do in Potions before Draco met Barbara and Shelly. We thought about it last summer. The Headmaster and Potions master approved it at the beginning of the term."

"You decided to be brave last summer," accused Shan, "even though it made your father a poor father."

"I didn't say he was a poor father, just occasionally strange. He gave it up."

Shan was glaring at me. All right, having an occasionally crazy father was stressful. I was wondering if Shan's disapproval was related to her parents' deaths. I decided not to ask. Perhaps she wanted me to ask. I didn't know.

"Draco and I are careful. We're not playing with the really dangerous potions. The Headmaster, the Potion master, Draco, and I exchanged letters about it last summer. We picked the safest potions where we thought some progress could be made."

"Oh, that makes it all right then," said Shan mockingly.

I was still hoping that Shan would tell me what was bothering her.

I said, "I'm sorry you're distressed about what I'm doing. Right now, I want to rinse off and change before dinner. I smell like a lab. Do you want to come with me, or would you rather do something else?"

"You want me to come with you while you take a shower?" she said with a smile.

"I didn't mean that," I stumbled out.

"You don't know what you're missing," she said.

I hadn't seen this side of Shan either.

In the shower I wondered which side of Shan I had seen. I wanted to believe she was flirting with me even though we were fighting. The gloomy side of me said she was teasing me because she was angry with me.

* * *

From the Gryffindor tower window, Hermione and Harry watched as Draco, Shan, Luna, Barbara, Shelly, and Hermann practiced defensive magic. The six were in a desolate, flat field near the castle.

"What are they doing?" asked Ron as he joined them.

"I think it's dueling and self-defense," said Hermione.

Draco and the girls were charming rocks and sending them on an L-shaped course towards Hermann. They were sending them at high speed with evasive maneuvers. Hermann wore a helmet. He took out a round of five with his right hand, and then he took out the next round of five with his left hand. After each round, he stepped closer giving himself less time to react. The L-shape kept Draco and the girls out of the line of spell fire.

Ron and Harry left, but Hermione kept watching. It was Luna's turn. Luna put on the helmet. Shan, Barbara, and Shelly waved their wands to dig up three clods of dirt, and then sent them towards Luna in a slow graceful arc. Luna's first two tries took out two clods, her third one missed, but her fourth try took out the third clod of dirt before it reached her. The four girls danced with glee. It must be some kind of general-purpose Blasting Curse, thought Hermione.

Draco joined Barbara, Shelly, and Shan. Four clumps of dirt arched towards Luna. She took them out, onetwothreefour, just like that. And how do you like your bright-eyed girl, Mr. Hogwarts?

Hermione watched Luna tuck her wand behind her ear, adjust a stick on her back, and assume a relaxed position. Hermann joined the exercise, and five clumps of dirt arched towards Luna. She whipped out her wand, onetwothreefour, just like that. Whack! She had twirled and taken out the fifth with her bokken. The crowd went wild.

At the periphery of Hermione's intelligence, a thought kept dancing. It was about the hallway confrontation with Hermann and the coming confrontation with Voldemort. It was about something that should be learned. If Hermione had been friends with Hermann or if she had been more like Padma, then Hermione would have talked about it with Hermann and possibly have come to some conclusion.

It's strange we're not friends, she thought, going off on a tangent. He listens to me, and I tell him more than I tell Ron and Harry. But he's an intellectual snob, he's a friend of the Malfoys, he's probably a Death Eater, and he gave Ron an unforgivable insult. Ron was cut to the quick, and Ron hates him. I'm a traitor for studying with him, but Transfiguration's great. We're pushing our own boundaries; I didn't know I could do those things; and I never felt this powerful before. I'll have to live with being a traitor.

The thought about confrontations, whatever it was, danced at the edge of her brilliant mind, and then it danced away. If she had been his friend or more like Padma, Hermione and Hermann would have wrangled with her idea and possibly have reached an insight about confrontations: the Brits thought in terms of duels, heroes and their friends, and powerful wizards; the Middle Europeans thought in terms of combat, teams, and tactics.

Their study-partner truce was too fragile to handle the topic, but if she had been able to talk to him about it, Hermione would have discovered that Hermann bitterly regretted his actions. He had treated a school kid confrontation like a combat scenario. He wished that he had stood with Draco and company like an honorable duelist. He wished he had not insulted Ron Weasley, whom he admired. He realized he could now never be friends with Hermione and her friends, and that was a great loss, even though they were Gryffindors.

Out on the field, Shan took her turn.

"Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to Charms we go," sang Hermione Granger to herself.

* * *

I was reading one morning in the Great Hall when a Hufflepuff girl sat down across the table from me.

"Good morning," I said, nodding at her.

She said her name was Terry Horton, and she knew I was Hermann Busch. For one wild moment I thought she was going to tell me that she had a lonely mum. I trotted out my social skills for some needed practice. We agreed it was a cold morning. She was fourth year, and her favorite subjects were Magical Creatures and Muggle Studies. I thought I was doing well with Terry Horton. We were trading information; she was smiling at me; the conversation was becoming more personal. My days as a lonely wizard were over.

She said, "Do you know Theo Nott?"

I admitted I knew him, although we were not close friends. We soon established that Terry knew who Theo was, Terry had not met Theo, but Terry would like to meet him. I said I would be glad to mention her name to Theo. At lunch I pointed out Terry to Theo. He looked interested. A few days later I saw them walking down the hall together.

Nott 1

Chapter 12 of 19

"Potions with Mrs. Nott did not go as expected."

Chapter 12: 10 August 10:00 AM -- 26 August 10:00 AM Nott 1

"Do you sail?" asked Theo.

"Some," I said. "I like boats."

Theodore Nott, Mrs. Nott, and I were having tea. I had recently arrived, and it was a little after ten on 10 August, a Saturday. Theo was eager to go sailing immediately while there was still a nice breeze. His mother nodded encouragingly at both of us.

"Lunch at one," Mrs. Nott called to us, as we carried the sails from the house to the dock.

"We probably won't make it," Theo called back.

We rigged the boat and were soon leaving the shore behind. Theo had decided to tack into the wind on the way out, which would let us run before the wind on the way back. I told him I would take the jib.

"I hear you're in Potions," said Theo, relaxing with a fellow sailor. "Mum does potions for a living."

"Yes, that's what I was told."

"Mum makes specialty potions ... hard to make. She says you offered to help."

"I'll prepare the ingredients ... the time-consuming, drudgery part. I'll let your mum prepare her brews."

"How's Draco doing?" asked Theo.

"Good. Very good. Draco, Vincent, Gregory, and I spent a lot of time riding around and practicing Quidditch."

"I hear you knocked them off their brooms," said Theo. "I wish I had seen that. Mrs. Malfoy told Mum about it."

We tacked.

"I'm going to visit Draco the last two weeks of this summer," said Theo.

"He'll be glad to see you," I said.

"I feel like I'm abandoning you. I'm leaving a guest alone."

"That's okay. I'm going to spend almost all my time preparing for Hogwarts," I said.

We tacked again.

"The travel arrangements are messed up," I said. "I should have visited you after the Malfoys and then visited the Clearwaters."

"If you don't go, you'll be leaving Draco alone," I told Theo.

"I'm going to spend one more week at my job in the Ministry," said Theo, "and then I'll be happy never to see them again."

"Maybe if you help Mum with her potions," continued Theo, "she'll have some free time. She should relax and have some fun."

"That would be good," I said.

"The family estate provides us enough for a modest lifestyle, but she wants the added income, and she wants to keep busy. I think she's overdoing it. I can't get her to relax."

We returned to the dock in time for afternoon tea. Mrs. Nott, familiar with sailors, was not surprised that we were late and provided some cheese and kippers with the biscuits.

The Nott estate had three buildings. An animal shed had been converted into a potions lab and a small living space for Mrs. Nott. A small guest house was usually used by Theo, but would now be shared by Theo and me when Theo was home. Theo had spent most of the summer in a rented room near the Ministry, but he was home Friday and Saturday nights. A large house was unused except for storage. Neither Mrs. Nott nor Theo said anything, but I could tell the house had been used for Death Eater meetings and rituals. It reeked of evil and felt nasty.

I moved into the guest house.

Sunday, during morning tea, we asked if Mrs. Nott wanted to go sailing with us. She wasn't sure

"We need your help on the water," I told Mrs. Nott.

She looked dubious.

"I wrap the sheet around the winch the wrong way," I said.

Theo, getting into the spirit of things, retorted, "He told me our boat was built wrong."

"I sit on the lee side of the boat on a reach."

"He said he was more comfortable there," complained Theo.

"I wanted to sail on the lee."

"He kept telling me I was doing everything backwards," whined Theo.

Who could resist sailing with such a nautical marvel? Theo and his mum told me, gleefully, that I must be the helmsman because of my competence. "That's the way of the world," they assured me. They made a big production out of putting on their life jackets. They said they were preparing for the sail of a lifetime. I had been warned about British humor.

We made a short trip and were back in time for lunch. I asked about the croquet set I had discovered in the guest house. Theo and his mum said they had no idea why it was there or what it was for. I hadn't played since I was a little kid, but I tried explaining what I recalled of the rules. Theo thought I had the rule about hitting your opponent's ball wrong.

"The one whose ball is hit is the offended party," said Theo. "He should be the one to knock the other's ball out of play."

Theo's mum thought the same thing. I had to agree, but asserted the rules were otherwise.

"Aggressive game," said Theo.

Once playing, however, Theo and his mum concentrated on knocking the other balls out of play. Especially mine, I thought.

After afternoon tea, Theo left for London in a jubilant mood. He thought I would be good for his mum. After Theo left, I returned to the guest house to study and listen to music. Mrs. Nott asked if she could join me since she liked to listen to music while she read. She asked me if I could dance, and I told her that I couldn't dance very well. She told me we could work on that. After all, I had made her go sailing and play croquet.

"Is this some kind of revenge?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

* * *

Potions with Mrs. Nott did not go as expected.

Monday morning Mrs. Nott gave me a tour of her lab. "Excellent," I said as I examined the equipment. The lab was set up to produce high-quality potions, the kind that could not be mass-produced. Mrs. Nott said she made twenty-three brews. She had been getting requests for some newer potions, but she hadn't the time to learn their preparation. We searched my references. None were in the textbooks since they were too recent, but three of them were in the latest edition of a potion encyclopedia. We wrote my family, asking for more information.

After morning tea, Mrs. Nott began preparing potions while I practiced brewing one of the newer ones. When I had it perfected, I showed the procedure to Mrs. Nott. I thought she stood very close to me during the demonstration. She was almost in the way, but some people are like that, and I shrugged it off.

During lunch, I asked about the house. Mrs. Nott said that it probably wasn't too hard to cleanse, but she and Theo had bad memories about it and had left it alone. I said I would like the practice since I was taking a Defense against the Dark Arts test next week at the British Ministry.

The house faced north and sat on a small hill. It had a ground floor, an upper floor, an attic, and a deep cellar. The ground floor had a parlor and a guest room with a bath between them on the East side, and a large dining room adjoining a kitchen on the West side. On the South side, as a one-story extension to the parlor, was a study with extensive windows and a fireplace. A hall separated the kitchen and dining room from the other rooms. Stairs were in the hall. The upper story had four bedrooms, a reading room, and two baths.

Between lunch and tea, I did an initial cleansing of the first two stories and sealed the cellar and attic. After scouring the house, I washed and changed for tea. After tea, Mrs. Nott gave me a dance lesson on the lawn.

Tuesday morning I worked on the other two potions that were new, and then I demonstrated their preparation to Mrs. Nott.

"That's wonderful," she said, giving me a hug.

Tuesday afternoon I did a thorough cleansing of the first two stories of the house. Since Mrs. Nott said she did not want to move into the house, I let her have the guest house and moved into the ground floor of the house. We had tea in the parlor, danced in the dining room, and fixed dinner in the kitchen. Mrs. Nott was glad to get her kitchen back since she had been living on tinned food. She was also glad to move out of the lab into the guest house. She had let Theo have the guest house even though he was home only two nights a week. What mothers do for their sons.

Tuesday afternoon we also got the return message from my family. In addition to the three we already had, there were five other potions that were becoming very popular. Mrs. Nott and I decided that I would spend the mornings getting their preparation perfected, and that I would relax and study the rest of the day. I protested that I wasn't helping her with her work, but she insisted my studies came first.

Mrs. Nott was an early riser. Perhaps that was good since she liked to use the bath on the ground floor of the house after getting up. When she finished, which was still early in the morning to me, Mrs. Nott would bang on the sleepy head's door and then fix breakfast while I used the bath. She liked having most of the house back even though she didn't want to sleep in it.

I planned to tackle the cellar and attic after taking the exam. I slept with the lights on and the protective spells up. I wished I had the family hound with me since he was a better guard than most spells. I was having strange dreams, which is probably one reason Mrs. Nott preferred to live in the guest house.

During lunch on Wednesday, Mrs. Nott said, "You can study in the lab in the afternoon while I make potions if you like. It won't bother me."

When I looked up from the books every once in a while, I noticed her glancing at me. Having help with the potions and getting the guest house and most of the house back was doing Mrs. Nott good. She was looking better every day. Definitely, I thought, as she smiled at me and brushed her hair back. Energetic lady, I thought, as she led me through another dance session.

Wednesday night the spell alarms went off. I grabbed my wands and tracked the source to the kitchen. A slimy critter was opening the bread box and wrapping itself around a loaf. Our good French bread! I waited until it had covered the loaf, extended its tendrils, and became comfortable. Then I fried its ass, as the Americans say. There was a new sheriff in town.

Thursday morning Mrs. Nott was amused by the scorch mark, but it meant porridge for breakfast.

That morning, Mrs. Nott wanted to work with me as I figured out the preparation for two of the new potions. She said since I was a fellow Potions master, I may as well use

her first name. She kept touching me, which I found friendly and reassuring. Janice was a warm person.

"I appreciate your keeping me company," she told me after lunch, as I sat reading in the lab.

"It's very comfortable around you," I replied.

We took a break for afternoon tea even though Janice wanted to brew more potions before she quit for the day. Our doing the new products had lengthened her working days, but Janice still seemed to be improving and becoming less tired. After tea, she wanted to dance, and she wanted the slow, close dancing numbers. We returned to the lab where I read a textbook while Janice made a large batch of skin ointment. It had been a long day for Janice, and I gave her a massage before she filled the tub to take a relaxing soak. I told her to not worry about dinner since even I could fix a salad, bake a potato, and fry a medium rare steak. Not to mention open a bottle of wine, one of my specialties.

Friday morning we worked out the preparation for the last of the new potions.

"I'm almost sorry we're finished," said Janice.

"I know," I said. "New stuff is fun."

"Of course," I told her, "you have to be good with potions to brew new ones."

She blushed a little.

"Really," I told her. "I've seen a lot of people in potions, and you're very talented."

"I wish I had met someone like you when I was at Hogwarts," said Janice, "when I was young."

"Well, thanks," I said, "but there were probably lots of students good in Potions at Hogwarts."

We only worked through the morning since it was Theo's last day at work and he could arrive anytime. After lunch, Janice wondered if I could give her another massage. "Of course," I said.

"Let's use the study," Janice said. "We can open the windows. I'll build a fire. I know it's August, but it'll be fun."

I returned with a quilt and arranged it in front of the fireplace.

"It's nice and warm in here," said Janice, unbuttoning her blouse.

"My, aren't you the gentleman," Janice said, as I turned my back to her.

When I turned back, she had her blouse and bra off and was lying face down on the quilt. Just what I need, I thought, Theo to come home to my giving a massage to his topless mum. Despite this apprehension, I gave Janice a long, sensuous massage. Janice was right. This was fun. Near the end, Janice was softly moaning as I ran my hands the length of her back. She looked flushed. I said it must be warm in the room and went to get her glass of cold water. When I returned, she was asleep. Good, I thought. I covered Janice with her blouse and sat in a nearby chair to read. I awoke about tea time to her stirring. "Thank you," said Janice, hugging me and giving me a kiss on the cheek. We decided we would go to Theo's apartment to check on his progress.

The apartment manager recognized Theo's mum and let us into his rooms. An exchange of messages established that Theo was completing the paperwork for his summer employment. He had worked with a family friend in the Control of Magical Beasts Department. Theo would meet us at his apartment. The unspoken thoughts were that it would do no good for the wife of a Death Eater and a Durmstrang Death Eater Wannabe to meet Theo in the English Ministry. Janice packed her son's belongings with a mother's efficiency since Theo had said he wanted to get out of London and go home. Tomorrow morning he would leave for the Malfoys.

* * *

"I hardly got to see him all summer," said Janice after Theo had left. I was awkwardly holding her.

"I'm sorry," Janice said as she cried on my shoulder.

Theo had celebrated the end of a tense summer. He regaled us with stories about lost and trapped magical beasts, as the bad memories faded and he recalled the exciting ones. Janice showed him her new potions and the first two floors of the house.

"So it is true what they say about Durmstrang and the Dark Arts," said Theo, after touring the house and eyeing the scorch mark.

"Partly," I replied.

Theo and I went sailing since there was a stiff breeze that evening. Out on the water, he kept thanking me for taking care of his mum. I told him his mother was a kind lady and a brilliant Potions mistress. Theo had to agree.

Now, holding a sobbing Janice, I tried to think of some diversion. I finally remembered she was English and offered her a cuppa. Then I remembered she was female and, among other diversions, mentioned clothes shopping.

"You're trying to make me feel better," she sniffed.

"Of course. Why not?"

"I haven't shopped in a long time, almost a year. There didn't seem to be any point in it. Who cared?"

"Well, if you don't need anything, we won't bother," I said, "but if you do, we can go shopping."

She looked at me. "You do care, don't you?"

"Yes," I said.

Janice spent the afternoon acquiring a new outfit. Remembering my manners, I told her that I absolutely had to show her off by taking her dancing. Much later, we were back in the study, and I was lying on the rug watching the logs burn in the fireplace. Janice lay down beside me, curled around me, and then went to sleep. When I awoke the next morning she was already up and fixing breakfast.

Janice was remote and quiet during breakfast. She told me she was going to spend the morning checking her potion supplies and that an old friend would come over that afternoon. Mr. Thurman, a bachelor twenty plus years older than Janice, arrived for lunch and began flirting with Janice, who didn't mind at all. Out of the blue, for no reason that I could fathom, I felt like someone was running a piece of cold steel through me. He admired her new potions and what she had done with the house.

"Janice told me you helped," said Mr. Thurman full of jovial companionship. "You must be a talented young man."

I fought down an inexplicable urge to fry his ass and said, "Thank you."

Mr. Thurman appeared again Monday morning to begin flirting to a receptive Janice. I kept telling myself I should be happy for Janice. Why was I in such misery? Was I allergic to Mr. Thurman? I originally planned to travel to London on Tuesday to take the two-day exam on Wednesday and Thursday, but I decided to leave this afternoon. The pain was too great to stay.

* * *

By Thursday evening, the exam ordeal was over. Wednesday morning was a written, and Wednesday afternoon was an oral. Thursday morning was a practical exam against elementary threats where I had to remember the elementary defenses. Thursday afternoon was a practical against directed threats. That was easy except the examiners were telling me to calm down a little. I kept thinking of Mr. Thurman and shredding the Brit duelers. What did I have against that man anyway?

Mrs. Nott must have friends in the English Ministry because Friday morning I received a congratulatory letter from her. She appeared ecstatic about my Outstanding NEWT in Defense against the Dark Arts, and she had arranged a party for me that evening. My emotional immaturity overwhelmed me. I thought about watching Mrs. Nott cuddle Mr. Thurman and pleaded exhaustion. The image of Mrs. Nott and Mr. Thurman was pain incarnate, but it told me what my problem was. I was jealous. I had become fond of Mrs. Nott. Well, who wouldn't? There was no cure, but diversions would reduce the pain, and London was full of diversions.

I kept thinking I had paved the way for Mr. Thurman by providing Mrs. Nott with a new, profitable line of potions and a livable house. I was constantly telling myself that I was exaggerating, but it was constantly eating at me.

I was officially carefree until school started. The German Ministry was pleased with my examination and with the letter of appreciation that Mrs. Nott had sent them. My family was even happier. During the day, I sat at sidewalk restaurants drinking cafe au lait and watching the shopping birds, and during the night I roamed the dance halls trying out my rudimentary skills on the night birds.

* * *

Sunday morning there was knocking on my hotel door. I peered out to see Mrs. Nott. Hell had arrived. I didn't see Mr. Thurman. Where was the other half of hell? I invited Mrs. Nott in.

"Hermann, where have you been? Are you ill?"

"Just tired," I said, remembering my cover story.

"You could rest at my place. Or maybe you don't want to. Is that it? I thought you liked it there. Did you get tired of me? I can understand your wanting to be around younger girls."

Mrs. Nott sounded sad enough that I wanted to put her mind at ease. I was also too hurt to hide the way I felt. I might as well be honest and end it. I said, "I like your company, really I do, but I thought I should leave you and Mr. Thurman alone. You two are happy together. I don't want to bother you."

Mrs. Nott sat quietly for a while.

"We're not together," she said. "After you left Monday, I told him that I had to spend some time alone."

I should have been sad for Mrs. Nott and Mr. Thurman, but selfish Hermann was rejoicing.

I was temporarily at a loss. It was nine in the morning. I said, "I know it's late for you, but I just got up. I'm ready for breakfast."

"I haven't been eating all week," said Janice. "I could have some breakfast, though."

I shaved, showered, dressed, and took Janice to a sidewalk cafe in a village outside London. This cafe was by a water fountain, and a fountain's white noise is supposed to induce a sense of privacy. I wanted Janice to talk to me.

"How's the house?" I asked.

"It's getting worse since you left," she said. "Stuff is coming out of the cellar and attic ... You were going to clean them after your exam ... but I chased you away."

I found it hard to be dishonest with Janice. "I was insanely jealous. I didn't even know it for a while."

What was there about Janice Nott? I had watched prettier women shop, and I had danced with prettier girls, but I was attracted to Janice.

"I was scared," said Janice. "Do you know I slept with you last Saturday? It was innocent, but I did. I woke up Sunday morning thinking I had to stop."

I ordered more tea for Janice and more cafe au lait for me.

"There are some obnoxious potions that break down after a few hours," I said. "We can use them to clear the cellar and attic of anything living. Then we can empty them and do cleansing spells."

"I moved out of the house about five years ago," said Janice.

About when Theo started school, I thought. I nodded and let Janice continue talking.

"I've been pretty much living alone since then, except when Theo visited during the summer. I had been pretty much living alone even before I moved out."

"I was surprised how quickly you cleared the first two floors," said Janice. "So was Theo. Do you think Theo will be okay at the Malfoys? He's known Draco for a long time."

"He's with an old friend his own age," I said, stating the obvious. "He's probably telling Draco about his summer at the Ministry, all his complaints and problems."

Janice agreed. "All the stuff he wouldn't tell me. Now he can talk about it."

"Theo said all the Slytherin boys are going to be there this week," said Janice. "You're missing out."

"You're stuck here with me," she said taking my hand. "Or you could go there if you wanted to. I could ask."

"Here is fine," I said, letting Janice wrap her fingers around mine.

Janice talked about her years at Hogwarts, her discovering her gift for Potions, and her top marks in her NEWT exams. She had chosen Potions, Herbology, and Transfiguration. It had been a difficult choice between Transfiguration and Magical Creatures, but she had wanted to excel in at least one "wand waving and incantation" subject. I told Janice that if she excelled at Transfiguration, she could excel at anything.

"Were you nearly a Ravenclaw?" I asked.

"Yes," she said sadly.

I had stepped on a sore spot, but Janice, already holding my hand, now held my hand with both of hers. Janice caressed the back of my hand as if that gave her comfort.

"My parents, most of my family, had been Slytherins," Janice said. "I was proud to join the Slytherins and stand against the rest of the world."

Janice paused. "I didn't do much standing. I was a year behind Narcissa Black and Severus Snape, and they took the brunt of the abuse from the rest of the school. They were strong and brave."

She thought awhile. "I saw Narcissa marry into a rich, pureblood family, and it looked like an escape to me. I did the same thing, even quicker than Narcissa had done it."

I thought about the effects of constant animosity directed towards a sensitive personality.

Janice stared into space for a minute. "Narcissa and I remained friends. And we both have a son the same age. Draco and Theo were together a lot. When they got older, they preferred staying at my house instead of at the Malfoys. I think they had more freedom. Lucius was always a taskmaster."

Janice was smiling. She was remembering her son's boyhood.

"Theo was never very friendly with Vincent or Gregory. He thought they were slow and brutal. Draco used to cultivate them as part of a gang. He was always a little ringleader. Theo was more of a loner."

"I liked Theo," I said, "although I hardly spent any time with him. He's worried that you're working too hard."

"I probably shouldn't say this, but Theo is worried about you, too," said Janice. "He thinks you're formidable against the dark forces, and he's worried that there's an underlying violent streak."

"I hope he's wrong," I said, but I knew that Theo was at least partially correct.

"It's not a bad thing," said Janice, seeing through me. "Sometimes it's necessary. Narcissa and Severus have it, and it helped them survive and protect the other Slytherins ... I'm glad they have it."

"I think it's going to rain soon," said Janice. "Do you mind my changing the topic? Let's go someplace where it's not raining."

We didn't find anyplace with sunshine, but we found private places where it wasn't raining and I could hold Janice. We finally returned to my hotel room.

"I'm not ... I'm not ready to sleep with you," said Janice.

"Okay, whatever you like."

"But I don't want to be alone," said Janice. "I want to stay here."

"That's easy. You take the bed. I'll take the couch. Are you sleepy now or do you want a hot chocolate or a brandy?"

"A hot chocolate," she said. "It's funny how Potions makes a person lead a careful, modest life."

"I think it's the temptations," I said. "All those really potent things we could brew for ourselves if we felt like it. We could whip up some stuff that would make us one with the universe ... no longer functional, but one with the universe."

"Yes," said Janice. "The fear of what could happen if we slip from the straight and narrow."

Janice had stretched out on the couch. "I want to take the couch, Hermann. I insist. I know you want to be chivalrous, but I insist on the couch."

I brought Janice her chocolate, sheets, pillow, and blanket. I kissed her goodnight and tucked her in. I went to bed.

* * *

I awoke as Janice climbed into bed. She lay on top of my sheet with a blanket covering her. I fought down the urge to toss the blankets aside and ravish her. "Go easy," I told myself. "She's been, she still is, the wife of a man who found fulfillment participating in the tortures of the Death Eaters." I fought down my anger at the frustration Janice was causing me. I ached to have her. "Be understanding," I told myself. If what she told me was true, Janice hadn't let anyone touch her in more than five years.

I lay on my back and waited. I was determined to capture her spirit.

Janice moved closer. I just waited. Janice tentatively placed a hand on the sheet covering my chest. I waited. Janice edged closer. Her arm was now across my chest. "Whatever she wants; whenever she wants," I told myself. Janice nestled against me with the sheet between us. I gently stroked her hair. By a series of small moves, I coaxed her head onto my shoulder. The sheet was still between us, but her head was on my shoulder, her arm was across my chest, and her leg was draped over mine.

I was overheated where Janice lay on top of me, cramped where her weight pressed against me, and irritated where her hair tickled my nose and eyes ... lovely ... marvelous ... all the domestic comforts. It was what I wanted.

Janice was impatient with Hermann. Yes, you're a gentleman, you would never force yourself on me, but I would like some passion, some sign that you find me irresistible, some indication that you're not completely in control of yourself around me. Ah, yes, he's kissing me. It's about time. I can kiss him back. Do you like my tongue, Hermann? Do you mind if I crawl on top of you and devour you? Oh, my, what an erection you have, Hermann. Is that for me? Can I touch it? He's slowly kissing me down my neck. Bloody hell, I'm wearing a bra. Let me take it off, honey. Hermann's watching as I sit up and undo the straps. Here, darling, let me take your hands and put them on my breasts. Do you like them? Do you want to kiss them? Yes, like that. Oh, that's better than I thought it would be. Never from the chaste nunnery of my breasts should you fly, Hermann. Yes, Hermann, run your hand down my side, over my silk-covered hips, and down my leg. Yes, Hermann, run your hand back up my thigh, across my silky knickers, and up to my shoulders where you can hold me as I press myself against you, as I wiggle like a woman who wants sex. Let me open my legs for you and put your hand between them. Run your hand up the inside of my thighs like that, darling, and, yes, across all my soft curves. Keep doing it, darling. Do you mind that I'm getting squishy? Oh, God, I'm moaning, and I can't help it. Oh, yes, honey, I like your hand in my knickers. You part my folds so gently. You're stroking me so nicely with your slickly wet finger. I can't think anymore. It feels too good. Don't stop, Hermann. Don't stop, darling. Oh ... yes ... God ... yes ... God ... yes ... oh.

Janice cried out as Hermann kissed her breasts and the first wave of ecstasy blanked her mind.

What am I doing? thought Janice. I pulled my knickers off, sucked and licked Hermann's dick until it was hard and wet, and now I'm on my back with my legs spread asking Hermann to come into me. I'm a married woman and I want another man between my legs, putting his dick in me, all the way in me. I'm letting someone my son's age mount me and take me. Oh, God, I'm moaning it feels so good. Yes, Hermann, take me, possess me, fuck me, have me. Oh, God, it's too nice. It's too nice. All I can feel is his sex. Oh, God. Oh, God. I'm coming. Oh, God.

Janice had always thought her sex was ugly, but she liked it when Hermann looked at all of her. She had never cared for it, but she liked it when Hermann mounted her. She had wondered about passion, but this time she had moaned and thrashed. She had always thought it messy, but she was glad she was slick for him and came for him. And she was happy when he came inside her. 'Making love' did describe it.

They lay tangled ... at peace after sex ... content with each other.

I had to persuade Janice to cuddle me while we were sleeping. She liked it. She admitted it made her feel more comfortable, but she wasn't used to it. She had never done it before. I told Janice that I had to get used to it, too, but I wanted to hold her.

* * *

"Good morning," said Janice as my eyes opened.

It slowly registered that she was fully dressed and sitting in a chair beside the bed.

"How are you feeling this morning?" asked Janice as she ran her fingers through my hair.

"Fine," I said. Actually, I wasn't fine, and I wasn't acting very polite. What was Janice doing out of bed? I knew she was a morning person, but why couldn't she have fetched a tea and newspaper and come back to bed to cuddle her wizard? And she was treating me as if I were her son. I made a tremendous effort to conceal my annoyance. Would I have to spend all day seducing her again? Perhaps she didn't want to be seduced again. Oh, great.

My spirit split. It was an ethereal experience. The part that contained the real me, the part that cared about Janice, the part that could be hurt, floated above the mundane part of me that Janice and the rest of the world could see. The mundane part of me could make the polite inquiries and responses about breakfast, Janice's state of health, and travel. It would lose contact with Janice and ultimately lose Janice because it didn't care about Janice or anything else. But this was the preferable state and preferable outcome. The alternative was the agony of longing for a cold and unresponsive Janice who showed no sign of caring for me. I realized I was a person who would show her new potions, cleanse her house, and be a temporary plaything in bed. I realized I meant nothing else to her, but Janice was not to blame since I had brought this upon myself. I would complete my self-assigned tasks.

"Do you want some tea?" asked Janice cheerfully.

"I suppose the next order of business is finishing your house," I said coolly as I accepted the tea.

"What?" said Janice, dropping the cup and saucer.

"I'm sorry," said Janice. "I'll clean it up. I didn't scald you did I? Oh, Hermann, are you okay?"

"I'm okay," I said, baffled by how concerned Janice sounded.

"Come over here and sit down," I said in an effort to comfort a distraught looking Janice.

"On the dry side of the bed," I joked.

Janice whisked the wet quilt off the bed, leaving me with just a sheet, brought another cup of tea, and sat down beside me on top of the sheet.

"I'm sorry I dropped the tea, but you sounded so cold and distant it startled me."

It was finally registering that Janice had been cheerful and affectionate instead of angry and sullen. That had been a good start. I now was awake enough to recall that Janice was the wife of a Death Eater, and I had to be patient with her. It's possible Janice and her husband had a loving relationship, but I didn't think so. Torture didn't agree with Janice. I should take it easy since Janice probably didn't trust me yet ... she was being a bit distant to protect herself. I now was awake enough to appreciate Janice, the loving and competent lady I had seduced. Okay, if it took me all day to seduce Janice again, then I would take all day. Take it easy, O randy one.

"I didn't mean it that way," I lied.

I was now ashamed of myself for wallowing in self-pity. I hadn't been polite or made any friendly overtures to Janice or given her any chance at all to relate to me. I was too ashamed and too cowardly to admit to Janice what I had done.

"How are you this morning and I'm sorry I sounded cold," I blurted out. "And thanks again for the tea," I said, lifting the cup to Janice and smiling at her. "Can you forgive me?"

"I'm fine. You just startled me."

I wished we were back to Janice running her fingers through my hair, but I had done damage and it would take time to heal.

"How long have you been up? Did you get a newspaper for yourself?"

Janice had been up for an hour. She had taken a tub, dressed, and waited for me to wake up. I kept thinking that she had been friendly and cheerful, and now she was subdued and hesitant because I had hurt her. I kept trying to think of some way to undo my mistake.

"A Sickle for your thoughts," said Janice.

"I'm trying to think of some way to make up for sounding cold and distant," I said.

"Are you still worrying about that?"

"Would it help if I said you were cheerful and attractive in the morning? And you make good tea?"

"That's a good start," said Janice.

Janice returned to running her fingers through my hair. I sipped my tea while she edged closer. I set the tea aside, laid my head in her lap, and took one of her hands in mine.

"I'm glad you're here," I said. I was thinking that the only thing that could save this relationship would be Janice's kindness and maturity.

"Are you hungry?" I asked. "You've been up quite a while."

"I'm fine," said Janice.

Go slow and take all day to seduce her, I thought as I sat up, ran my hands through her hair, and kissed her. She wants to relate to you as a person first, I thought as Janice put her tongue in my mouth. I should just talk to her for a while, I thought as I cupped her breasts. It won't do to hurry things, I thought, as Janice moaned, put her arms around me, and pushed her breasts into me. Don't scare her away, I thought, as I nibbled my way down to her cleavage, and Janice tore off her blouse and bra. I should take her to breakfast and chat, I thought, as I tended a breast until I could taste her and then tended the other breast while Janice whispered my name and endearments. Don't rush the intimacy, I thought, as Janice slid down raising her skirt above her waist, and I removed her knickers, spread her legs, kissed my way up her thighs, parted Janice's folds, and applied my tongue. I shouldn't take advantage of a lonely Janice, I thought, as Janice moaned and writhed and grabbed my hair and pushed me into her. I meant to give you more affection first, darling, I thought, as Janice cried out my name and her thighs gripped me. Oh, Janice, I like you too much. You're turning me into an animal who wants to fuck you while you watch me take you. Janice pulled me up between her legs and said, "Take me, darling. I want to watch you fuck me."

* * *

At breakfast, Janice went directly to the most important topic ... the details of her last several days while Hermann was gone. Yesterday, Janice had talked about the highlights of her life. That was sociable, but this was important. Hermann held her hand and listened with great interest, and then Hermann told her about his equally

important quest for a good cafe au lait in London. Janice thought it was a wonderful story. Janice could feel her nipples against her bra, and she wondered what was happening to her since she had just had sex. Her scrambled eggs arrived, giving Janice a chance to recall this morning in bed when Hermann had taken her. There hadn't been much watching. It had become intense, they had become entangled, and Janice still felt peaceful and a bit otherworldly. Janice helped herself to a piece of sausage on Hermann's plate. We'll go back to the hotel room, thought Janice, we'll gather our stuff, and then we'll go home.

Spy

Chapter 13 of 19

"I was too lost in thought to notice the return of Thunderstorm Hermione."

Chapter 13: 2 December 11:00 AM -- 20 December 5:00 PM Spy

Plunk.

I looked at Shan standing by the lake, a melancholy Shan throwing rocks in the water.

Plunk.

I winced. That had been a perfectly good skipping stone.

"It's cold out here," said Shan.

I offered to walk back through the greenhouse in an effort to cheer her up, but she declined, saying we were already late for lunch. She was moody during lunch, perhaps because Draco and I were planning to spend the rest of the day in the lab. I kept wishing that I knew what was bothering Shan.

"Meet me for dinner?" she asked as I left.

I agreed. A moody Shan was better than no Shan.

"Be careful," she said.

"It's only Potions," I said. "We're not herding dragons."

I could not understand Shan's anxiety. Potions and Arithmancy are the perfect subjects for competent, but cowardly, wizards no dangerous plants, no rampaging beasts, no wonky transfigurations although both subjects could be potent. We had learned a lot from the mundane chemists, and the German wizards had potions that could eliminate a small city. Arithmancy, using advanced math, could produce spells that were earth shaking, and they were used in construction. Durmstrang students believed the German Wizard War Department was studying both. The ingredients and procedures at Hogwarts, however, would not support such potent efforts. I had checked.

After Potions lab with Draco, I had dinner with Shan, and we went to the Ravenclaw common room. Shan was much more welcome among the Ravenclaws than I was among the Hufflepuffs. I did Arithmancy first since the derivations required that I be alert, and then I stayed up late to write the essay for Charms. Shan had written her essay for Charms while I worked on Arithmancy and then returned to the Hufflepuff dorm. Shan, however, left me all the references for the essay with the relevant passages bookmarked. I felt like a parasite since the hard part of the essay was the reference work. Besides, by doing the reference work for me, Shan was supporting my spending lots of time in the lab. Shan was helping me do something she disapproved of. I wondered about the lady.

* * *

Inevitably, Hermione talked about her adventures with her two friends. After hearing and thinking about the first two adventures, I had a thought for Hermione.

"You're missing a Slytherin," I told her.

"What!"

"Harry's obviously a brave Gryffindor; Ron's a loyal Hufflepuff; and you're a smart Ravenclaw. You're missing cunning and power."

"What?"

Lost in analysis, I missed the storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

"Your big problem in the first adventure was not being taken seriously," I said. "Neither you nor Harry have relatives or family friends who are influential at the Ministry. Ron's father is at the Ministry, but he's not influential."

"You're looking disdainful," I told Hermione. "You think using influence is unfair. But a powerful family is something you're born with, like intelligence. A Slytherin using influence is no more unfair than you using your intelligence."

"For your first adventure, a friend at the Ministry might have kept the Headmaster at Hogwarts when he was needed or found out who was responsible for the diversion."

Lost in analysis, I didn't notice the nearby tables clearing as the cold front moved rapidly towards us.

"For your second adventure, influence at the Ministry would have kept the gamekeeper from going to prison without a trial," I said. "Visiting the spiders without him almost got your friends killed."

"Harry fighting the monster was braver than I want to be," I added, "but a Slytherin might have sent out for some roosters and practiced a make-them-crow spell."

"If you had a Slytherin accomplice you wouldn't have needed the Polyjuice Potion," I said. "You could have avoided the danger and the hairballs. A Slytherin witch would have been ideal. She would have wormed the information out of the boys with no effort."

"Besides, don't you think a Slytherin witch would balance the team nicely?"

Lightning struck, thunder clapped, and Hermione Granger stormed out of the room.

* * *

Shan wanted to know if anything exciting happened to me at Durmstrang. I told her about being chased by a Red Demon Oryx my third year.

"Omigosh," said Shan, turning pale. "How did you survive?"

I told her I had thrown my cloak in the air to distract him and then clambered up a tree.

"Didn't it destroy your cloak?" asked Shan. "They're ferocious."

I told her he trampled my cloak and then glared at me while he ate it. The worst part was that the cloak had my mid-term essay for Mundane Social Studies ... an historical study of Martin Luther.

"Martin Luther?" said Shan, puzzled.

"Oh, I remember," she said brightly. "He nailed a church door shut."

"That's him."

"Didn't he become the Patron Saint of Locksmiths?" asked Shan. "But what happened to your cloak?"

The Oryx shredded the right sleeve of my cloak, devoured it along with the Table of Contents for the essay, and then given me a satisfied smirk. He ripped the left sleeve to pieces and chomped it down with the Methodology Chapter as a garnish. The Oryx then gave me a suspicious look and burped.

"Omigosh," said Shan.

The beast was determined to despoil my goods. He munched the tails of the cloak along with the Summary Chapter ... a chapter containing the most solid, well-reasoned conclusions in the history of Mundane Social Studies.

"And then?" she asked.

The Oryx gave me an accusing look, developed a case of terminal diarrhea, stumbled behind a thorn bush, and went hoofs up. The school investigated, but the committee was headed by the Chair of the Social Studies Department who declared the Oryx to have died of natural, academic causes.

* * *

True to form, Hermione appeared for our next study session in Transfiguration. She wasn't going to neglect her schoolwork just because I was a blithering idiot pretending to be a friend, a bloody awful prat who couldn't appreciate how brave Harry was, a foreign ignoramus who didn't understand the situation, a fancy ponce who had never done anything in his life, a user who took advantage of people, and a twit who didn't know enough to pronounce judgments on anything.

"Honestly!" I said to myself. It was a wonder that I could exist.

The telling retort that Hermione had for me, that she delivered after we had dutifully finished our Transfiguration homework, was that I should see if I could do any better. I told her I wasn't a Slytherin. I told her I wasn't powerful. I told her I wasn't cunning. She continued to glare at me. I suggested Hermione go through the stories again in detail. Perhaps we could discern some method of operation.

The first adventure, as Hermione was retelling it, had arrived at the climax: the stone, the confrontation scene in front of some mirror, and the final rescue of Harry by the Headmaster. I was confused and had a number of questions.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "The stone could only be obtained by someone who wanted to find the stone but not to use it. But Harry didn't want to find the stone. Didn't he want the stone to remain hidden? Then how did Harry get the stone?"

"He wanted to keep it away from Voldemort," she said. "Harry didn't know about the Headmaster's special spell."

What a mess, I thought. The other barriers could be overcome by a powerful wizard, and there were plenty of those around. The final barrier could only be overcome by an innocent, an innocent who arrived because the adult wizards weren't paying attention to his warnings that the initial barriers were vulnerable.

It was obvious that the stone would have been safe if Harry and his friends hadn't interfered, but I knew better than to say this to Hermione. Instead I remarked that Harry and his friends were missing information and that they needed someone with cunning and power on their side.

I realized, too late, that Hermione would take this as repeating the suggestion that they needed a Slytherin witch.

I was too lost in thought to notice the return of Thunderstorm Hermione.

"Why didn't the Headmaster kill or capture Voldemort?" I asked. "That seemed an opportune moment. Can't the Headmaster kill or capture Voldemort? If he can't do it, then perhaps he could organize an arrest team."

"It was to show that Harry could stand up to Voldemort," screeched Hermione.

Thunderstorm Hermione rumbled through the room and out the door in a mighty gust.

Stand up to Voldemort? Was this some series of trials the hero had to undergo before the final culmination? Was Brit wizard kind trying to live some ancient legend? I only knew one Brit legend. There was Harry, Ron, and Hermione. Who was King Arthur, who was Lancelot, and who was Guinevere? I had a conjecture about which of the three might be Guinevere, but I, the twit, didn't know enough to pronounce a judgment, and my Celtic Princess of Facts had left in a huff.

How much of this story should I believe? An artifact gives eternal life, and no one is interested in it except Voldemort. Wars have been fought over less. Hermione would have me believe that Harry Potter was not interested in it, not even to help his friends.

Poor cover story, Hermione Granger, I thought. Perhaps eleven-year-olds would accept that no conflict was raging over such a powerful stone, but I couldn't imagine anyone else accepting the tale. Why was Hermione trying to feed me this nonsense? Had someone altered Hermione's memory? Was that why she was not able to analyze past events? I decided to step lightly here. I would keep Hermione at some distance and not get too involved. Naturally, human perversity intervened, and I felt the urge to do something for her. But, once again, I decided it was best to leave her to her friends.

I had really, really bungled the attempt to discern some method of operation for the Death Eaters by talking to Hermione, but there was one small consolation. A Great Hall half full of people had witnessed her screeching at me. Actually, screeching at me again. It was inconceivable that I would be cooperating with her.

'All warfare is based on deception.'

Good acting, Hermione. You even had me fooled.

Had Hermione transmitted any real information to me before her analytical capacity was saturated? As I understood it, the second campaign by the Death Eaters was subtle. Blame the daughter of a Muggle-Lover for the deaths of Muggle-born to stop the enactment of regulations protecting Muggles. The scheme was succeeding. The

English Ministry was in a state of panic. They had sent one innocent person to prison without a trial, and they had removed their most powerful wizard from the scene of action. In the middle of the campaign, however, one of the participants had changed the objective to eliminating Harry Potter. This person then made a kidnap victim out of the student originally selected to receive the blame. The plan collapsed.

Note to self: Tom Riddle is not a team player.

Hermione had not told me with what they were currently contending. In her current state, I didn't think she would tell me if she knew, but I also had the impression that she didn't know. Now that, I realized, was an area for contribution. What were the Death Eaters' current schemes? It was time for information gathering, commonly called spying.

I was the worst choice in all of England for spying on the Death Eaters. I was able immediately to think of eight show stoppers. First, I was a student confined to Hogwarts. Second, I was an overloaded student with no time for surveillance. Third, I had observant peers. Hermione and her friends easily had slipped by their fellow Gryffindors. In their second year, their peers hadn't even noticed that Harry wasn't calling forth the snake or that Ginny was killing chickens. I had to contend with Draco, Barbara, Shelly, Luna, Su, and Shan ... a different group of peers. Fourth, I had no special powers of movement. Some of what Hermione had told me didn't make sense unless she and her friends could move unobserved through secret passages. Fifth, I had no real friends at Hogwarts except Draco, who was possibly a Death Eater. Sixth, I didn't have a special relationship with any faculty member. It had been important that Harry and his friends did. Seventh, I had no family or friends in the outside world of English wizards. Eighth, I was not connected to any private source of information.

I was ready to spy on the Death Eaters. How hard could it be for an intelligent young man?

* * *

After the next study session in Transfiguration with Hermione, I mentioned that I might be able to help, but that I would have to be able to leave Hogwarts for secret overnight trips.

"That's never been done before," she said. "And why should we trust you? Who are you going to meet?"

I knew from her last two questions that it was possible. There were secret ways out of Hogwarts. If her first reply was honest, then she and her friends had never accomplished an overnigher. I refrained from pointing out that if it had been successfully accomplished, then she wouldn't have heard about it. I was learning to be diplomatic with Hermione. After all, I was now a clever and subtle spy.

I left Hermione to wrestle with her conscience and her friends over revealing a secret passage to me. I prepared the ground for being gone all night with no one noticing. It was accomplished by falling asleep from exhaustion in the Slytherin common room and having to spend the night there because of the curfew. I even fell asleep from exhaustion several times in the lab. Its unbreakable seals meant that no one discovered my whereabouts until morning. After a while, no one was particularly concerned by my vanishing for the night. At least, that's what I thought.

At the same time, I contacted the German Ministry telling them I needed a reliable contact and information on spy craft. They were obviously worried about me, but even more obviously worried about their lack of information. They warned me many times to be careful. They advised me to attend the next social outlet.

I needed a cover. With the casualness of debonair spies everywhere, I told Luna I was going to Hogsmeade on Saturday and I would love to have her company. Her response was enthusiastic enough that it took a while for me to regain my debonair casualness. Luna insisted that we invite Shan too.

"She should come with us," she said. "Shan thinks you're a good friend."

The more the merrier. Let's test the mettle of the German secret wizards. Shan said she would love to go, but she had scheduled this Saturday to complete an essay for Charms. Shan was either a good actress or sincerely sorry not to go. I suggested that we both complete our essays and then go to Hogsmeade. It was cold in the morning anyway. Let the German secret wizards cope with that. They did. Shan and I finished the essay at eleven with Luna waiting patiently. We had a late tea, took a leisurely broom ride to Hogsmeade, and had a late lunch. Because we had a late lunch, the three of us were the only ones at a large table when two recent graduates from Sweden asked if they could join us. Sweden! Yes, they had heard of the animals Luna asked about, but no, they hadn't seen them themselves. The couple was taking some time off to tour England. The witch chatted with Luna and Shan. The wizard was a good-natured poet who insisted I take a copy of his recent works. The couple wished us a merry goodbye and went off to see more of famous Hogsmeade. Late that night, back at the dorm, I read the slip of paper in the book of poems. An incantation and a thumb print would turn it into the German Wizards' spy manual plus a list of my contacts. Another incantation would wipe it clean ... except for the awful poems.

* * *

Hermione gave me the information about the Whomping Willow and Shrieking Shack connection. I arranged a meeting in Hogsmeade. Since there was no way to meet without being observed, I decided to be overwhelming enough that no one would recognize a Hogwarts' student. I gave myself a mustache, grey hair, large glasses, a bigger nose, and a deadly swagger stick with a wand in it. I was, after all, a NEWT candidate in Charms. To top it off, I wore my maroon Durmstrang cloak with its hood up. I made the interesting trip past the homicidal tree, through a dark, treacherous tunnel, and out of a creepy, dangerous house. At the outskirts of Hogsmeade, I finally stopped shaking from terror. I'm going to get you for this, Hermione! I strolled into the tavern like the person I was pretending to be. I spotted the tart in the corner and walked over to her. Several lowlifes, who had been eyeing the tart, moved away fast. I had incorporated some Malfoy into my persona. I sat down at her table. She paid the barkeep for her drinks and some Floo powder. I would obviously reimburse her later. We arrived at a good hotel in London, went to the room she had rented, performed the spells for secrecy, and looked at each other. We had not yet spoken a word. It hadn't been safe until now.

"Well, well, Patricia Clearwater, fancy meeting you here."

"Oh, Hermann."

She rushed me, knocking me off my feet onto the bed. She was kissing me deliriously. My most important question had been answered. She didn't want to claw my eyes out. I could trust Patricia Clearwater.

She told me the spy business could wait. We had other things to do first.

Afterwards, I explained that the spy business was very dull, very laborious, and very dangerous. All organizations and operations, including the Death Eaters, needed money, and the Ministry of Magic was the largest dispenser of funds in the English wizard community. I was fairly certain, but not absolutely certain, that some of these funds were going to disguised Death Eater enterprises.

"That's where I work, the Finance Office, comes in," said Patricia. "We have a record of all the transactions."

Patricia thought a bit. "The trick is identifying which funds are going to Death Eaters. That's going to be hard."

"Very hard," I agreed. "If they have been clever, it may not be possible to identify their funds."

"You've already figured out how tedious and frustrating this is going to be," I said.

Patricia nodded.

"It's also very dangerous," I said. "If we discover their funding routes, we can hurt them. If you decide to do this, you will be their worst enemy. If the Death Eaters discover you are spying for us, they will kill you. They will probably kill your family, too. You don't have to do this."

"I thought Harry Potter was their worst enemy," said Patricia.

"Harry Potter is the worst enemy of their current charismatic leader," I said. "There's always hate and fear. Any group with funds can live on the hate and fear. We need you to locate those funds."

Patricia nodded.

"Remember, you're our most valuable specialist," I said. "Don't put yourself at risk by doing commonplace spy stuff."

Patricia looked puzzled.

"All the things you normally think about when you think about spying" ... Patricia nodded ... "don't do them," I said. "No listening to conversations, no peeking into rooms, no stealing papers, no rummaging through files or wastebaskets. We already have people doing that."

"Caretakers can do that," said Patricia. "That's their job."

"Exactly," I said. "No following people either. We have specialists for that."

"There is a part of this that might bother you," I said. "I'm working with the German Ministry because I can trust them. All your information will be seen by the German Ministry. We are trying to find reliable English Ministry people, but we're strangers in a strange land. You might prefer to wait until this is a purely British operation."

Patricia didn't want to wait.

"This is very dangerous. You don't have to do this. It would be smart not to do this."

"You don't understand, Hermann," she said. "For most of my life, I've watched the Death Eaters hurt and kill people I know and love."

Patricia paused, recalling bad memories. "I couldn't do anything. I could only watch. Now I can do something."

I gave Patricia her incantation-protected book containing general instructions, advice, codes, safe places, and emergency contacts.

"I'm the only person who knows you're spying for us," I said. "If you arrive at a safe place or make an emergency contact, then they will know you are one of ours, but otherwise they do not know that you exist."

"Can I tell Penelope? She has her own flat now, but we're still close."

I thought awhile and said, "It would be a good idea to tell Penelope, otherwise she might make revealing comments about your activities."

"When you talk to Penelope," I said, "tell her that I fear for your life."

Patricia gave me a quizzical look.

"Promise me that you'll do this," I said. "If you talk to Penelope, then she's involved, too. I want her to know how serious this is."

"Promise me," I said.

Patricia promised.

Patricia told me that she knew Penelope would want to help. I told Patricia that I could be in London over the Winter Holidays, and I could talk to Penelope. "Don't let Penelope do anything until I've talked to her."

I had to hurry back. I embraced Patricia and held her for quite a while.

"Be careful," I said.

"You keep saying that," she said.

I returned to Hogsmeade just after the tavern had closed. I tossed the owner several Galleons and a Malfoy look. That would keep him quiet. I made my way to the fixer-upper to await the end of the Hogwarts curfew.

While waiting, I reflected that I hadn't been completely honest with Patricia. I didn't know if we had any caretakers or trackers. I didn't care. I didn't want Patricia taking unnecessary risks. Left to her own inclinations, Patricia would try to be an entire spy brigade.

I entertained myself in the tunnel by imagining dropping the creepies I saw down Hermione's robe.

Halfway through the tunnel, I thought of the perfect Winter Solstice Gifts to give everyone on my list. That had been bothering me for quite some time.

I peeked out from the roots of the angry tree.

"There he is," cried Luna.

"You're not wearing your Hogwarts robe," said Shan.

What was happening? I ducked back into the tunnel to exchange the Durmstrang cloak for my Hogwarts robe and to return my face to its normal, upright position.

"There's nothing like a sunrise stroll to begin the day," said Luna, as I joined the two girls.

"Yes, it was such a good idea to invite us along, but we should get back inside before we all freeze," said Shan in a tone of voice that would freeze dragon fire.

They took me to the Prefect's Bath, leaving me with instructions. "Go soak your bloody fool head in the bloody hot tub, you bloody fool."

They went to raid the boys' dorm for clean garments. It would be a perfect complement to the morning's fiasco if they found my sister's valentine gift, a pair of white silk boxer shorts with lots of little pink hearts.

Later, in the Great Hall, pouring hot tea into me, they said, "You could be expelled."

They asked, "What were you doing? What were you thinking?"

I told them that I had gone Durmstrang crazy and had spent the night away from Hogwarts. "How did you know where to find me?"

They said they had noticed that I was preparing to do something and then that I wasn't in the Ravenclaw or Slytherin common rooms. They knew I had been talking to Hermione, and they wondered if she and her adventurous mates knew what I might be doing. Since I had disappeared, it must be a secret passage. They got Hermione out of bed and told Hermione they would tell everyone that Hermione knew about secret passages unless Hermione told them what I had done. They had waited until curfew ended and were about to come after me when I appeared.

I said, "You two are brilliant."

They didn't respond to that.

"Were you meeting a girl?" asked Shan quietly.

"No," I said. "That would be really dumb. Everyone in Hogsmeade would notice a Hogwarts student meeting a girl late at night."

"There are lots of girls at Hogwarts, Hermann," said Shan, still speaking quietly.

"I wasn't meeting a girl," I said.

"Yes, Hermann," said Luna. "There are lots of nice girls at Hogwarts."

"Maybe he wasn't looking for a nice girl," said Shan, still speaking quietly.

"I was just going crazy. I wasn't doing anything stupid like meeting a girl." That didn't come out quite right, I thought.

"You weren't chasing Death Eaters, were you?" said Luna in alarm.

"That's dumber than chasing a girl," I said.

"Why would Hermione tell you about a secret passage if you weren't going to help chase Death Eaters?" said Luna.

Why did I have to meet all these intelligent women? I was on thin ice here. "She was telling me about her adventures with Harry and Ron. I guessed there must be some secret passages."

"So you had to use one of them and get yourself expelled," said Shan.

"I'm sorry I went crazy. I'm not expelled yet."

"Speaking of being expelled," I said, "did you tell Hermione to keep quiet about everything?"

"Oh, no," they both said, running off to find Hermione.

I lamented that I had once again made Luna and Shan angry with me, but there wasn't any help for it. I had to have a face-to-face meeting to establish and verify a bond of trust. In the murky world of espionage, a bond of trust was essential. I hoped I would never have to do such a thing again. The overnighter was crazier than I wanted to be. I wished Luna and Shan hadn't appeared. They had seen me in the maroon Durmstrang cloak, which could connect me to the visitor in the tavern.

This was discouraging. It was my first effort as a master spy, and I had been completely outclassed by two schoolgirls. I felt a twinge of sympathy for Voldemort. Meddling kids. The terrifying thought was that if two schoolgirls had discovered everything that I had done, then certainly the Death Eaters had discovered, or would soon discover, what I had done. I had placed lives in danger. There was the even more terrifying thought that the fuss raised by Luna and Shan had drawn the Death Eaters' attention to me. I became angry with them. Then I became suspicious of them. Were they death-symp? Why were death-symp watching a transfer student? Was it because I was talking to Hermione? Were there so many death-symp that they could watch everyone? I hadn't asked them about their sympathies, and now it was too late.

* * *

"Did you catch a Death Eater?" hissed Hermione, as she sat down beside me in Transfiguration.

"It was a practice run," I said.

"Well, it didn't go very well, did it. You obviously need more practice," she continued to hiss. "Maybe you should take Shan and Luna with you."

"Don't look at me like that," she said. "You're scaring me."

* * *

Several days later, Luna and Shan had insisted I meet them for afternoon tea in the Ravenclaw common room. I wondered if this was the first of a series of sanity checks. I needed a sanity check, although not for the reasons that Luna and Shan thought. My suspecting them of being in league with the Death Eaters was crazy. I felt like a nit. Two powerful witches were wasting their time taking care of crazy Hermann.

A few minutes before tea time, I was taking a break and looking out a Ravenclaw Tower window when Luna joined me.

"Do you live in a tower at home, Hermann?" she asked.

"No."

"You should," she said. "You like looking over the countryside. Maybe you should be a bird. What kind of bird would you be?"

I thought about my recent behavior. Was a 'mean spirited pecker' a bird?

"You're the one who's a bird," I said.

"No, silly," she said, "that's English slang for a girl. I wonder why they call us birds?"

"Birds are pretty. Birds sound nice. We like to watch birds. We like to be around birds. Maybe that's why," I said. "I meant a real bird."

When I thought of Shan, I thought eagle. Luna was harder to place.

"You would be a magical bird," I said, giving Luna's hand a friendly squeeze and releasing it.

Luna reached over and held my hand.

You would be a magical bird who looked after other birds, I thought. I didn't tell Luna that because it sounded soppy and fluffy.

"It would be nice to be a bird that watched over other birds," said Luna. "I think Shan would be an eagle. We would be friends."

Be friends with an eagle and watch over other birds. Only Luna could manage that.

I wondered if abstracted Luna had a soft and fluffy place. I wondered the same about ice and steel Shan. I supposed they did for some lucky wizard.

Shan arrived from the Prefect's meeting. There hadn't been any whispers or rumors whatsoever about a Hogwarts student out all night. I had accomplished a successful overnighter. Luna and Shan were very proud of me.

* * *

A few days after the overnighter, the espionage was producing information. The English Ministry financial records showed that the Hogwarts gamekeeper was the head of an animal-rescue-and-care unit that was receiving 2,000 Galleons a month. No one believed this. The money was going elsewhere, and the German trackers were watching the goblin bank. Acting on a hunch, a sweep was made for other charitable organizations receiving 2,000 Galleons a month. Ten others were found, and they didn't sound plausible either.

* * *

Shan was complaining about my hair.

We were almost the only people in the Great Hall on an early Sunday morning. I thought she had wanted to practice Charms and then kata, but she started fussing about how my hair was cut and insisted on trimming it for me. Now she was disgusted by how 'gunky' it was and said I didn't have to have bad hair just because I was a Potions master. She was certain I needed the shampoos available in the Prefects' bath. She would get her swimming costume; I would get mine; and then she would use the right soaps on me. I told her that, being from Durmstrang, bringing a swimming costume to school had never occurred to me.

"You'll have to improvise," Shan told me.

A little later, I was in a sudsy tub with Shan using one soapy compound after another in her attempt to salvage my manly locks. Shan was giving me a final rinse when she said, "Can I ask you something?"

After I nodded, she said, "Why are you playing with psycho-active potions?"

At last, I thought. Let's get it out, girl. I gave my answer some thought.

"There are three reasons," I said. "First, a new type has been discovered with the Hogwarts Potion master being one of the discoverers. Second, they're beneficial. The stress and strain of being a wizard puts as many people in the mental wards as accidents put people in the physical wards. Third, there's the selfish reason. The initial patents will be worth a lot of money."

"Draco doesn't need money," she said.

"He might," I said. "I can use the money."

"Do I get to ask you something?" I said. She nodded yes.

"Why do the psycho-active potions upset you?" I said.

"I thought you and Draco were being brave," she said.

"You thought we were doing it just to be brave, to impress the girls?" I asked

"Yes," she said.

"It's the challenge, benefits, and money," I replied.

After the salvage effort on my hair, we were in the Hufflepuff common room having tea. "They're not going to kill you," Shan had told me as she dragged me there.

I was sitting on a rug watching the fireplace dreaming the fire, as the Africans say. Shan was stretched out on a couch, running her fingers through my hair. Admiring her handiwork, I suppose.

"My parents were brave," said Shan.

I gave her a 'tell me more' look.

"They thought the Dark Lord was dead. Wizards and Muggles could live in peace. They had a nursery outside Birmingham where they grew both kinds of plants."

She watched the fire for a while.

"The nursery did well because the two of them could grow anything. In Birmingham, they each owned a store. My father's store sold Muggle plants, and my mother's store sold wizard plants. My mother's store was hidden from the Muggles, of course."

I nodded for her to continue.

"My mother, sister, and I were visiting my aunt and uncle, my mother's sister and her husband. They're witches, actually they're a witch and wizard. When we returned home, we discovered the Death Eaters had killed my father. They had burned down the nursery and the two stores. I was eight years old."

"That's terrible," I said, lamely.

"We lived with my aunt and uncle. Mother never recovered: She died eight years later when I was sixteen."

I had the impression there was more to this sad story, but it could wait. Shan was busy 'styling' my hair.

"It's a forlorn hope," I said. "It's never going to look good."

Shan continued the brushing and combing.

"I feel like one of the plants in your greenhouse," I told her.

She started naming plants. None of the names sounded very good. I was on the losing end of this exchange.

"None of those plants sound very good," I said.

Shan sat down beside me on the rug. It was totally inappropriate, but I noticed what lovely legs she had.

"They're all plants with bad hair and a worse attitude," she said, smiling at me in a triumphant manner.

"Plants have hair?" I asked.

"Bad hair," she replied.

"Would you like to take a walk?" she asked. "Let's go see the lake."

We didn't make it to the lake. Shan walked a different direction until she found a sunny spot out of the wind. She was talking about her aunt and uncle. While Shan and her

sister were living with them, her aunt and uncle had constantly told Shan and Su that they were half-bloods who couldn't be witches. It was one of the best days of Shan's life when her letter from Hogwarts arrived. During her first holiday, Shan taught Su a spell in order to show Su that she was a witch, too. Shan was in a lot of trouble for that, but she said it was worth it. Shan was a wild witch her first year.

I said it hadn't been that traumatic for me. I was helping with potions when I was nine years old. It was better than a chemistry set. If I hadn't been accepted at Durmstrang, there was mundane chemistry. I told Shan my sister had shown obvious talent at an early age too early. My sister was a problem child because she had abilities she didn't know how to control or even know she should control. Shan said she was almost two years older than her sister, but she was born in October and Su in August, which put them one year apart at school.

Shan's mother had died in January of Shan's fifth year. Shan had been stoical about it, determined to maintain her achievement record. She did outstanding work for all her OWLs. Her sixth year she had been haunted by guilt over her mother's death and the feeling that nothing was really worthwhile. Now she was once again determined to do well. Ice and steel Shan was back.

Most inappropriately, and strictly to myself, I wondered if she would like to take a little time off for affection. I knew a wizard who liked her. None of my fellow Ravenclaws were saying anything about Shan Li except the occasional comment that she was a brilliant witch, and they thought she belonged in Ravenclaw. I heard the same about Hermione along with speculation about her and her two male friends. I never heard any speculation about Shan Li, and I never asked. I had heard a few remarks about getting bashed up by the ice and steel lady when Shan started fencing, but I had shrugged them off at the time.

Did I have some understanding of Shan now? I had some conjectures. She thought 'bravery' had killed her parents, and she was upset when she thought Draco and I were flaunting 'bravery' in Potions. She had confused her housemates by being a wild witch her first year and a swot the next four years. They had called her 'cold' when she almost ignored her mother's death. They had taunted her during her sixth year when her performance fell. She said some of them told her that she should give up her Prefect's badge. This would account for the slight distance I felt between Shan and the other Hufflepuffs. Shan was accepted by the Ravenclaws who were used to behavior swings. To put it bluntly, we weren't the balanced personalities the Hufflepuffs were.

Christmas

Chapter 14 of 19

All in joy went my love riding

And with him rode my heart

Into the waiting dawn

Chapter 14: 21 December 10:00 AM -- 28 December 8:00 AM Christmas

It was going to be a dismal holiday.

Everyone knows that Ministry offices are nearly empty during the holiday season. It was only natural that Harold Clearwater would make up the slack by moving a camp bed into his office, working around the clock and leaving his charming wife yearning for some company. Instead, he decided to celebrate the season by spending more time at home. England expects every man to do his duty, you irresponsible twit!

Draco had been receiving pleading letters from his mother. A large number of his father's friends wanted to convene at the Malfoy estate during the New Year holiday. They would need a lot of attending, but they definitely did not want any hired help around they could not trust. That left the catering to Mrs. Malfoy and the two remaining house-elves unless Draco came and helped.

Draco gleefully showed me a return letter with the wonderful news that I was acceptable to all the Malfoy house guests because I was from Durmstrang.

I think Draco suggested my name out of spite because both their families insisted that Barbara and Shelly come home for the holidays. The girls had been sending hints in letters to their respective families. They wrote that they had just talked to a boy named Draco Malfoy, who seemed very pleasant. They wrote again that they had just received help with a Transfiguration spell by Draco, who appeared very talented. On both occasions, the replies from their families had sent the girls to bed in tears.

I explained the Yankee joke to Draco, and we made yellow badges containing black line drawings of the North American burrowing rodent.

"They are so cute," said Shelly, besotted by the twitching noses of the little varmints.

"I thought you two didn't like animals," said Barbara.

We absolutely had to make badges for the two girls.

There was more good news. Theodore Nott and his mother could come and help, too. If Mrs. Malfoy, Mrs. Nott, and I were in the same room, those two women would have everything figured out in less than a minute. The other thirty to fifty people in the room wouldn't know that anything had happened, but Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Nott would know everything without a single word being spoken.

"Sacre Bleu!" as the Americans say.

"What?" said Draco.

"How do you spell 'mincemeat'?" I asked.

We explained the joke and made a badge for Theo. Then we had to make one for Terry.

I hadn't helped. Out of Old World politeness I had responded to their letters, telling them that everything was dull at Hogwarts and their sons were doing fine. I had been certain I would never see Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Nott again.

I had even written a few letters back to Penelope Clearwater. My mother and father, with help from the German Ministry, had visited Penelope and talked about the independent bookkeeping business. The German Ministry thought the more normal we appeared to the Brits and the more personal contact, the better. It was a diplomatic exchange of goodwill, except that Mr. Clearwater was murderously angry. Nothing's perfect. At any rate, since my family and I had been such good friends to her, Penelope was eager to introduce me to the Weasley family. Wouldn't it be lovely to spend Christmas Eve with them? I, too, thought it a lovely idea. It would be a cleaner death than the one awaiting me at the Malfoys.

I did ask about Percy Weasley. He wasn't reconciled with his family yet, but the Weasleys wanted to see Penelope, and Penelope had told them she was bringing her friend, Hermann Busch. That should put the dumb cluck in the weasel house.

It was a tight timetable. The train would take us from Hogwarts to London on Saturday, 21 December. Saturday night, Sunday, and Monday I would help the Malfoys prepare for their visitors. Tuesday morning, 24 December, I would go to my hotel room in London. Penelope would take me to the Weasleys that evening for Christmas Eve. I would be in London on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Saturday morning, 29 December, I would return to the Malfoys through Wednesday, 1 January. The friends of the Malfoys, to whom I would be a servant, would be there Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. If I was still alive, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday were free. Sunday, 5 January, the train would take what was left of me back to Hogwarts. Tell my parents I died bravely.

* * *

To picture the wing of the Malfoy Manor with Narcissa's room, imagine building a U from five wooden cubes. Place three cubes in a row. Stack the other two cubes on the outer cubes. Turn the structure from vertical to horizontal. Turn the cubes into varied rectangles to allow for doors and passage ways. The middle rectangle of the three is the Master Bedroom; the left rectangle is the Mistress's Bedroom; and the right rectangle is the Other Mistress's Bedroom. Malfoy Manor is an old house for an old-fashioned family. The other two rectangles were for the personal servants. Narcissa had the Other Mistress's Bedroom completely filled with boxes of stuff. Narcissa had her own opinions about family relations. We had to clear it for Janice Nott. Draco and Theodore would stay in the servants' rooms, which were very luxurious. To complete the arrangement and to help guard against intrusions by any of the guests, I would stay in the Master Bedroom.

"What?" I said.

"That's a good joke," I said, "and they say Malfoys don't have a refined sense of humor."

I looked at Narcissa and Draco. They weren't joking. The five of us were to form a tight unit guarded at night by spells and proximity. No one else was willing to use the Master Bedroom. I discovered why when I entered it. Evil. Nightmare City. Janice Nott had vouched for my decontamination abilities, and Narcissa reminded me that I had the best nightmares. The elves and I took everything that was moveable to the dungeons since Narcissa and Draco refused to touch any of it. The elves and I scoured the room with soap and water followed by our best benign spells. The elves and I brought the furniture from my summer rooms into the Master Bedroom. Just to thumb my nose at everyone, I did request black satin bedding. "I can be evil, too," I told the room. I brought up two bottles from the wine cellar, and the elves and I had a glass to toast the new Master Bedroom. I told the elves I would take care of Narcissa. They protested, but after a glass of wine they were in no shape to do anyone any good. I sent them to bed, reminding them of all the work to be done tomorrow. This imperious style seemed appropriate for the person sleeping in the Master Bedroom. It was one in the morning and Draco had gone to bed, but I could hear Narcissa still moving boxes. I removed the spells from the adjoining door and entered the Other Mistress's Bedroom, bringing the open wine bottle and a glass.

Narcissa was standing in the middle of the room: dirty, sweaty, and cursing everything in sight ... in a word, gorgeous.

"What the bloody hell are you doing in here," she said.

She kicked a box, and I heard something break.

"I brought you something bloody hell to drink. Then you can bloody hell kick my shins, and then you can feel the bloody hell better."

She glared at me.

"Do you want the drink first, or do you want to kick my shins first?" I asked.

"I'll have the drink first. Where are the elves?"

"The elves and I toasted the renovated room, and they staggered off to bed," I said.

"You got my elves drunk?"

"Yes."

"Bloody hell," she said, finishing the glass of wine. "I will kick your shins."

"Care for another glass first?" I asked.

"The elves were too stressed to sleep after cleaning that room," I said while filling her glass. "I gave them a glass of wine, and they went to bed and passed out."

I tossed the empty bottle on the bed. I moved her dusty, matted hair out of her face. I said, "Do you realize that I miss fighting with you?"

"Is that what you really miss?"

"No," I said.

She gave me a hug, spilling some wine. No problem for a witch.

I showed Narcissa the renovated bathtub and coaxed her into using it with me. I waved my wand to lock the three bedrooms. While she was in the tub, I poured her another glass of wine and massaged her back.

"You left me," she said.

I knew she was talking about last summer. "Yes ... I did."

"I know you couldn't help it, but you left."

Narcissa had a brief mental image of writing to the German Minister: "Dear Sir, Please let Mr. Busch stay and continue our torrid affair. I promise to take care of him. There's beer in the cellar, and I've ordered some pickled cabbage for the stamina he'll need. Sincerely, Narcissa Black Malfoy."

I wondered what she was smiling about when she reached over, took my hand, and said, "I'm glad you're back."

Narcissa climbed out of the tub, stumbled over to the bed, curled herself around me, and fell asleep. I lay awake for a while, feeling frustrated and cursing myself for being

considerate.

I thought of Mr. Malfoy escaping from prison and stumbling upon us. Would he be angry. Especially if he arrived after dark and tripped over things. I had rearranged the furniture.

Narcissa awoke with a cry and sat straight up. I leaped out of bed, wand in hand. Narcissa said that it was a bad dream. I told her that it was the room, but there wasn't any real problem since Ravenclaw boys were specially trained to take care of Slytherin girls. Yes, that was what they were teaching me at Hogwarts. I was getting a NEWT in it ... Nubile Elegant Witch Tending.

"For half a second I took you seriously," said Narcissa.

We lay side by side as I rubbed her temples and ran my hands through her hair, slowly relaxing her. I encouraged her to cuddle me and nuzzle me. Narcissa was now nibbling on me. I had my hand between her legs and she was rotating her hips.

After a while I noticed that nothing was happening. Narcissa was lying still and not moving. She was definitely not wet. I stopped and lay there facing the ceiling. Looking back on it, I wonder if it had been better if I had said something, something comforting to Narcissa. Looking back on it, I realize I had been hit with a double blow. My fantasies about being a stud had been revealed as phony. My thoughts that Narcissa really liked me had been called into doubt. I wasn't functional. As we lay there looking at the ceiling, an elf appeared and announced that Draco was getting up. Narcissa left for her own bedroom. I braced myself to face misery.

Draco saved the day ... partly because he was even grumpier than I was and partly because he was a tactician, too. We both realized we needed to know how many people were coming, when they were coming, who was going to stay overnight, and what they wanted to eat and drink. An elf appeared to say that Narcissa wouldn't be up until teatime. Draco and I toured the house one floor at a time. We made a rough sketch of each floor, indicating suitable bedrooms, meeting rooms, and storage rooms. We noticed a lot of broken items strewn around. We decided Draco's mum needed to relax.

After tea, Draco and I insisted that Narcissa rest in the study while the elves looked for the letters that had been sent about who would be attending the New Year meeting at the Manor. Narcissa perked up when we entered the study. The walls were covered by photographs of the Snitch-Birds. I knew they had to be professional photos to catch the Snitch-Bird movements. The Snitch-Birds had gone back to Germany at the end of the summer, but they had served their purpose. Draco had begun the Autumn Term in peak condition, and the Slytherin Quidditch Team had beaten all its opponents within a matter of minutes. The scores against Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw had been 170 to 20, 170 to 10, and 160 to 0. The Slytherins, being a realistic House, knew this couldn't last. The other Seekers were gaining; there was an element of luck in catching the Snitch; and Draco's going for a NEWT in a laboratory science was taking its toll. Nevertheless, Draco had given his Team and his House a commanding lead.

Now, Draco's mum was showing us the photographs and reminiscing about the birds. "Remember little Frederick. Here's sweet Lillith. She led me on the wildest chases."

Draco and I looked at each other, nodded our heads, and let Draco's mum take us on a tour. She was smiling, taking us by the hand, and leading us from photograph to photograph. Draco and I left her in the study while we prepared the Manor for the guests.

Draco inventoried the household provisions of food and drink, and I levitated stuff into the storage rooms. By lunch, the elves, as only house elves can, had examined every scrap of paper in the house and had found the letters. There were seven letters, each stating that the writer and some of his friends would like to convene at the Malfoy Manor. Draco and I let Narcissa prepare the return letters asking the particulars. We decided we needed a margin of error in case Narcissa had destroyed some of the letters. Draco, guess what, had found some interesting brews for lunch. After a good lunch, we returned to inventorying and levitating, feeling much better. By afternoon tea, Draco had discovered some more brews for the two of us, and he needed his mum's advice on several brandies. After sampling all of them and delivering her opinion, Narcissa decided that a short nap would be okay. Trust Draco to come through in a crisis.

Draco and I knew that the Christmas holidays were originally pagan and the popular culture nicety-nice was out of place. For the evening meal, we had the elves cook a suckling pig on a rotating spit over charcoal. Draco had located the ceremonial wine. We would eat outside, and all plates would be several layers of butcher paper. For utensils, Narcissa offered us an exquisite collection of Malfoy family daggers. If nothing else, in this time of social disharmony and national stress, as a beacon to the world, we aristocrats would demonstrate true Holiday Spirit.

Occasionally I saw a melancholy shadow pass over Draco. I knew what it was. Barbara and Shelly weren't there. And there were some nice pagan rituals the three of them could have enjoyed, too.

It took some time for its effect to permeate our lives, but my reaction to the family daggers was a turning point. Previously, Narcissa had been disappointed by my indifferent attitude towards jewels and fine clothes. Was I a lower class nit? I, however, had wanted to handle all the daggers, asked if there were more of them, and listened to the history of every one of them. Narcissa decided that I wasn't a peacock, dandy aristocrat ... the type that lived off the Malfoy fortune. Narcissa got it into her head that I was a simple-living, courteous, blood-thirsty aristocrat ... the type of aristocrat that had made the Malfoy position and fortune. Narcissa had me pegged as a deadly gentleman who was kind to his lady. By the time we had examined all the daggers, Narcissa's eyes were shining.

As I was about to go to bed that evening, I decided to take a chance. I knocked on the door between our bedrooms. Narcissa said I could come in. I found her sitting in front of one of those dressing mirrors. Who knows why? She didn't use much makeup. She motioned for me to sit beside her.

"I'm sorry about this morning," I said.

"It was my fault," she said.

That didn't give me any information. She could think it was her fault because she was exhausted. She could think it was her fault because she didn't care for me anymore. I put my arm across her shoulders, half expecting her to bite it off.

"Are you okay?" I said.

I waited.

"Are you still mad at me?" she asked.

That answered my questions. I told her that I wasn't mad at her this morning. Really, I wasn't. Okay, yes, I was disappointed. I wanted her to stay with me tonight. I really did want her to, yes. A little later she was curled up around me and asleep. I lay there frustrated, but happy.

* * *

Narcissa, astride her broom, was approaching a green glade where Hermann would make love to her ... if she made it that far. Her knickers were slick, and she was sliding off her broomstick. Looking back, Hermann was falling behind. She was hurrying to the glade. Looking back, a death's-head was gaining on her. She heard herself squeak. She was racing to the glade. Looking back, Hermann was falling behind. She tried to hold on to the broom. The death's-head was upon her. She was sliding off her broom.

Narcissa awoke, clutching at Hermann.

She noticed she had one hand around his cock. This is so symbolic it's embarrassing, she thought, as she recalled her nightmare and moved her hand.

It was her mildest nightmare since Draco had left for school, and she had been sleeping soundly until the bad dream. Draco and Hermann being here is good for me, she thought. Hermann and I can't immediately jump back into the sack after being apart for six months, even though that's what we tried to do. She stroked the hair of her son's friend. She wondered if he was still mad at her ... or maybe he hadn't been mad at her.

I awoke to Narcissa running her hand through my hair. I was a bit wary this time. I was thinking Narcissa had layers and layers of defenses. She nestled into me and smiled as she felt my erection grow. She had her hand on me, and then she had her mouth on me. Her tongue was licking me wet.

It felt comfortable that she was my friend's mother. I knew she was a loving person who took care of those close to her. But my mix of feelings was uncomfortable. I wanted to take care of her. I wanted to provide her with her daily dose of warm fuzzies. I wanted to take her and possess her. I wanted to enjoy the incredible sex that this woman could give me ... that she could give me because we liked each other.

My friend's mother stretched out next to me and opened her legs for me. With her hand guiding me, I savored the feel of her flesh parting as I entered her. I watched her face as she felt me enter her. I held her and kissed her and reassured her. I'll accept you, I thought, as her defenses went down. I'll take you, I thought, as she nibbled on me and began moving. I told my friend's mother I wanted her. I embraced her slithering soul. I listened to the delicate sounds of her coupling. I listened to my friend's mother sigh as she yielded to the affection, the intimacy, and the sex. I listened to my friend's mother whimper as she surrendered to the affection, the intimacy, and the sex of her deadly gentleman who was kind to his lady. I felt the butterfly flutters of my friend's mother as she let out a soft, moaning sigh and then slowly went limp. I held her close enough to feel her pounding heart.

It wasn't sweetness after that. Hermann thanked all the gods Narcissa had a cunt. He would have gone crazy if he couldn't fuck her.

Hermann rolled over, raised her feet towards the ceiling, and watched his prick slide in and out of her. Sensory deprived Narcissa reached up, pulled him close, and wrapped herself around him. She wanted him in her arms and between her legs. She was ever so glad she had a cunt because she wanted Hermann to fuck her. She wanted to feel every move he made. She wanted to experience her vagina stimulating his erect penis into ejaculating.

But it was not to be.

Narcissa was briefly surprised to discover she was not going to be betrayed by her animal instincts, but by petty, rational thoughts: He had been a good friend to her son ... he had returned ... he had taken care of her. She moaned and moved with the urge to procreate with him. The next she knew, Hermann lay gasping on top of her as her contractions squeezed out his limp prick. Her vagina must have stimulated his erect penis into ejaculating sometime during her frenzied coupling. She held him close enough to feel his heart pounding.

Well, that was okay, we thought, passing out in each others' arms.

Later that night, the demons returned for Narcissa. She was sleeping fitfully: tossing and turning, clutching me and then huddling on her side of the bed. When she was clutching me and half awake, I performed a fractured, English version of a lullaby and goodnight kiss my mother used on my sister. I hummed and then sang:

"Help all good witches

To get their wishes,

And never to weep

As they fall asleep."

I stroked her hair as the ancient magic worked its spell.

That's me, Hermann: mediocre at sex, good at nursery rhymes.

* * *

"Good morning, Debby," I said to the house-elf. It was eight-too-early in the morning. Draco was getting up, and Debby had coffee for me. I reluctantly untangled myself from Narcissa, shaved, showered, and joined Draco for breakfast.

Draco returned to inventory. The elves and I had become efficient at transporting, and we were quickly clearing all the rooms. Draco and I were having a beer for morning tea when Narcissa appeared.

"Honestly!" she said.

Draco and I chuckled at that word and asked her what she expected from students on holiday.

"Irresponsible behavior?" she asked us. She informed us that, like a proper lady, she would wait until lunch and then have Champagne. Draco had found some decent Champagne, hadn't he, she asked with mock anxiety.

It was half an hour before afternoon tea. The elves and I had everything moved to the storerooms. It was now a matter of deciding what to do with the empty rooms, but we couldn't make those decisions before we had the guest list. I went looking for Narcissa and found her in an upper room where she was looking out over the lake. We watched as Draco, also taking a break, walked down to the lake. I was standing behind her when she moved back into me.

Draco wandered around the shoreline of his lake.

My hands wandered around the outline of Draco's mum.

Draco found his lake lovely.

I found Draco's mum lovely.

Draco's lake rested its head against the foothills.

Draco's mum rested her head against the window sill.

Draco's lake spread out before him with its inviting wetness.

Draco's mum spread out before me with her inviting wetness.

Draco reached down and found a rock.

I reached down and found Draco's mum.

Draco enjoyed the smooth feel of his rock.

I enjoyed the smooth feel of Draco's mum.

Draco admired the shape of his rock that he had uncovered.

I admired the shape of Draco's mum that I had uncovered.

The rock moved across Draco's lovely lake before plunging into its liquid interior.

My rock moved across Draco's lovely mum before plunging into her liquid interior.

Draco's lake opened for his rock. It slid in without effort.

Draco's mum opened for my rock. It slid in without effort.

"Skip, skip, skip," went his rock. "Splash," went Draco's lake.

"Slish, slish, slish," went my rock. "Ahhhh," went Draco's mum.

Draco enjoyed every second of every long skip of the rocks into his lake's wet deep.

I enjoyed every second of every long plunge of my rock into his mum's wet deep.

Draco's lake was giving him incredible pleasure as his rocks slithered into it.

Draco's mum was giving me incredible pleasure as my rock slithered into her.

Draco's lake whispered that it was his.

Draco's mum whispered that she was mine.

Draco's lake was busy as his rocks caressed it and reached its secret places.

Draco's mum was busy as my rock caressed her and reached her secret places.

Draco's lake lost control. Draco's lake writhed on his penetrating rocks.

Draco's mum lost control. Draco's mum writhed on my penetrating rock.

When Draco was finished, the lake rippled for a while and was still. The breeze sighed over it.

When I finished, Draco's mum rippled for a while and was still. Draco's mum sighed.

I had the better deal. The lake returned to being a lake. Narcissa returned to my arms. I returned to my senses. I had lost perspective with the sheer joy of having Narcissa. Narcissa was young for a witch. While I was in her I had wild thoughts about Narcissa and me making another Narcissa. I would give Draco a stepsister. He would be almost an uncle to her. The barrier wasn't the age difference. It was the class difference.

Narcissa and I walked down to the study for tea with Narcissa glowing. I was continually amazed that Draco suspected nothing. It would be different when Theodore and Janice Nott arrived. Theodore would recognize a cat whose cream was being licked. Not to mention Janice.

Some letters had returned from our coming guests. Narcissa read one of them and laughed. Draco and I gave her an inquisitive look.

"Mr. Kurmin will be here with five guests," said Narcissa, "but three of them wish to remain anonymous. Ha. The three anonymous guests are Writhal, Selumkin, and Chyman. They're goblin executives in the goblin bank."

I committed the names to memory as the talk turned to constructing a chart that would list every guest and his or her arrival and departure times. In addition, we had to prepare meeting rooms for the seven or eight different groups.

Finally we returned to our rooms to clean up and prepare for some holiday festivities. Once behind closed doors, I reassured Narcissa that she had been wonderful this afternoon. I held her in my arms and stroked her hair while she purred.

Primitive societies have drums and tribal dances, and the Durmstrang Boys' Dorm was no exception. Narcissa, Draco, and I weren't an exception either. We chose a flat spot of lawn near the house, built a small fire, summoned the house-elves to be a rhythm section, and performed the elementary circle dance taught to all first-year Durmstrang boys. At Durmstrang, we boys danced till exhaustion every Friday after sundown. We had survived another week. After several rounds of the circle dance, Narcissa and Draco demanded I perform a kata. I said any piece of wood would be sufficient, but Narcissa insisted on a real blade. Did they have a katana? Of course. Did they have a bokken? They had everything. I chose the bokken, returned to the spot of lawn, and performed three kata. Narcissa bit her lower lip and pressed her thighs together. I had unknowingly reinforced her notion that I was a lethal gentleman. After several more rounds of the circle dance, we released the elves to prepare the shish kabob skewers. Draco and I built a bed of coals for the shish kabob and fetched the butcher paper and daggers. We would continue our faithful observance of the holiday. It's hard to tell with elves, but they appeared to relish the whole affair. The primitive rituals touched something deep in their psyche.

After dinner, Narcissa wanted to retire early. I managed another brandy with Draco before pleading exhaustion. I wanted to touch something deep in Narcissa's psyche.

When I entered the Master Bedroom, Narcissa was sitting on the bed wearing just a bathrobe. She was impatient. "I've been waiting for you."

I sat beside her, put my arm around her, and said, "Didn't you think I would try to get here as quickly as I could?"

"Draco and I had a brandy and watched the stars," I told her.

She put her head on my shoulder and said she liked it that Draco and I had some time together.

"We've been busy. None of us has had much time to see each other," I said.

She put her arms around me. This is unbelievable, I thought. I'm playing a scene from a domestic comedy on television. The family is squabbling over the holiday because they can't spend time together since they have to get the house ready for guests they don't want. What's the resolution? Ah, I remember. Hubby-san rinses wife-san off and eats her, thereby restoring 'Wa' to the household. No, wait, that was late night Japanese telly. What was the Disney Channel resolution? Some wholesome family entertainment. Perhaps if I combined the two?

"Would you like a bubble bath?" I asked Narcissa.

"We are smoky," said Narcissa. "You and your dancing around the fire."

Narcissa's defensive layers were falling away as I continued to be affectionate and gentle with her. The intimacy, the loss of control, the need for affection, it all shattered Narcissa's desperate, solitary independence. In the tub, I let her know I was fond of her and that she was an elegant and attractive lady. Narcissa was radiant as I led her back to bed, but she was still hesitant. Once in bed we lay side by side as I rubbed her temples and ran my hands through her hair, slowly calming her. Finally she accepted my affection, and she was a participating partner, returning all my attention and showing me and telling me where she wanted to be held and caressed. When Narcissa was obviously excited, I nibbled my way down her.

Narcissa did a lady-like parting of her legs to let Hermann nibble his way up one thigh and then the other. She jumped a bit and cried out like a true lady when he parted her folds and applied his tongue. She sighed and performed lady-like squirming while he took her to a nice place. She continued her nice lady-like sighs and wiggles as the nice

place became very nice. Then she became very lady-like as she held his head and pressed into him as the nice place became extremely nice. Soon she was performing extremely lady-like writhing and moaning as the nice place became divinely nice. Finally, she was having her divinely lady-like cries and spasms as the nice place became a place of ecstasy.

I stretched out on my back beside Narcissa and coaxed her over to me. I wanted more from her. How much dare I ask for?

"I think you should fuck me," I whispered to her.

Oh, yes, sweetheart, she thought. Let me show you what you mean to me. I can lavish attention on you, she thought ... covering his mouth, his nose, his eyes with kisses ... kissing her way down his chest ... noticing the tremendous erection he always got when he gave her an orgasm ... grabbing it and kissing it.

Easy, girl, he thought.

His erection got even harder as she practically devoured it. Oh, she thought. I can do what feels good to him. I can enjoy the ultimate selfishness ... giving pleasure to my lover ... capturing my partner with ecstasy.

I can be naughty.

Like my warm mouth, sweetie? Like my wet tongue? I know someplace even better. Let me put your cock at the entrance to my furry slit. Oh, that's nice. Like some warm, wet twat, honey?

Do you really like it that I'm a mature woman? Do you like watching me as I turn into a little girl? You do, don't you? Watch me, honey. Do you like it when I gasp and moan and rub my clit against you and squirm on your cock? Do you like my thighs squeezing you? Look into my adoring eyes, sweetie.

Want to watch me just fuck my little heart out for you?

I want more contact. Do you like how my breasts feel? Hold me. Oh, that feels good. It's too nice. I'm going to romp on you until you can't stand it, sweetie ... until your poor little pecker squirts, honey ... until you pump me full of goop, darling.

Narcissa was aware of her increasingly intense moves. She had her arms wrapped around him. Narcissa was sweating and grunting and thrashing. She was squeezing him with her thighs. She was crying out his name.

His English witch was coiled around him, and she was in rut. Blimey.

Narcissa lifted herself on her elbows to look at Hermann. She smiled: Watch me fuck, darling. There was a choked sob. He looked into his lover's beautiful face as her entire body gripped him in a series of contractions.

She felt him grab her in primal possession and squirt into her. Oh, yes, she thought.

"I did fuck you, didn't I?" she gasped.

"Yes," he said.

She caught her breath, hopped out of bed, hopped in the shower, and hopped back under the covers. He straggled after her into the shower and stumbled back to bed. He's getting bedraggled from taking care of me, she thought. I need to watch over him better. I want to cuddle him.

"Goodnight, Hermann," she said, snuggling around him.

"Goodnight, Narcissa," he said, happy with his loving lady, falling asleep in her arms.

* * *

It was early morning when I woke to Narcissa nuzzling me and slithering on top of me. At first I thought she was getting really demanding. That was okay. In fact, I liked it. I would try to keep her happy. Then I remembered that we were all leaving this morning. She was conforming to the primitive ritual of farewell sex. My preference was to sleep another hour and then hike up Narcissa's skirt and have her on the table between the coffee and croissants. The original breakfast of champions. Might shock Draco, though.

Earlier, Debby, the house-elf, delivering clean clothes, saw her mistress, with the agony of departure in her eyes, looking at Hermann. Debby felt weak as she saw Narcissa run her fingers through Hermann's hair, as she heard the soft murmurs of Narcissa nuzzling Hermann, and as she watched the silk nightgown move with Narcissa's writhing. Debby gazed transfixed as Narcissa enjoyed Hermann hands moving over her ... stroking her, cupping her, rubbing her, squeezing her, pleasuring her, exciting her, comforting her, claiming her. Debby caught her breath as Narcissa rolled onto her back, her nightgown sliding up, her thighs opening to reveal and offer her charms. The primal streak in elves, the streak that knew Narcissa wasn't offering just sex but herself to Hermann, welled up in Debby as Hermann entered Narcissa, as Hermann entered and possessed Narcissa.

Debby watched in reverence as Hermann performed the primeval ritual.

Debby was captured by the beauty ... the bottom of Narcissa's feet, the vee shape of Narcissa's thighs, the inviting roundness of Narcissa's hips, the crack between her mistress's hips, the pink pucker of her mistress's bum ... Hermann's shaft moving in her mistress causing a flow out of her, down her crack, over her pucker, and onto the sheet. To Debby, it was sheer, breath-taking beauty, enhanced by the adoring face and soft sighs of her mistress. Debby was entranced by Hermann's adoration of her mistress ... a consuming adoration that held her mistress captive, a patient adoration that slowly engulfed her mistress until the physical and emotional intensity was nearly painful, a demanding adoration that brought her mistress into sweaty, grunting, writhing, mindless ecstasy. Debby gasped with her mistress as her mistress's toes curled, her thighs clenched, and her pucker contracted. Her mistress's juices flowed out past Hermann's shaft, down her crack, over her pucker, and onto to the sheet. Debby was struck with awe at the sublime scene. Debby had trouble catching her breath.

Debby watched as Hermann pulled out of Narcissa, and Narcissa arranged herself on her knees with her head cradled in her arms.

Debby grew excited.

"She's your witch. She's your witch," Debby silently screamed. "You own her. You own her. Mount her. Put it in her wet cunt. Slop her up. She wants you. Take her. Make love to your witch. Make her happy. Take her. Fuck her. Screw her. Take her. Do her. Take her."

Debby the house-elf was no longer completely rational.

Debby was dancing as Narcissa moaned and pushed herself against Hermann.

Debby was hopping from one foot to another as Narcissa lost control and gyrated on Hermann's prick

Debby moaned and gaped as Narcissa moaned and grabbed the sheets, as Narcissa creamed and grabbed Hermann, as his loving Narcissa smiled like sweet cream.

"Whoo. Whee. Whoo," went Debby, doing back flips, as Narcissa's whole being was wracked with intense pleasure, as Narcissa caressed Hermann's prick with her soft, liquid convulsions.

That's what house-elves liked to see.

Debby sighed to herself as Hermann laid Narcissa on her back and prepared Narcissa for entry.

That morning Debby had seen Narcissa snap at Hermann for carefully labeling the boxes according to which room they had come from. Hermann had replied that his experience with warehouses taught him that such knowledge was always useful, and Narcissa had snapped back that he was wasting time. That evening Debby had heard Narcissa snap at Hermann because of his arrangement of meat and vegetables on the skewers. Debby knew that, deep inside, Narcissa was no longer in control of her emotions.

Now, with the bottom of her feet and herself presented, Hermann touched Narcissa deep inside. Debby was transported with reverential ecstasy as the two of them became lost in the ceremony.

Debby deemed Hermann too gentle, not demanding enough, not rough enough; but her mistress was content, hence, Debby was content.

A physically exhausted and emotionally drained elf was satisfied to see her mistress sprawl across her wizard, give him an affectionate hug and kiss, and sigh contentedly on top of him.

Later that morning, Debby watched Hermann leave for a London hotel room and Narcissa and Draco leave to visit relatives in France. Narcissa and Draco were there to bid Hermann farewell and good luck. Narcissa insisted that Draco check the cellar doors and windows one more time. As Draco disappeared, Debby saw Narcissa grab Hermann in a tight embrace and watched Hermann hold Narcissa and try to comfort her. Narcissa only released Hermann when Debby heard him promise, on his wizard's honor, to return.

* * *

The hotel was the same hotel I used last summer, but I had a much smaller room since the holidays were a busy diplomatic season. At the hotel were messages from Penelope. She had to change meeting me from noon to two o'clock. The holiday season was busy for retailers, too. I sent a return message to Penelope. I thought of sleeping the time away. I had been working hard; I had been missing sleep; and I was already missing Narcissa. I looked out my window at dreary London. It would be better to get killed at the Weasleys than to spend the holidays alone in London. I slept till one and then took a long hot soak. Penelope arrived shortly after two.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Hermann, but it's been frantic for the holidays and I've had so much to do. I'm doing inventory now for some of the stores ... more than just bookkeeping. Those books your mum brought me are a real help. Isn't your mum nice? She and your father spent a whole week helping me. The stores think I helped them make more money this year. I haven't had time to do anything for a week. My flat's a mess, and it's going to be embarrassing to take you there. I think I have undies strewn around the place. I've been nibbling all morning. Your mum warned me about holidays. Everyone liked her, and we visited all the stores I work for. I'm glad you're here. I've been so lonesome. Have you had lunch, or were you waiting for me? Can we talk here? This is a smaller room, but it's still a very good hotel. Do you have a girlfriend yet? I'll bet there are lots of pretty ones at Hogwarts. Promise me you'll close your eyes when we go to my place because I think I left my knickers in the sink and a bra on the table. It's probably too late to see a flick, and I really liked the one we saw last summer. I'm so glad you're coming with me to the Weasleys. I'm really tired of going everywhere alone."

Being familiar with Penelope, I had offered her a comfortable chair and a cup of tea, and I was letting her wind herself down.

"It's terrible of me to carry on like this, and I never do this to people, but you're so comfortable to talk to, and I think I could tell you anything and you wouldn't mind."

"It's nice listening to you," I said. For some reason, it was. Perhaps it was the thought that the usually composed Penelope would relax around me.

"I haven't had lunch yet," I said. "Is there anything that you fancy?"

Penelope didn't know whether she was hungry or not. I wondered aloud if she was tense from overwork. She didn't know but said I could feel her shoulder muscles to find out. I told her she was very tense and needed a massage. She wanted to do it properly and lay face down on the bed since the room was too small for a couch. I started to rub her back, but she decided it would be better if she took her blouse and bra off. I turned my back. She accused me of spying on her in the mirror. I told her I wasn't, but that I would close my eyes if it made her feel better. Then she was in front of me telling me that I really did have my eyes closed. Didn't I want to look at her? I said I would be a gentleman this time and peek the next time. She agreed. It was a deal.

Halfway through the massage, when she was more relaxed, I told her that the evening at the Weasleys might be tense. I described the corridor confrontation with Ron Weasley and company. She thought it was a good story. Since we were trading stories, she told me she wasn't really a virgin. She and Percy had lost control during a snogging session in the Prefect's bath. I remarked that was three years ago. She agreed it had been a long time. We went to the hotel's casual dining room, which didn't mind at all that we had a salad with our afternoon tea. Penelope said I may as well keep her company at her flat while she showered and dressed for the Weasleys.

* * *

Some time later at the Weasleys, as dinner was ending, as Molly and Fleur were handing out dessert, Bill and Charlie, who were sitting across from Penelope and me, were talking to Penelope about her work.

"His mum gave me lots of help," said a slightly tipsy Penelope to Bill and Charlie, putting her arm around me.

"Mrs. Busch is a bookkeeper?" Molly Weasley asked, as most of the table glowered at me.

Bill and Charlie seemed mildly amused. Slightly tipsy Penelope nodded yes as she laid her head on my shoulder. Bill and Charlie seemed even more amused.

"She's an accountant," I told everyone, thinking that if Penelope didn't move I was going to die happy ... sooner rather than later.

Everyone looked puzzled.

"It's a mundane profession," I said.

I talked about tax laws, interest rates, and building depreciation. Mr. Weasley listened with rapt attention. Mundane social structure was even more complicated than their gadgets.

"Your mother's a ... a mundane?" asked Hermione, like a brave Gryffindor.

Penelope sat straight up and nodded a tipsy yes to everyone.

"Yes," I said.

I gave them the story of my father meeting the mundane accountant, swearing her to secrecy about wizardry, and letting her handle the financial side of the potion business.

"Didn't you spend part of last summer at the Malfoys?" asked Charlie.

I knew where that question was going. I told them about potion patents, the arguments with Draco, and my mother visiting Mrs. Malfoy. I ended the story by saying, "It didn't bother my mother at all that Mrs. Malfoy's a witch."

Bill, Charlie, and the two twins thought that was hilarious. Hermione laughed despite herself. Penelope was smiling proudly. I could hear everyone else's brain cells rub together. Did this mean I was partly evil, or did this mean I wasn't completely evil?

I had been looking over the people at the party, trying to decide if anyone there was trustworthy. I had decided that they were all trustworthy, but I was concerned about their discretion. Other than Penelope, only Bill and Charlie seemed self contained enough for the spy business. I couldn't figure out how a dragon master could help, possibly because of my lack of imagination. I could see how someone working at the goblin bank could help, but I couldn't see his trusting me. Mr. Weasley might know someone suitable and trustworthy, but I couldn't figure out how to approach him on the matter.

From their conversation, I decided the current Ministry Head was not sound. From their glances and occasional reticence, I deduced that everyone there, except Penelope, was a member of some clandestine group. That made recruiting a spy almost impossible. They would all want to share their knowledge with the rest of the group. A secret organization to fight evil and a spy network are two different things.

Since I wasn't going to do any recruiting, I joined wholeheartedly in the card game. I stayed with apple juice and tea, even though everyone else was getting merrily tipsy. Given the provocations of Penelope, Ron, the Malfoys, and Durmstrang, I could see the fun-loving Weasley brothers merrily enticing a tipsy wizard into some trap. Someone would find my body during the spring thaw. It didn't help that merrily tipsy Penelope had her hands all over me when she asked to borrow my cloak. Penelope, Ginny, Hermione, and Fleur wanted to go for a walk. The other card players merrily watched handsome Penelope stride out the door wearing Durmstrang and then gave me a tipsy glare. I agreed with their assessment. Penelope, with her charm, competence, and understated beauty, would be my pick of the four.

After the girls returned from their walk, Penelope slumped into a chair in the corner. I quit the card game to check how she was. She said she was tired and wanted to go home, even though it was early in the evening. We made our goodbyes and left. When we reached her apartment, however, Penelope had recovered and wanted me to stay for a brandy or something else if I didn't want a brandy. She had noticed my abstinence at the Weasleys. I opted for orange juice if she had it. She brought two orange juices, had me sit on the couch, and sat down beside me.

"It's not my fault Percy doesn't visit his family," said Penelope. "If his own mother can't convince him to come home for Christmas, I don't see what I can do about it. Percy wouldn't even leave the Ministry to take me someplace. I told him we could do anything. We didn't have to see his family. He hasn't even seen my flat."

I agreed that it was unfortunate that Percy and his family weren't speaking to each other.

"And they could have been a lot nicer to you," continued Penelope. "I brought you as a friend because your mum helped me a lot. Hermione said you were making Transfiguration her best class, and Ginny said you hadn't ever hurt anyone or even been unkind to anyone at school. You did insult Ron, but you apologized and said you didn't mean it. Molly absolutely loved the present your family gave her for a Yule gift."

I said that they were a close-knit group and probably slow to accept strangers. My mother had deduced, from talking to Penelope, that a gift from our family to Mrs. Weasley would be taken as a gift from my family to everyone.

"What's wrong with Durmstrang?" said Penelope. "Everyone likes your mother and she went there. No, she didn't go there, did she? But your father went there, and your mother married your father."

I told Penelope that her logic was impeccable and her conclusions sound.

As she talked, Penelope had moved closer and closer to me on the couch. I coaxed her into my lap. This is one reason, I thought, that people at the Weasleys had not been "a lot nicer" to me.

Penelope then felt badly about her outburst. I told her that everyone there had been glad to see her. The family felt bad about Percy and had hoped that she, by some miracle, would appear with him. They were just disappointed that I wasn't Percy. It had made the evening stressful for her, but she had visited them, and she had been very nice to all of them. She had done all the right things. I told her it was perfectly normal to tell me how she felt.

I almost told her that it was perfectly normal that she felt good in my lap. Or was it good that she felt perfectly normal in my lap?

"Hermann, Mum says you're very understanding ... She says you ... you accept people as they are."

"That was considerate of your mum."

"Would you mind ... would you mind if ... if I was a little different."

I had no idea how to handle this, except thinking that I had better say something reassuring.

"I doubt if you're doing anything really bad." Boy, was that lame.

There wasn't any response from Penelope. I would have to try again. "We're all different. If I can't accept some little quirk that you have, then I'm a poor friend."

"This ... this is more than a little quirk."

I finally thought of something to say. "Are you hurting anybody?"

"No."

"Then I should be able to accept it."

Penelope made me promise not to laugh or get angry, retrieved a box of photographs from a hidden place, and showed me the first one.

It was a bondage photo of a lady in lingerie spread-eagled on a bed.

Penelope could have given me a hint about what was coming. I had to absorb this information and make some mental adjustments before I stumbled out, "Okay ... good photo ... she's not my type ... but good photo."

I gave Penelope a reassuring hug and said, "What else do you have?"

Penelope gave me a questioning look. I nodded that I was okay with this.

I wanted Penelope to show me the rest of the photographs to give me time to think. My best moment was when I realized this didn't tell me much about Penelope. Penelope might find the photos stimulating without wishing to do any such thing herself. Penelope might belong to some hardcore bondage club.

I went fishing for information. "Which photos are your favorites?"

Penelope must have taken the question for both interest and approval. She climbed back into my lap, gave me a smile and hug, and cheerfully searched through the stack for the best ones.

"Have you ever done this?" she asked me.

"No," I said. "Have you done much of this?"

Penelope hadn't tried anything yet, was just thinking about it, and didn't have a real boyfriend anyway.

"Unless you count as a boyfriend," she told me.

I told Penelope that was fine with me.

"Really?" she said.

"It's not late yet," said Penelope, "and it's Christmas Eve. Why don't you stay and have a brandy with me? You don't mind a brandy, do you? We can get comfortable. I can get you something besides a brandy if you'd rather. We can build a fire in the fireplace. I should have done that earlier. It will be nice and cozy. I've got some biscuits here, too. Just the two of us. I can open the Yule gift from your family tonight. Or I can wait until tomorrow. I can spend Christmas with you, can't I? Do you mind staying?"

"I'd love to stay," I said.

"We can build a fire, have brandy and biscuits, and spend Christmas together," I added as Penny bounced over to the fireplace.

Soon, Penny had a regular nest for us of fire, rug, pillows, brandy, and biscuits ... and her photographs. The analytical Ravenclaw had decided the most basic technique was the wrists tied together above the lady's head. She crossed her wrists above her head to show me what she meant.

Penny looked at me intently. "We can practice it ... if it doesn't bother you."

Penny was helping me get comfortable. She took off my blazer, then my tie. She admired the feel of the silk tie.

She was petting it and wrapping it around her wrists. "This feels great."

Hold it girl, I was thinking, that's my paisley, my one and only tie for festive occasions. I imagined it getting all rumpled and crumpled and twisty. Penny had a dreamy look in her eyes as she imagined the same things.

We decided we couldn't practice with Penny holding her arms above her head. It was tiring. It also meant no brandy or biscuits for Penny. It also meant no cuddling for a loveable wizard, I grumbled to myself. Girls get their priorities mixed up.

Penny arranged a broom handle and a mop handle in an x shape. I applied my wand to the paisley and I had it, right on the x cross, a triumph, a masterpiece. It was a perfect Windsor knot, complete with dimple. Earlier this evening it had taken me fifteen minutes to get that knot with dimple before going to the Weasleys. Penny gave me a 'when you've finished playing around' look. Ravenclaw witches focus on the task at hand.

While I tried getting a more suitable knot for the occasion, my scholastic sweetie summed up what she had read about bondage. There had to be a 'release word' that let the couple know that one of them wanted to stop. Bondage scenarios were negotiated and planned in advance, and it was an activity for established couples who trusted each other. It was 'playtime' for them, like a private masquerade party ... home theater with sex.

Penny was not happy with my progress. She went to get her own wand.

"This isn't fair," I complained. "Girls get lots of practice with bows and ties, laces, needles and thread."

"Afraid of competition?" said Penny unsympathetically.

We worked on getting a good tie complete with an instant release word.

"Yes, yes," said Penny as we started having some success.

"Oh no," wailed Penny as my paisley became one snarled mess.

"We almost had it! We nearly got it!" said Penny.

Penny was having a great time. I was ready to go back to my hotel room. It was clear to me that Penny was only interested in the bondage technique and that I was superfluous. I decided to be a 'nice boy' and stay until Penny and I had the bondage technique perfected, and then like all 'nice boys' who had been used I would simply leave and not come back. Thus resolved, I forgot about making advances to Penny, I quit complimenting her, and I concentrated on the bondage technique. The sooner I got out of this hell the better. Thus resolved and focused, my spells began to crack and snap. To describe myself as an irritated NEWT candidate in Charms is not modest, but it was accurate. At the periphery of my awareness, I noticed that Penny was first impressed and then alarmed. What did I care about that? She didn't care about me. The wood of the broom and mop handles was beginning to crack and splinter as I applied bindings that no witch could ever escape, that no counter spell could ever release.

"Hermann ... Hermann," I heard a quiet voice say.

"Hermann ... You're scaring me."

I returned to some semblance of rationality. Part of my mind told me that I had ruined it with Penny. I had revealed myself as a monster out of control, someone who could never be trusted. Another part of my mind told me that since Penny regarded me as a 'nice boy,' it didn't make any difference. Most of my mind, however, was sad. Penny, a nice person, had been having fun on Christmas Eve and I had spoiled everything.

"I'm sorry Penny," I said. "I ruined everything by overdoing it."

"You might feel better if I left," I said, thinking Penny couldn't want to be with me after what she had just seen.

"Why?" said Penny.

"You said you wanted to stay," said Penny, nearly in tears.

"I do want to stay," I said "but I've behaved very badly."

"You haven't done anything," said Penny, "except get a bunch of splinters in your paisley tie."

"Is that what you're upset about?" said Penny angrily. "Your dumb paisley tie?"

"I'm upset about the bindings I've been doing. I'm an out of control monster," I confessed.

"If you're upset about it, then you're not a monster," said Penny. "Besides, all you did was splinter some wood. You didn't do anything to a person. Is that what you're worried about? Doing that to a person?"

"Yes," I said, taking an easy way out.

"No," I said, being more honest than I wanted to be.

Penny tentatively put a hand on my shoulder.

"It's okay," I said. "It's over. All that's left is the embarrassment."

"Do you want to talk about it?" said Penny.

"Maybe later. I'm too embarrassed now."

Had I ruined the evening! I'd had a childish temper tantrum for no reason. I had doubly ruined everything. First, I lashed out for no good reason, and then, instead of shrugging it off, I had a massive guilt attack. Unstable Hermann.

"You feel very tense," said Penny. "I should give you a massage."

Pause.

"Hm," said Penny. "I let you give me a massage, but you don't want a massage to relax."

"Would it make you feel better if I let you?" I asked.

"Yes."

She returned with a duvet. "Lie down on this. And take your shirt off."

A few minutes later Penny asked about my visit to the Malfoys. Later she asked why I was upset. She was quiet a while. Finally, she said, "Exhausted from school, you arrive at the Malfoys. At the Malfoys you work hard to get their house ready for guests, and you cope with Mrs. Malfoy who was falling apart. This morning you arrive in London to help me recover from a hectic holiday season. This evening you went to the Weasleys where you were nice to everyone even though they treated you like a Death Eater. After the Weasleys, you consoled me because I had a rough evening with them. After that you were understanding about my fetish and were helping me cope with it while I ignored you. Finally, you were uncooperative because you felt like you were being used. Then you felt guilty because you weren't perfect."

She kissed me and said, "I'm so glad you talked to me about it."

I was relaxed enough from the massage and happy enough to be in Penny's good graces that I didn't protest her interpretation of events. This was a warning. If I lost control like this at the Malfoys next week, I could be dead, dead from torture after betraying people who trusted me and who would soon be dead themselves. I was an immature student playing spy.

The part of my mind that was still here reminded me that it was time to behave in a mature and responsible manner. I needed the practice. The here-and-now was a person who was treating me well. I rolled over on my back and thanked Penny for her kind description of my behavior.

Penny put two more logs on the fire. "It's warm in here," she said as she took off her blouse.

She was hovering over me and softly kissing me. I was holding her.

How can I break the news to Penny that our first time might not be a great experience? I wondered.

"I hear it takes a while to get used to sex," said Penny.

There are advantages to smart women.

"I've heard the same thing," I said. "They say the big problem is that boys are very eager, but girls take longer."

"Do you have any ideas?" asked Penny. "How come I talk to you like this? I don't talk to anyone else like this."

"I'll try to go slow," I said. "Maybe you can have a lot of fun before I ... before I ..."

"Before you put your prick in me," said Penny. "There I go again. How can I talk like this?"

"It's really a good thing," I said. "I like it that you talk to me."

"Honestly?" asked Penny.

"Yes," I said. "It feels like we're a couple. We'll tell each other what we want. Only, I'm shyer than you are. I'm not sure I'm as brave as you are."

"What do you want now?" asked Penny.

"Well ... you can tell me how far you feel like going by undressing," I said. "If you want me to kiss your breasts, you can take your bra off, and ..."

"There," said Penny taking her bra off.

"Okay ... and you can tell me you want me to admire your legs and put my hands on your thighs by taking your skirt off."

"There," said Penny taking her skirt off.

"Uh ... your shoes and socks," I said.

"You want to play with my toes?" asked Penny.

"I didn't think it would go quite this fast," I said.

"I get it," said Penny taking her shoes and socks off. "I take off my knickers when I want your prick in me."

"Not quite ... not so fast on that one," I said.

"You're right. I want your prick in me right now, but we should wait."

"Is there something you would like first?" I asked, trying to be suggestive. I wondered if being suggestive with Penny was a lost cause. Perhaps I should say 'do this and now do that.'

"What would you like?" asked Penny.

"Come over here, under the cloak," I said.

"This is warm. It's a nice cloak," said Penny.

I ran my fingers through Penelope's hair. "I don't do much with my hair," she said. I told her it didn't need much. I told her it was very attractive. "That feels good," she said as I stroked her hair and her temples. I kissed her on her forehead. She put her arms around me. I kissed her eyes, her nose, her lips. "You're very sweet," she said. "Do

you really like me?" I nuzzled her collarbone and neck and whispered that she was a lovely lady. "I don't think I'm very pretty," she confessed. I told her she was quite lovely, and I liked holding her. "I wish I had a fuller figure." I nuzzled my way down to her breast. "I'm not very busty," she sighed, running her hands through my hair. "I feel like I'm not offering you very much," she said.

I had to do something about Penny's self-perception. "I know," I told her. "Why don't we gift wrap you?"

Yes, Penny had ribbons left over from her Yule Time gift wrapping. We decked her out. Blue-green fit her best, and we used it discreetly in her hair and around her wrists. The greedy recipient would tear off everything else: a small, red bow for her navel, a silver ribbon for her breasts, and a wide yellow ribbon with a gold bow that replaced her knickers. She was pleased that she was my best present ever. She was even more beautiful unwrapped. And now she had a Yule Time song in her heart.

Come she told me and see your new queen

A nubile queen to see with gifts she will bring

Her finest gifts she brings to give to her king

To lay before her king the queen she will give

The queen she will be, the queen she will give

So to honor him and give him her love

When she comes

Pretty lady, you see what I have

I am a poor boy too, too poor for the queen

I have no gift to bring except for my drum

That's fit to give the queen who has her own drum

Has her own drum, I have a drum

Shall I play for you the best that I can

On your drum

Then she nodded and gave me her drum

Her hips and thighs kept time, the beat of her drum

I played my drum for her, I played on her drum

I played my best for her, my queen with her drum

Queen with her drum, me and my drum

Then she smiled at me and came with her drum

Me and my drum

We went to bed with Penny falling asleep on her pillow on her half of the bed ... prim and proper Penny.

"Goodnight, Hermann."

"Goodnight, Penny."

* * *

I awoke the next morning to find Penny fully dressed and offering me coffee, oranges, croissants, and yogurt.

"You have to show me the spy stuff this morning," she said. "We have dinner with my family this evening. Do you think we can go watch another one of those fun movies this afternoon?"

She paused. "I hope that's okay with you," she added. Another pause. "I bought coffee for you."

Penny was definitely from the business side of the Ravensclaws. I took a few sips of coffee.

"Thanks. It's good coffee. You know, it's okay to kiss your boyfriend in the morning."

She leaned over and gave me a peck on the cheek.

"That's not bad," I said, "but I wanted something more affectionate. You're safe. I'm not going to ravish you right now."

After a few tries, Penny managed a girlfriend type of kiss.

"You were wonderful last night," I told her.

She blushed. "Was I okay?"

"Wonderful," I assured her.

The morning was spent on business stuff and spy stuff.

"Your mother and father were great, absolutely wonderful," said Penny. "Your mother explained the business and legal part of bookkeeping and accounting to the shopkeepers. Your father mostly sat there and listened, except he was wearing this blazer with the Durmstrang insignia on it. I think if your mother and I had been there alone, the shopkeepers would have tried to get pushy, but your mother kept pausing to get a nod of approval from your father, and the shopkeepers kept looking at that Durmstrang insignia. Ye gods, he's intimidating, isn't he?"

"Depends," I said. "He could have hexed all their bits off in the blink of an eye, but he's always been kind to his family even when he was suffering from extreme potion poisoning. My mother adores him."

"I noticed that," said Penny.

Shortly after she met my father, my mother decided he was a wizard in chemistry. Her later discovery that he was a real wizard wasn't as significant. She realized that raising wizard kids would be difficult, but she thought her wizard was worth it.

"Tell me what else happened," I said.

"We drew up some contracts about secrecy and nondisclosure. We sealed them with spells. The shopkeepers wanted punitive spells, but your mother insisted that revelation spells were sufficient, and she was backed by your father."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Yes. Your father said the shopkeepers had hired cheap wizards and the spells were weak. He offered to break them for me if I liked. Your mother said we should let them stand for a while so that I would adopt the mannerisms of adhering to a strict code."

"That's my powerful father and foresightful mother," I said.

"They both mentioned that you could break the spells."

"It runs in the family. There's a standing joke that my father and I would make good Dark Wizards. The spells are Charms. We can do Charms."

I examined the spells on the contracts. They would be easy to break, but the goal was to break them in such a way that no one would ever know they were broken, and to add spells that no one would detect that revealed if anyone became suspicious and checked the original spells.

We turned to the spy business.

I gave Penny the same talk I gave her mother with the same result. One new addition was a spell developed for searching files developed by the German spy wizards. An agent, posing as a Durmstrang administrator, had shown it to me at Hogwarts. It was a Charm, and I felt chagrined that I had not developed it. "They told me that would be your reaction," the agent told me.

There was the assurance that Penny and her mother could quit any time they felt like it. In fact, if they ever felt too much stress, we advised them to quit. Also, refuge, complete with a new identity and training for a new profession, was available to them in Germany. Penny scoffed at this, but I emphasized that it could be a life saver, and it was a standing offer.

I did not warn Penny or her mother or myself about the most important factor: how much blood would soon be on our hands. I had no idea myself. May the gods forgive us.

It was lunch time, and of course, reasonable and rational Penny wanted a salad. Over a cucumber, I told Penny there was an excellent chance of seeing a good flick. It was Christmas, and the art cinemas would be offering counter-culture. I was right, and we saw Maltese Falcon and bought reproductions of the original posters.

That evening we showed up on the Clearwaters doorstep with Penny holding my hand. Penny insisted that we be seated next to each other at the table, and she kept eating tidbits from my plate. We talked for a while after dinner with Penny sitting on the floor beside my chair. It puzzled her younger brother, amused her mother, and infuriated her father.

* * *

Penny had been deep in thought most of the day and evening. Well, the spy business deserved a lot of thought with its risks, deceptions, and methods. When we returned to her flat, she announced she had something but didn't know what I would think about it. I sat on the couch with my arm around her, told her I would listen to anything, and prepared myself to discuss espionage.

"It's a great bondage scene," she said. "I've been thinking about what to do all day."

"Okay," I said.

I remembered that I had completely failed Penny's mum. Penny's mum had wanted to be an unfaithful wife with a spicy affair to enliven her marriage. I had ruined everything by romancing her, with the possibility of alienation of affection.

"I'll be a thief," said Penny. "You catch me and tie me up, but I offer you anything if you'll let me go."

"You'll need something to steal," I said in sudden erotic inspiration. "What about a famous piece of erotic art. Give me some paper, and I'll sketch you as you pose."

We decided that the most erotic possibility was Penny in her lingerie. I had her strike a number of suggestive poses, before I found the right one. Penny wanted to see what I had produced.

"It's a stick figure with two round dots on its chest and a filled-in triangle on its hips," said Penny, sounding disappointed.

"It's Surrealism," I said defensively. "It's worth a lot of money."

"I'll hide it in the clothes cupboard where no one will ever find it," I said. "I'm a world famous dealer in erotica, and I know how to do this."

I opened a drawer of Penny's cupboard. "Um ... I'll hide it under my valuable collection of knickers," I said.

"Is that your merchandise?" asked Penny, looking over my shoulder into her clothes cupboard. "Kinky customers."

Penny got dressed, we turned out the lights, and Penny furtively entered the bedroom, searching for the world's most valuable erotic sketch. I had Penny on the bed with her wrists tied over her head quicker than you could say 'abnormal psychology.'

"Let me loose. Let me loose." As she fought the bonds desperately, her skirt budged half way up her thighs.

"You're a thief, my dear, and you've been caught. I must admit you're a lovely thief."

"What are you going to do with me? Let me go, and I swear I'll never come back or steal anything from you."

"It's too late for that," I said, "although I might let you loose if you do something for me."

"What's that?" asked Penny.

"Well, you're very pretty."

"Not that," said Penny.

Penny struggled against her bonds, thrashing around until she was flushed and her long skirt had moved high enough for her knickers to show.

"I can always call the constables, and you can go to prison if you'd rather."

"Don't do that. Please. What do you want me to do?"

"Not much," I said as I passed my hands over her breasts. Even through the bra and blouse, I could see her nipples become erect.

"Filthy beast!" she hissed.

"Quite," I said unbuttoning her shirt. My hands barely touched her silk bra as I cupped her breasts and tweaked her nipples. As I continued the teasing, her breathing became heavier, and Penny tried to push her breasts against my hands, but I continued the provocative teasing.

"What's your name, lovely?" I asked.

"Penny."

"You have nice breasts, Penny." I continued the gentle caressing. "I dream about cute breasts like this. They're just the right size. They're kissable."

"Would you like me to kiss your breasts, Penny?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"I want you to kiss my breasts."

Penny moaned as my mouth and tongue finally released the tension that had built up from the teasing. I moved to kissing her lips. Penny was frantically pushing her tongue into my mouth. She's supposed to be resisting more than this, I thought. Oh, well, amateur theater.

I broke away to admire Penny sprawled on the bed. I ran a finger from her knee to her knickers ... first one leg, then the other. Penny looked at me, and parted her thighs.

"You have nice legs, Penny. I like your figure."

"I don't have much of a figure," said Penny sadly.

"Nonsense. You're athletic. You drive men wild."

"I bet you're pretty. I want to see all of you."

Penny bit her lower lip, pressed her legs together, and turned away from me. "No, not that."

"Yes, yes, that's what I want. That's what you have to do. Tell me I can take your knickers off and admire you."

Penny lay on her back staring at the ceiling with her legs slightly parted. "Okay."

"Okay, what?"

"Okay, you can take my knickers off and look at me."

I pushed Penny's skirt up and then slowly pulled her knickers down.

Penelope had her legs pressed together. Hermann pulled her knees up, and his gaze traveled slowly from her knees up the length of her thighs to her furry center. She blushed and felt warm. She tried to look away, but she found herself fascinated, found herself watching the person who was going to take her.

Hermann's look took in her entire body ... the face he had told her was intelligent and kind ... her shoulders he had told her were handsome ... her breasts he had said were perfect ... her hips he had said were just right ... her legs he had told her were perfectly lovely. He began spreading her knees. She tried to resist, but she felt weakness seeping through her, and she watched as he parted her legs. She knew his gaze was traveling up her opening thighs to her sex. She felt a sinking sensation as she realized her sex was wet and waiting for him.

Hermann moved up between her legs before they were fully parted. He was nestled between her warm, firm thighs. She tried not to, but she gently pressed her thighs against him. He felt good between them. She tried to fight down the thought that she was glad he was between them.

The end of his cock parted her. She gasped. He pulled out and then parted her again. She moaned and her juice ran out and made the end of his cock slick. Something deep within her made her struggle, even though it was a weak struggle. He lightly pressed his cock against her, and as she writhed, his cock sank deeper and deeper into her. She cried out at the feeling of her flesh being parted. She was trying to resist. She was trying to pull him in deeper with her legs. He continued to sink slowly into her as she moaned.

When he was all the way in, he looked into her shining, pretty eyes. There was a low moan, and she was still for a second. His cock felt her wet quivers. She looked at him. There was another moan. His wet cock felt her hard spasms.

As her spasms subsided, she became soft, and her thighs relaxed and parted. He watched her become softly lovely, and he watched her shapely thighs part. Lovely. Her eyes shone. Full access, he thought.

The bound and penetrated girl awaited her fate ... the next event. When it arrived, her wrists writhed, her heart moaned, her being slopped, and her spirit soared. Penelope's hips rocked. Her feet rose towards the ceiling. Her soul sang.

All in joy went my love riding

And with him rode my heart

Into the waiting dawn

My fine love crouched near and willing

The open girl lay before

Sweeter be this than dappled dreams

The swift dear breasts

The soft wet dawn

His hard red buck at a white junction

My joyful sigh sang before

At my hips went my love riding
Riding the soft sigh down
Into the wet new dawn
Two white legs spread wide and eager
The open portal lay before
Softer be they than whispered sighs
My open thighs
My slick wet thighs
His hard shaft at a soft valley
The hungry arrow flies below
Nestled in me went my love riding
Riding the arrow down
Into the warm wet dawn
My fine love crouched low and smiling
My sheer joy rose before
Rising with joy for his true joy
His sleek soft girl
His warm soft girl
Two white legs spread wide and eager
The lucky hunter safe within
All in joy went my love riding
And with him rode my heart
Into the waiting dawn
My fine love now still and smiling
My heart was pierced within
I spoke the release word. Penny wrapped her arms around me.
And to think, I had originally planned an exciting evening where I took Penny doggy style.

I talked prim and proper Penny into cuddling me while she slept. It wasn't difficult because she was a happy lady. She even decided that I had said the release word out of concern for her, and that was sweet. She was thinking that she might like bondage once every week or two. And on the holidays! Was I sincere when I said I liked her figure and found her irresistible?

There'll be no strings to bind your hands

Not if my love can find your heart

I was thinking there were advantages to Penny's hobby. We wouldn't have to suffer the unresolved sexual tension in popular entertainment. We could complete the implied, but denied, resolution of the kidnap victim who lusts after her abductor, the boss and secretary flirting with each other, and all those damsels in distress. While everyone else was frustrated, we could re-enact the scene and consummate the built up tension. I reassured Penny, most sincerely, that her figure was my ideal, and I reassured Penny, most sincerely, that I found her intelligence and class absolutely irresistible.

It was true.

(*) Shameful mangling of 'Little Drummer Boy' by Davis, Onorati, and Simeone

(**) Shameless parody of 'All in green went my love riding' by e. e. cummings.

(***) A version of 'Angel of the Morning' originally by Chip Taylor

Bonding and Un-bonding

Chapter 15 of 19

"How love and hate do mix."

Hermann surprised Draco by informing him that the literature in the Boys' Dorm at Durmstrang had suggestions for taking care of more than one witch. Verdammt, thought Draco, I went to the wrong school. The pamphlet was not available in English, but it had been translated into American, which Draco might be able to read.

The pamphlet, even though it served a minority, grew out of the social conditions surrounding us. We were not hunter-gatherers or nomadic shepherds. We were within, and interacting with, first-rate, industrialized, twentieth-century nations where there was equal training for both witches and wizards. There was a small surplus of women, especially among the older generations for whom the pamphlet was originally written. There was no reason for anyone to be alone or without a family. Witches were especially fond of social bonding. It was obvious that, under these conditions, the pamphlet would be witch-centric. Some amount of polygamy was as natural as the rail system that brought students to Hogwarts and the modern plumbing they expected when they arrived. It came from the same conditions that provided the rail system and the plumbing. The version in the Durmstrang Boys' Dorm made efforts to dispel our adolescent fantasies. It was not successful, but it made the effort.

Glancing at it, Draco decided it contained good information. On the other hand, it was not entirely encouraging. It began with a number of warnings:

(1) Consider how difficult it is to care for one witch. Quadruple this.

(2) Success depends mostly on the witches, not you.

(3) You will be a minority member of the household.

(4) Avoiding failure requires the impossible: Treat different witches equally and fairly.

The pamphlet then stated that a polygamous relationship could be highly rewarding for all concerned (chapter six), but the key element was that it must be rewarding for all. It continued

Get real, stud boy. There are four basic components for successful polygamy.

First, the witches must be able to live together harmoniously. Their relationship can be mutual respect and tolerance, sisterly affection, or sexual romance. Whatever its nature, if the witches cannot live together in an agreeable manner, then your life will be hell on earth. Recognizing compatible witches is covered in chapter two. Fortunately, there are a number of things a wizard can do to promote harmony. Unfortunately, there are a very large number of things a wizard can do to disrupt harmony. This topic is covered in chapter twelve, which contains essential information for any wizard involved with more than one witch.

Second, all the witches must want, desire, and need you in their individual lives, and all the witches must want, desire, and need you in their collective lives. They outnumber you. If they do not love you and care for you, then your life will be hell on earth. At the very least, they should all evince affection both verbally and physically. Help in deciding whether or not they are sincere is covered in chapter three.

Third, all of them must want this polygamous relationship with you. If one or more of them wants a monogamous relationship instead of the polygamous relationship, then the endeavor will not succeed. Determining their commitment to the relationship is covered in chapter four.

Fourth, you must genuinely like each of the witches, you must genuinely like them equally, and you must genuinely like them as a social group. This is treacherous ground. It is easy to delude yourself because of an intense attraction towards one of the witches. If you cannot relate to all of them in an equal and loving manner, then your life will become hell on earth. Guides to assessing your feelings toward the individual witches and toward the entire group are covered in chapter five.

There were chapters on finance, children, and short-term polygamous relationships. There was even a chapter on the polygamous aspects of serial monogamy. Finally, Draco found the section that even a Malfoy needed when confronted with several witches at once: sex (chapter nine). He went directly to the subsection on getting started.

Draco was embarrassed that after several months they had only gotten to light snogging. The pamphlet was reassuring about the slow pace. "Remember, relating to two witches is four times as hard as relating to one witch. In compensation, two witches can be four times as satisfying as one witch." The pamphlet went on to say that necking (American for snogging?) as a threesome could be pleasurable enough that this phase of the relationship could last quite a while, especially among younger witches and wizards. At that point, the pamphlet rambled a bit, pointing out that the verbal and physical affection, the psychological comfort that two devoted witches can deliver, could be overwhelming.

The pamphlet asked if the witches were getting impatient. "No, didn't think so." Was the wizard getting impatient? "Yes, a little." Were the three of them becoming friends? "Yes, definitely." Was the wizard feeling real affection for the witches? "Yes, yes, yes." Were the witches showing real affection and caring for the wizard? "Yes, absolutely."

Draco also discovered what he had observed but not consciously known: He only snogged Barbara and Shelly as a pair. While interacting with one witch, he and the witch acted like good friends. It might be that the witches were passionate only when the other witch was present. It might be habit. It might be that individually they were shy. It might be a way of ensuring that both witches received an equal amount of affection.

The pamphlet urged the wizard to talk issues over with his witches, to let them know what he was thinking, to find out how they felt about things, and to come to some kind of understanding.

Draco, brave soul that he was, brought the matter up the next time he, Barbara, and Shelly were alone in the Slytherin common room. He told Barbara and Shelly that he was happy about how things were. They, being intelligent women, were immediately skeptical. Draco finally got around to asking if they minded his being affectionate to them singly. No, he didn't want to stop the threesome cuddling. Really, he didn't. Honestly, if he couldn't cuddle both of them together, then an important part of his life would be missing. No, one of them shouldn't leave now. He absolutely, positively, definitely liked both of them, and he certainly, assuredly, without a doubt wanted them both to stay and hold him right now. Yes, really. His feelings would be hurt if they didn't. He was sorry he upset them. Yes, he thought that he had upset them. He didn't mean to. He only wanted to be certain that everything he did was okay with them. He regretted mentioning it and hurting their feelings. Okay, okay, their feelings weren't really hurt. No, he didn't want to change anything. It would just be some extra cuddling. He just wanted to know what they wanted. Yes, okay, he believed them when they said it was nice of him to ask. Yes, it was fine with him if Barbara and Shelly wanted some individual quality time with him. Yes, it really was fine with him. He was okay with that. That's what he was asking them about. And, no, he wasn't getting upset. And, yes, it would be nice if they brought him some tea.

The pamphlet was right about quadruple effort. The pamphlet, however, had not mentioned quadruple fear. He was apprehensive before the conversation, scared during the conversation, and terrified now that the conversation had happened. "What have I done?" he muttered to himself later. "Everything was fine. I was having a good time. Have I ruined everything?"

At noon the next day, Shelly met Draco in the hallway. Shelly checked that no one was looking, took Draco by the hand, and pulled him into an empty classroom. They stood about a foot apart, holding hands.

"This is different," said Shelly.

"Yes," said Draco.

Shelly put her arms around Draco while he stroked her hair. After a minute, Shelly and Draco walked to lunch where they joined Barbara.

Later that day, Draco left the Slytherin common room. He planned the usual. He would meet Barbara and Shelly for tea, perhaps take a walk, and then they would study together until dinner. He wondered if Hermann would join them or be studying with Hermione. Perhaps Hermann would join them later. I hope he doesn't start reeking of

Hermione, thought Draco. As he left the Slytherin common room, he met Barbara. They found a secluded spot on their way to tea, where, once again, Draco found himself holding hands with one of his girlfriends.

"Shelly was right," said Barbara. "This is different."

"It's very pleasant," said Draco.

"Yes," said Barbara, giving Draco a long, slow hug.

They walked the rest of the way to the Great Hall where they joined Shelly for tea.

* * *

The espionage was prospering, if that's the correct word. The list of financial backers who had gathered at the Malfoys for New Years was a goldmine of information. Somehow Mrs. Clearwater and her daughter had gained access to the confidential personnel records presided over by Mr. Clearwater. A sweep was made looking for people who had been recommended by the Malfoy guests. They had been placing their people as administrative assistants and auditors. A standard rule of espionage is that it's easier to suborn someone who is already in position than to place your own person in that position. The German trackers were now watching the administrative assistants and auditors to see who was vulnerable to blackmail. They could be turned into double agents.

* * *

"They could tell me what they wanted," complained Draco.

"I thought everything was getting better," I said, knowing that Draco was talking about Barbara and Shelly.

Draco stopped to look at me. "It was."

We continued our walk along the lake. It was late Friday afternoon.

"Luna and Shan are upset. I bruised them pretty hard in practice the other day. I tried to tell them I was sorry, but they thought I was careless."

Neither of us mentioned that the Potions professor was unhappy with us. We had botched every brew the first two days of this week and decided to quit before we hurt ourselves. The Potions professor had told us that Potions masters don't get time off.

We had reached the place where the forest meets the lake. A bird appeared in an open air space amidst the canopy of tree branches. With lightning reflexes, Draco downed it with a spell. I took the next bird. For a few minutes, the feathers flew.

We stopped, embarrassed. We tried to hide the evidence by using spells to fling the dead birds way out into the middle of the lake.

"I hope no one saw us," said Draco.

We had visions of the gamekeeper thundering towards us in moral outrage. What would the girls say?

"How's it going with you and Luna and Shan?" asked Draco.

"Nothing," I said. "I'm going crazy."

Draco smiled.

"Easy for you to smile," I said. "You don't have to see Luna prancing into the common room wearing the gods-know-what. Sometimes she forgets she's a beautiful girl. I am going crazy."

"I thought you had arranged individual snogging time for the girls," I said.

"It was great," said Draco, "then they started complaining that I didn't understand them ... that I didn't know what they wanted."

There was a pause before Draco said, "I don't understand them. I don't know what they want."

"What about Shan Li," asked Draco, "the Hufflepuff Prefect? Ice and steel Shan?"

"Ice and steel," I said. "A Hufflepuff Prefect."

"That's too bad," said Draco. "She's cute."

"I know," I said. "And she grows on you. She looks better all the time."

"We're all fucked up," we said in American, thinking about school, about the girls, about the birds.

Draco and I ate a lonely dinner together thinking about the harshness of life. All the girls wanted to go to the Hufflepuff common room for a game of charades. Draco declined, thinking he couldn't take any more complaints from Barbara and Shelly about not understanding them. I declined, thinking I couldn't take any more flaunting of unavailable sexuality from Luna and Shan. The girls decided we'd rather brood than be with them. Draco and I knew better. We knew the truth, that we were weak and cowardly. We had reached our limit for whining and teasing.

I mentioned the mundane game of darts to Draco. The best we could find and charm was a wooden post and some steel spikes. We hurled the spikes into the wood post with inspired ferocity.

"You could always try what's-her-name," said Draco.

I hurled the next spike through the post with enough ferocity that it ricocheted around the room.

"Wow!" said Draco, both impressed and amused.

Doubled over with laughter, Draco managed to get out, "Sorry I mentioned it. Did I hit a nerve?"

That's my good friend Draco, always by my side, always supportive.

We gathered what was left of the post with the spikes in it and proceeded to the Slytherin common room where we tossed the remnants of our game into the fireplace. As the whole mess reduced itself to cinders and slag, Draco and I demonstrated the Durmstrang circle dance to an interested audience. First the innocent first years joined us, then the aloof seventh years, and finally the whole Slytherin dorm, including the girls.

It was the dance of the damned, the cursed, the lost. We were the damned, the cursed, and the lost.

Draco and I had collapsed on the couches in the Slytherin common room. Draco was surrounded by Slytherin girls and a few boys. They wanted to know what they could

get him and whether they could dance again next Friday. Draco asked for some cold fruit juice and promised another dance next Friday. Good, I thought ... the healing power of group activities and House approval.

"I suppose you want someone to bring you an iced drink, too?" I heard. I looked up into the knowing eyes of a Slytherin witch. I had noticed her while dancing and had been trying not to stare at her.

"I can get it myself," I said mildly.

"Good," she said, "because we need to raid the kitchen for more. Do you want to come along?"

"Sure," I said. I sat up and put my feet on the floor. I paused. The long walk along the lake, the dart game, and the dancing had caught up with me.

"You need help," she said as she pulled me to my feet. Strong lady.

"I gather you're Hermann, Draco's Ravenclaw partner. I'm Pansy, Pansy Parkinson."

Pansy took a count of the drinks needed, and we were on our way to the kitchen.

"Glad to meet you Pansy. You dance well."

I didn't say she was graceful and coordinated. She wasn't. She was a little flat footed, but she danced well anyway, and I had enjoyed watching her.

"What did you and Draco do to that poor wood post?"

"We threw spikes at it."

"I could see that."

"Well, you asked," I replied. I looked at the smile dancing in her eyes.

"Perhaps you were wondering why," I said.

"No," said Pansy. "It's obviously an ancient Durmstrang custom, and it's part of your continuing corruption of Draco. Before the term is over, you'll have the entire Slytherin dorm throwing spikes at wood posts and performing tribal dances."

"It never entered my mind that you were going crazy from stress," added Pansy with a straight face and twinkling eyes.

We gathered the drinks along with some ham and biscuits. We met the Caretaker on the way back. Pansy whisked the kitchen baskets into a dark corner, announced she was a Prefect escorting a poor little lost Ravenclaw, and declared she had everything under control. We could hear the Caretaker's brain cells rub together as he looked at the poor little lost Ravenclaw. A demon cursed, cat eating, bird of prey.

"Don't worry. I'll take good care of him," said Pansy, gripping my arm so that I wouldn't get lost ... or eat a cat.

After the Caretaker had gone, Pansy asked, "Didn't you and Draco try soaking in a hot tub to relax?"

"No," I said, "it never occurred to us to take a bubble bath together. No."

"That's cheeky," said Pansy. "And to a Prefect who saved you from both the Caretaker and getting lost."

"You're right," I said. "What can I do to show my appreciation?"

"Well, you could hang around the common room, stuffing yourself with ham and biscuits and letting your muscles get sore; or you could let me give you the relaxing hot-soak that you really need."

"If I agree to the tub," I asked, "will you bring me some iced drinks?"

"Bloody, thick-headed Ravenclaw! Yes, I'll bring you some iced drinks. Are you happy now?"

"I will be," I said.

Pansy took me to the Prefect's Bath, told me I looked about Draco's size, and left to get me clean underwear and to borrow a clean robe. When she returned, I was soaking in clear warm water, not certain which soap to use.

"Ye gods," said Pansy, "don't you have any modesty? Where are the bubbles?"

"I was waiting to ask your preference," I said.

"Oh, you were certain I was going to get in the tub with you, were you? It's the faucet with the pink pearl button on your left."

I pushed the pink pearl button. "Does that mean you're getting in with me?"

"Yes, but if you were a gentlemen, you would have had the bubbles ready."

Pansy took off her robe. "Wow, Pansy," I said. "That's a great bathing costume."

"It's not a bathing costume. It's my underwear, and you shouldn't be looking."

"Let me rephrase it, then. Wow, Pansy, you look great in your underwear."

"Are you still looking!"

"No. I'm trying to say the right thing."

"Yes, of course you are. You are the very embodiment of good manners, you are."

I heard Pansy splash into the tub. No, not graceful. Pansy used a sponge to soap and rub my back until I was falling asleep, took me back to a Slytherin couch, and brought me a pillow and blankets. When I awoke it was a new day, and Draco was ready to work on Potions.

Next Friday, we told the kitchen elves that the Slytherins would be eating a light dinner, but they would want to eat again around midnight. Yes, the elves could watch the dance if they wished. They could even dance if they liked. What did we care? Hop on a table and cut loose. Express your primitive soul along with the tribal Slytherins. Once again, Pansy hauled me away from the feast to the tub. Pansy insisted it was essential for the continuance of my mental health, which was obviously fragile. Anyone could see that.

Pansy asked about Durmstrang, and I agreed that we emphasized the Dark Arts and that we went crazy in the winter exactly as Pansy had guessed. Pansy told me about living with her family. High maintenance lady, I decided. It's a good thing I wasn't going to become attracted to a snobbish Slytherin witch.

* * *

The Friday Slytherin Dance became a regular event, with the Slytherins adding musical accompaniment. Younger Slytherins were excited about it since it promoted fellowship across the age groups. The third time in the tub, I persuaded Pansy that she should be the one to get a massage. She added more bubbles and tossed her bra out of the tub.

"Why are you doing this for me?" asked Pansy as she became relaxed. "No one does anything for me."

"You must be feeling tired and unhappy," I said. "Aren't things going well?"

"You're right, I shouldn't complain," she said. "But there aren't many people here I can talk to."

"Well, maybe something's bothering you," I said.

Pansy was quiet for a while. She wasn't used to talking about herself, but the massage was having its effect. "I was home for the holidays, and Mum had me meet all these eligible sons from rich families."

There was another pause. "My purpose in life is to get married off to a rich family, but I'd rather have a life of my own."

She continued, "But I don't know what I want to do."

I asked her what she liked in school. Pansy said she had received Outstanding in Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, Herbology, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. She had received Exceeds Expectations in four other subjects.

"Ye gods, Pansy, that's great. Perhaps you're having problems deciding because you're good at everything."

It later occurred to me that Pansy could have done better in the exams, but she hadn't applied herself. Why bother? Her family wanted her to be a sexual bargaining chip.

When the massage was over, Pansy told me I had made her feel a lot better, and I helped a limp Pansy back to her dorm. She still insisted that I spend the night in the Slytherin common room. After all, wasn't I going to have breakfast with her and Draco? She brought me a pillow and blankets before stumbling off to her dorm room. I went to sleep suppressing improper urges. No, I could not become involved with a high-maintenance witch.

By the fourth dance, Pansy had found a swimming costume for me and had bought one for herself. We celebrated our new-found modesty by having a water fight.

We talked about what Pansy liked, but it was a delicate subject since under the right circumstances she would have become an Auror. A powerful one, I thought. They probably wouldn't admit her with the current suspicions about the purebloods. Pansy did let slip that she had received Auror training last summer from her Uncle Frederick. Discreet inquiries revealed that Uncle Frederick was an Auror famous for both his fieldwork and his training ability until he 'went bad' and then retired to his estate. I promised Pansy I wouldn't tell anyone, and I never did tell anyone even though it was valuable information. "I don't have to betray everyone, not all the time," I told myself.

Pansy insisted that she give me a massage. She was teasing me. "You want to get your hands on me and get in some naughty touches," she told me.

"You mean you don't want me to?"

"A gentleman wouldn't have said that," retorted Pansy.

I mangled an e. e. cummings poem:

"The gentlemen I mean are not refined.

They say whatever's on their mind.

They do whatever's in their pants.

They shake the mountains when they dance."

"Yuck!" said Pansy. "What's that? Is that some demon-cursed poetry you keep beside your polygamy book back at Durmstrang?"

"Durmstrang's not all bad. It would have made an excellent Defense Against the Dark Arts professor out of you," I told Pansy. "You could be great, you know, and Durmstrang would help you on the way to greatness."

Pansy ended the evening by kissing me on my forehead and wishing me 'sweet dreams.' "For your mental health." Actually, it did improve my mental health.

The Ravensclaws noticed that I was having Saturday breakfast with Draco and Pansy. They were puzzled. They informed me that Draco and Pansy were once a couple, and they were the King and Queen of the Purebloods. I wasn't only puzzled, I was uncomfortable. I was being friendly to Draco and Pansy at Hogwarts while working against their friends and family in the outside world. Did Pansy know I wasn't a pureblood?

* * *

"Pansy, I have to tell you something." We were alone at a table in the Great Hall.

"You have a wife and two kids in Germany."

"No."

"You have two wives and one kid in Germany. I saw that terrible book on polygamy you gave Draco."

"No."

"You're really a Dark Wizard. I knew it all along. I'll keep your secret, love. You can trust me."

"Pansy, you're not making this easy."

"Why should I? I love getting bad news."

"I've heard you take the pureblood wizard stuff seriously," I said.

Pansy looked at me. "You've been lying to me!" She stood and glared at me.

"Not really."

"Bloody hell, you haven't!" yelled Pansy in a voice that filled the room.

The Great Hall heard that I was a false friend, that I might be able to fool people for a while, that I would be found out, that I fenced with girls because I was weak, that I studied with girls because I thought I was a Casanova, that I must be a Durmstrang reject, and that everyone would be better off if I left on the next train.

How love and hate do mix, I thought, as I surreptitiously gripped my wand and said, "Does this mean it's all over between us, Snookums?"

* * *

The list of financial backers who had gathered at the Malfoys for New Years continued to be a goldmine of information. Patricia and Penelope Clearwater were now looking at real estate and identifying possible meeting places, local headquarters, and safe houses for the Death Eaters. Their success would change the nature of the game for all concerned.

I was staggered by the accomplishments of Patricia and Penelope ... arguably the two deadliest witches on the face of the earth. Their weapon of choice was intelligence.

* * *

I was in the Ravenclaw Common Room engrossed in Arithmancy derivations. It was an hour before midnight, and I had just left Draco after working on Potions with him in the Slytherin common room. Shan wandered over, and I said hello.

"I'm going on Prefect patrol," she said.

"Okay," I said, disappointed that she wasn't going to stay and talk to me.

She stood looking at me for a while before saying, "It's kind of lonely patrolling."

"I can join you in a little while," I said. "I only have a few more problems to solve."

"Oh, don't put yourself out," she said, annoyed. "I'm sure you'd find the whole thing and me boring."

She walked away. Once again, my superb social skills had the girls delighted to see me.

"I would really like to come with you," I said, catching up to her.

Shan refused to look at me.

"Are you going to hex me if I come with you?" I asked.

I was learning that if I wanted to be with Shan, I had to be responsive to small signals. Of course, I was always worried that I was bothering her. Any day now she could turn on me in anger and tell me to leave her alone. I was going crazy trying to figure out the signals ... or if she was sending any.

"No, I won't hex you," she said, still not happy

As we left the common room and entered the hallway, Shan said, "You go on patrol all the time with Draco."

Was that the problem? I wondered. If it was, then I was glad she had said something. Was it a good sign that she was jealous of Draco?

"We're usually working on joint projects in Potions," I said, trying to justify my patrolling with Draco. "I can't do much by myself. I may as well take a walk to clear my head."

"You two are the terror of the lower castle," said Shan.

"What!" I said.

"You two even scare the other Prefects."

"What?" I said.

It was an evening for eloquence.

"Are you telling me that you didn't know this?" said Shan.

"Hogwarts has never seen a more humane pair of patrollers," I protested.

Shan gave me a skeptical look.

"Really," I asserted. "Draco and I talked it over. We decided the whole thing was based on hypocrisy."

At least I had Shan's non-hostile attention now. Shan was always interested in moral issues.

"Most of the people out after hours," I said, "are couples looking for a quiet place to snog. That's what Draco is always doing."

"What about you?" asked Shan.

"Draco's getting the girls. I'm getting jealous," I said.

"Almost everyone else out after hours," I continued, "is getting food from the kitchen. Draco and I do that all the time."

"We do catch a few students doing some damage," I admitted. "We send them to Flitwick. We tell them to tell Flitwick exactly what they were doing and why. We tell them that if they don't tell Flitwick everything, we will find out about it."

"Why Flitwick? Do they tell him everything?" asked Shan.

"We thought Flitwick would be understanding," I said. "We think he listens to them, tells them they're not taking a constructive approach to their problems, and sends them to the infirmary for a calming potion."

"Do they tell him everything?" repeated Shan.

"We don't care," I told her. "Draco and I figure the kid was doing damage because of some grudge against Hogwarts, probably justified."

Shan looked scandalized.

"By the time we catch him and Flitwick talks to him, the kid has gotten over his grudge," I said defensively. "Who cares what happens after that?"

Shan looked even more scandalized. I wasn't certain she could handle the rest of the story. I walked along, lost in brooding.

"Hermann?" said Shan. "Is something wrong?"

Truth be told, I was sulking. I had been falsely accused, wrongly maligned, and simply misunderstood. This was my reward for being part of the most decent and effective wizard patrol the school had ever seen. It wasn't fair.

"Hermann," said Shan, "I want to hear the rest of it. Really."

"Draco carries vials of contraceptive potion," I said. "He hands it to all the girls, warns the couples that we will be back in about ten minutes and tells them that they should be back in their dorms."

"You give them ten minutes!" said Shan in shock.

"They have ten minutes to find a better hiding place or get back to their dorms," I said. "If they go back to their dorms, fine. If we find them again, we escort them back to their dorms. If they successfully hide from us, they have the contraceptive potion if they need it."

Shan still seemed to be in shock. Were Draco and I outrageous? We thought we were reasonable.

"Our policy on the kitchen raids," I said, "is that the students only take what they can eat ... and no alcohol."

"Didn't you catch Ron and Harry in the kitchen?" asked Shan. "That one's famous."

"I can't remember any ...," I started to say.

"Oh, yeah, I remember," I said. "It was a Saturday night, and we had finished the patrol. We went down to raid the kitchen ourselves, and Ron and some other bloke were there. Out of reflex, Draco barked out, 'Take only what you can eat and no alcohol.' They asked about butterbeer, and Draco told them they could have all the gottverdammt butterbeer they wanted. While they were leaving, Draco made some remark about their choking on it. They may have heard that. I don't know what the fuss is about. Isn't Ron a Prefect? Can't he raid the kitchen with impunity?"

Shan was giving me a wide-eyed look.

"Look," I said, "we didn't mean to startle them. We were just tired. And they were delaying our hypocrisy."

"Your hypocrisy?" asked Shan.

"Yes," I said. "Every Saturday night, Draco and I let the elves pour us a large glass of brandy. We toast the successful potions. We lament the failed brews. Draco celebrates the good times with Barbara and Shelly and broods over the latest fights. The elves are happy to see us because we stop a lot of food wastage. The kitchen raids have become a rational service the elves like to perform."

"Besides," I said, "we have a policy towards Gryffindors. A Gryffindor out of bed is on a perilous quest to save the world or elves. We're not going to interfere."

"No wonder you two scare everyone," said Shan, shaking her head in disbelief. At least Shan was smiling now.

"We've never hurt anyone!" I protested. "We've never hexed anyone. We've never taken points from anyone. Draco tries to make sure all the girls are safe. We have a rational policy about kitchen raiding."

"We call ourselves the KGB Patrol," I said, proudly.

"What?"

"Kitchen-Girls-Building Patrol," I replied.

I was tired of talking about myself. I wanted to hear about Shan. The longer I was with her, the more attractive she looked. I wanted Shan to take me to some private corner, cuddle me, and whisper her secrets to me. Perhaps it was time to take one of the risks I had to take with Shan. And perhaps it was time to make a complete fool of myself.

"You know," I said, "the more I'm around you, the more attractive you look."

There. Let her think about that one.

"How has your patrolling been?" I asked.

Shan was not to be deterred. "I'm only telling you what I've been told. It's how you appear to the other students. They say you swoop down on them with your cloaks billowing. Like two birds of prey."

"I'm just out for a walk, and I just explained that we're completely harmless," I protested again.

"Unless," I said in sudden inspiration, "you're Barbara or Shelly. Then you have to watch out for Draco. He'll snog the living daylight out of you."

I glanced to see if that got Shan's thinking on the right track. Forlorn hope.

"The students say there's no way to hide from you. You always find them," said Shan.

"Don't the Prefects know all the best spots?" I said, hoping Shan would pick up on the suggestion.

"No one can tell where you'll appear next, or when," said Shan, still trying to tell Hermann how other students saw him. "You're like two phantoms of the night."

I gave up. On what thin gruel of romance did Shan subsist? It certainly didn't include any solace for a lonely wizard.

"Okay, okay," I confessed. "We use semi-random search patterns from game theory."

"You do what!" said Shan.

Then it hit me. All this interrogation. No private conversation. I wasn't here because Shan liked me. I was here to make some boyfriend jealous. I would have been angry if I hadn't been so devastated. Shan was taking advantage of the fact that I liked her. How could I get through the rest of this torture with minimum pain?

I said, "The person I should be talking to is Luna."

"Luna?" said Shan, stopping suddenly, sounding hurt. I would have felt badly about how hurt Shan sounded, except she had been using me.

"Of course," I said. "This is exactly the right stuff for Luna and her father. I can see the headlines now: 'Random Methods Stalk Hogwarts: Gamblers Ruin Snogging Enchanters.' There can even be some quotes. 'I thought I had infinite expectations,' said one disconsolate wizard, 'but I discovered I had a finite stopping time.' 'It was a

very discontinuous transition,' agreed his pert and pretty companion, clutching a vial of potion."

"Oh," said Shan sounding relieved, "you were kidding. You're making one of your jokes."

Yeah, I thought, that's me, another joke. The pain was greatly diminished by keeping a vision of Luna in my head. Luna with her sweet smile, her bright eyes.

"This is a nice room," said Shan, taking me to a small room with windows.

"You can see the stars and moon from here, but it's raining tonight," she said.

I went to a window and looked at the dark and rainy landscape.

"Can I look, too?" asked Shan.

There were plenty of windows, but I moved so that she could join me. Easy girl, I thought, as she crowded in to look out the window. Her shoulder and hip were against me. It was impolite of me not to move and give her more room, but I didn't move. I wasn't thinking about the landscape anymore.

"I'm sorry it's raining," said Shan.

"I like rain," I said.

"Are you always so gloomy?" asked Shan, sadly, fixing me with her warm eyes.

Shan's warm eyes. She could look at me all day like that.

"It's not gloom," I said. "It's turbulence. Rain and storms are interesting."

"I can understand that," said Shan, placing her hand next to mind.

I slowly placed my hand on top of hers. Shan didn't move away. After a while we were holding hands. 'The pain, the calm, the astonishment,' as they say.

It was time to reconsider this Shan thing. Was Shan really using me to make some boyfriend jealous? Did Shan have to complete her duties first? Emotional needs came last. Thin gruel.

It was Shan who turned from the window, opened both our cloaks, and embraced me. I was thinking crazy stuff. I was thinking that beneath Shan's exterior calm was a raging pit of emotions. I was thinking that she might not show it but ice and steel Shan felt and loved very deeply. I was thinking that I would accept this. I was thinking I would take the risk and act as if this was true. Crazy stuff. I knew the unbearable pain that awaited me if she turned on me in anger at my unwanted attention.

"Hermann, you're still thinking. I can tell," said Shan. "Can't you ever stop? ... Can't I be first for you? ... For a while?"

New Year's

Chapter 16 of 19

"I can't believe this is happening. This is embarrassing. This is the best damn fun."

Chapter 16: 28 December 10:00 AM -- 5 January 8:00 PM New Year's

"Good morning, Mrs. Malfoy. Good morning, Mrs. Nott. Hello, Draco. Hello, Theo." It was a little after ten in the morning on 28 December, a Saturday. I had just left the bed and embraces of Penelope Clearwater, who was certain she was sending me into a nest of snakes and was lamenting that she hadn't prepared a protective amulet for me. I was now waiting to see who was first in line for hexing my bits off.

"Oh, Hermann, we were afraid you weren't going to come," said Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Nott, embracing me. I hugged them back since it would have looked suspicious to recoil from them. Draco and Theo pumped my arm and patted me on the back. Something's going on, I thought.

Mr. Kurmin had arrived yesterday with the three goblins, and the three goblins had claimed the Master Bedroom since no one was there. They refused to believe the story that someone from Durmstrang was staying there. Everyone assured me that we had much better rooms to offer the goblins. We decided the best approach was to be spontaneous. Mrs. Malfoy would present me and talk to the goblins. The others would stand by outside in case the goblins were obstinate. I changed into my Durmstrang cloak, and Mrs. Malfoy knocked on the door.

"Gentlemen," said Mrs. Malfoy, "let me introduce Mr. Busch from Durmstrang."

"Sirs," I said, "glad to make your acquaintance."

"We were here first."

"We didn't think you existed."

"We're not going to give our names."

"Mr. Busch was here earlier," said Mrs. Malfoy. "He cleansed the place. Surely, you have noticed that this is not a typical Death Eater room."

Mrs. Malfoy continued, "You can see he exists. He's not going to ask for your names."

"You weren't here when we arrived."

"I had business in London," I said.

The goblins were looking at the Durmstrang cloak. I could guess what was running through their minds. The German wizards had both the best record and the worst record for dealing with goblins. Throughout history, and even now, goblins were better treated in Germany than anywhere else. During the goblin-wizard wars, however, the

German wizard campaigns were nearly genocidal. Some people would strike out the 'nearly' from the description.

"I don't know what Mr. Kurmin was thinking," said Mrs. Malfoy. "I kept telling Mr. Kurmin that Mr. Busch was returning and that we had much better rooms for you."

"Would you like to see the other rooms?" added Mrs. Malfoy.

The other rooms were individually smaller, but there were three bedrooms, a nearby conference room, and a separate bath. The goblins decided that Mr. Kurmin had made a mistake in the arrangements, but we all declared it had been a temporary misunderstanding.

While moving the goblins, I managed to pull Mrs. Malfoy into a private room. "You were brilliant," I told her. Her response was to give me an affectionate embrace, blush, and dash off.

That was a strange response, I kept thinking. I puzzled over it the entire time we spent on lunch. I had asked what we were doing for the goblins' lunch. No one was sure when or if they wanted to eat. I assured them that goblins ate lunch and volunteered to ask the three upstairs their preferences. I knocked on the conference door, stood politely outside while they put their confidential papers away, and then asked about their wishes for lunch. I returned with the goblins' request for soup, biscuits, and lots of cheese, which sounded good to all of us. I got the expected preparation time from the elves, and returned to tell the goblins when they could expect lunch. Later, I was again knocking on the conference room door to deliver the lunch tray. I told the others that the goblins had expressed appreciation for our kindness. If we had been in Germany, the goblins would have eaten with us. All this time I was really thinking about Mrs. Malfoy.

When I told Mrs. Malfoy that she was brilliant, I expected either anger because of Mrs. Nott, or a neutral thank you as she disowned me because of Mrs. Nott, or a passionate thank you despite Mrs. Nott. The blushing school girl response had me baffled unless that was her response to Mrs. Nott. Was that it? Did the two of them together mean an entirely different relationship with everyone starting at the beginning or almost at the beginning? They had both been pleasant to me at lunch, and that was encouraging. Did I need to worry about this? It was tempting, and it appeared the simplest not to get involved with either of them, but then I might have to contend with two scorned women. I would have to do something appropriate in order to survive.

During lunch, Mrs. Nott began planning the meals. I paid attention, asked questions, and made some suggestions that earned me approving smiles and slight blushes. My current reading was that both women were shy but willing partners. I hoped I was not being too optimistic.

Draco and Theo hauled me away for an afternoon of riding and playing catch. I reminded myself that I had better act like a schoolboy if I didn't want to arouse their suspicions. On the other hand, my behavior was understandable. If Barbara and Shelly and Terry were here, then Draco and Theo wouldn't want to whip out their sticks and go for a ride. Wait, let me rephrase that.

* * *

Because of my interaction with the goblins and because I was the neutral stranger, it was decided that I would greet the guests, usher them around, and act as go-between. It meant I didn't have anything in particular to do, but I was always on duty. Would I do any spying? I would take the advice I gave Patricia Clearwater and do none whatsoever. My job was to learn everyone's name and the group to which they belonged. That information was too valuable to compromise by snooping.

I thought only a few of the guests would be Death Eaters. They were simply rich and powerful individuals conspiring against the public interest. I was willing to bet even money that there were similar meetings happening around the world. One of the benefits of five of us being there to help was that Mrs. Malfoy would be free for private conversations. The return for hosting this affair was tips on investment opportunities. The Malfoy and Nott families could each make a small fortune. This was one reason they were grateful for my diplomatic, even friendly, treatment of the goblins.

The monetary value of the next several days was on my mind later that night when I had retired to the Master Bedroom. I answered Janice's knock on her adjoining door, seated her with a brandy, and then did the same for Narcissa.

"I realize these meetings are very important for your families," I told both of them.

They were glad to hear that. We were all dedicated to providing a secure meeting place with no disturbances. We would all be careful and private about our feelings and relationships.

"I know this sounds soppy," I said, "but I would like to give both of you a massage. Or would you like a bath and massage?"

"But you'll put us to sleep," they both protested. "Don't you want us?"

"Of course I do," I said. "I'm being romantic about it. Besides, both of you feel very tense."

They agreed that the stress of preparation and the confrontation with the goblins had taken their toll. They soaked in the tub while I played bath attendant and started a fire in the fireplace, and then both of them stretched out on the sheet in the bed while I gave them a massage until they were both asleep. I covered them with a sheet and quilt, took a tub myself, and then went to sleep on the couch.

Before falling asleep, I wondered if I had ruined everything. They had asked if I wanted them. That was an ideal time to ask them how they wanted to arrange it. Stupid Hermann. How did Draco manage with Barbara and Shelly? I wish I had Malfoy ability.

When I awoke the next morning, Janice and Narcissa were still asleep. I joined Draco and Theo for breakfast.

Since we didn't want our guests to know we had written records, I was busy memorizing the guest list, the meeting rooms, and the arrival and departure times. The memorization and secretly watching the two women had me fatigued. An hour before afternoon tea, I pleaded the need for a lie down and went to my room. I decided a warm bath might help.

A few minutes after he had left, Janice remarked that Hermann wasn't looking well and that she should check on him. Draco and Theo remained absorbed in their Quidditch book. Narcissa smiled and nodded that it was a good idea.

What am I doing? thought Janice. I should be angry enough that I never want to see him again. When I first arrived, I listened to Narcissa talk about him, and I knew they were a couple. I didn't keep anything a secret either. It wasn't long before Narcissa was giving me her knowing looks.

It's even worse that last night we practically threw ourselves at him, and he just gave us a massage. That's carrying chivalry too far, Mr. Busch. I could tell this morning that Narcissa was hurt, too. Damn his self-control and Middle European manners.

No, I shouldn't think that. He's behaving properly in front of our sons. He wants to act properly for our guests. What do Narcissa and I want him to do, chase us around the manor? Grab us as we squeal and drop our knickers? Well ... yes.

She continued to his room. "What about your son downstairs and your husband in prison?" said an inner voice. "What are you going to do, O Potions mistress," said the inner voice, "trade secret ingredients?"

Maybe he doesn't care for me any more. Maybe he has a girlfriend. He's been polite and nice to us all day, but that doesn't mean much. Damn his continental manners, again.

With this mix of thinking she shouldn't want him, fearing he didn't want her, thanking his good behavior, raging at him for Narcissa, and cursing his lack of demonstrativeness, Janice knocked and entered.

"Hi, Janice," said Hermann, sounding pleasantly surprised. He was a bit apprehensive, though, about his bits. Perhaps they planned to serve him his bits cold ... a bit at a time ... a bit out of sight of their sons ... bitter witches.

Seeing him and hearing him, her heart and step skipped a beat. The rest of the room went out of focus. Fate could not be so cruel that he did not want her.

"We're worried about you. You look tired. Are you well?" she asked, walking toward him.

"You took good care of us last night. Narcissa and I slept very well," she said, standing before him.

"But we missed you this morning."

At that, Hermann put his arms around Janice.

There was a long sigh as he enfolded her, as she laid her head on his shoulder, as he stroked her hair, as she pressed against him. She had forgotten how good it was to be held. It occurred to her that she couldn't stand there all day. There were people waiting downstairs. But she couldn't move either. She was kissing him deeply. She thought she would never stop. She didn't want to stop.

He was holding her and kissing her ... gentle, loving, but greedy kisses. It was natural for her to unbutton her blouse. She kissed him back, glad for his attention. She wanted to take off her bra for him. He was kissing her mouth, her neck, her breasts, her lips. It was the most natural thing in the world for her to take off her knickers for him. Her skirt was around her waist, and her legs were spreading. His kisses were the gentlest she had known, but she felt the undercurrent of insistence and demand.

She was aware that he was entering her. She wanted him to enter her. She had forgotten how good it felt, how irresistible it was, how it made her move. She hadn't known she could be entered so easily. She was holding him and murmuring encouragement. He was all the way inside her ... loving and demanding. She knew he was taking her.

She was harmony: grunting, squishing, moving, giving.

Suddenly, there was a sharp piercing that went through her. She was gripping Hermann and gasping for breath.

Once again, there was the rhythmic, compelling, obscene, squishy noise. It wouldn't be the same if I weren't sloppily, noisily wet for him, thought Janice. She felt him grip her shoulders, her hips, the small of her back. She knew that he had taken her.

Janice hadn't known she could be possessed so effortlessly.

She sat beside him with a quiet stillness as she arranged her clothes and hair into something resembling a respectable mum. Their companionship permeated the room. He really does like me, she thought. Everything could be okay. The world doesn't have to be a lonely place.

"How do I look?" she asked. "I feel like the cat who's stolen all the cream."

"You look like a beautiful cat who's swiped all the cream," I said. Theo is going to kill me, I thought.

There is a type of peck on the cheek or forehead that happily married women give their husbands. It expresses more affection than a passionate smooch. Then she left to report on my good health.

I soaked in the tub a while and went to bed. I awoke to knocking on the door between Narcissa's room and mine.

"Which blouse do you prefer?" asked Narcissa, striding in with a garment in each hand.

I've given him two whole hours to rest, thought Narcissa. That should be enough for someone in good health. Janice hadn't said anything, but her attitude after visiting Hermann held no hint of concern. Janice's relaxed, serene, glowing, smug attitude had screamed volumes about his physical and mental state. Ah, yes, caring Janice had checked his health ... how considerate of motherly, concerned, caring Janice.

Back in Narcissa's room, several bras lay discarded on the bed. They had been too provocative ... I'm a married woman with a son ... or they hadn't been provocative enough ... I'm not an old maid. She had decided to dress appropriately in plain, white silk undergarments, which Hermann had always favored. I can't go waltzing in nude, the proprieties must be observed, she had thought, looking in the mirror one last time to check that the plain, white silk knickers flattered her derriere.

"And we need your help choosing the appetizers for tonight," she said, striding over to the bed.

"I've found the perfect appetizer." He had leaped out of bed and scooped her up.

"Hermann, you fool, put me down," she said. Perfectly healthy, she thought.

"Okay." He tossed her on the bed. She bounced. He bounced on top of her.

"We're supposed to be ... Mmmm ..."

"We're ... mmm ... supposed to be restrained ... mmm ... and ... discreet."

"Then don't make so much noise."

He was holding her wrists above her head, and the other arm was between her legs with his hand on her white-knickered round softness. He was devouring her lips, her mouth, her lips again. Alright.

He paused to look into her eyes. She gave him a demure smile. He returned to her lips and mouth ... this time consuming her calmly and gently. He moved down to her silk-covered breasts.

"Let me loose. You'll take all day," she said.

When he released her, she unfastened her bra, threw it across the room, and placed her wrists back above her head. He grabbed her wrists and returned to her breasts as if he were hungry for them. Narcissa moved in joy as he held her down and feasted on her.

When he noticed her knickers were sopping wet, he couldn't wait any longer. He pulled them down and off as she struggled. "Beast. Beast," she told him.

He came up between her legs, parting her thighs and sliding easily into her. Narcissa grunted and slopped as he looked into her shining eyes and pounded into her. Narcissa couldn't get enough. She wrapped her legs around him, pulled him in tight, and moved with him. They can hear me all the way downstairs, she thought. I don't care, she thought, just fuck me. I'll forgive you for Janice, sweetheart. Make love to me. My gods, I'm a little animal. How did he know I wanted to be ravished? I didn't know it myself, she thought. That was her last thought. She went blank as he romped on her. His darling undulated like a snake in rut. She squeezed the stuffing out of him.

Her lassitude soon passed. She was relaxed, serene, glowing, and smug. It must be contagious. She hopped in the shower and hopped back out. "Where'd you put my knickers, love?"

"I didn't 'put' them anywhere. I threw them across the room."

Right. She located them. They were cruddy now. Boy, had she been wet, but they had served their purpose. She hopped into her room ... the dark purple ones would do, even though they had seemed too racy before ... hopped back out and over to his bed. She put on her knickers and then sat beside him to put on her matching bra. She was starting to wonder if her animal coupling had bothered Hermann.

Hermann leaned over and gave her an adoring-husband peck on her forehead ... a seal of approval.

"You didn't tell me which blouse you liked," she accused him. Then she laughed at the look on his face and hugged him.

Narcissa thought about asking Janice if he had played rough with her, too ... decided not to.

A bit later, when Hermann came downstairs, the boys dashed outside to try the maneuvers described in the new Quidditch book while there was still some daylight.

Narcissa, feeling mellow, said, "It's great they play together." She poured the tea.

"And share," said Janice, passing the sugar.

"Sharing is good," said Narcissa, sipping her tea, surprising herself. She had always liked having Janice as a friend, but she hadn't realized she was willing to be this friendly. I'm feeling too mellow, she thought. It's his fault.

Janice thought about asking Narcissa if he had taken her effortlessly ... decided not to.

The two women moved the tea to the West lawn where they could watch the boys play. They're going to break their necks, they both thought. We won't be able to watch them play much longer, they both thought. The two women watched the boys until dark forced the end of practice ... even though neither cared for Quidditch, even though it was cold and windy outside. The boys clattered inside and down to the cellar where Draco pointed out several good brews.

* * *

We had to show Theo and his mum the Durmstrang circle dance with the elves acting as a rhythm section. While Theo, Draco, and I were practicing the dance, it occurred to everyone that the dance would be a good item for New Year's Eve. There wasn't much entertainment available since there wasn't anyone our visitors trusted. The three of us could dance, and it was simple enough for our guests to join us if they liked.

While we three boys took a break, the two women tried their own performance. It became rather interpretive. Janice and Narcissa danced and looked at me like women who had just made love and wanted to do it again. I was enjoying the performance.

"Mum!" said Draco and Theo. Draco and Theo knew Durmstrang boys didn't move like that, and they didn't want to know their mums moved like that. I knew their mums moved like that, and I had no objections at all to their dancing. Das ist ja geil. They could dance like that anytime they liked.

"We should dance on New Year's Eve, too," said Narcissa and Janice.

"No!!" said Draco and Theo and Hermann.

* * *

"Have you thought about giving up and going to bed?" said Draco.

"Perhaps I should," I said.

We had been playing cards after dinner. At least, everyone else was playing cards. As the cards passed through my hands, I had been trying to think about what to say to Narcissa and Janice. The other players' attitudes had gone from amusement to irritation to concern as I threw away winning hands and tried to play losing hands. I remembered that last night I had given the two women a speech about being rational and discreet, and this afternoon I had grabbed them and bonked them as they became available. I didn't have any excuse, and I didn't have any plans.

Luckily, everyone chalked my condition up to fatigue. I originally thought I had almost no role at all for the meetings. I was to memorize everyone, their groups, their meeting rooms, their requirements, and their arrival and departure times. I even worked out a timetable for the elves to get rest breaks. My job was to make sure that people and things arrived at the right places at the right times. All the hard work would be done by others. It slowly dawned on us that I was coordinating everything. I was 'The Butler.'

I made my apologies and went to my room. With a total lack of imagination, I decided to take a bubble bath. As I lowered myself into the water, Janice and Narcissa arrived. Completely out of ideas, I invited them to join me. Mein Gott, those two women were beautiful.

I said the only thing I could think of to say, "You're beautiful." Obviously, I was on my last legs.

"You were very sweet," said Janice, hugging me.

"Yes," said Narcissa, also hugging me. "This morning we were worried you didn't like us anymore."

"We know you're tired, Hermann," said Janice, "but we can do whatever you like."

"Narcissa's the lady of the house," said Janice. "I think she should be first tonight."

"Okay," said Narcissa, "but tomorrow night, Janice is first."

I sat there feeling totally insignificant. Naturally, those two would work everything out. What had I expected?

"I think you should let me take care of you," I said, soaping them up. I wanted them relaxed. They were amenable.

Narcissa hopped out of the tub, told me she would see me in a minute and danced into her bedroom.

"You'll come see me later, won't you?" asked Janice.

"If I possibly can," I said.

When I entered Narcissa's room, she was waiting in bed, but I could tell she was nervous. So was I. We had just agreed that I would take care of both women, and we had worked out a schedule. None of us knew how to go about this, and none of us knew if we could emotionally handle it. She was lying on her side, propped up by pillows.

"You look thoughtful," I said, lying beside her.

"This is different," she said.

I reached up and put my hand on her shoulder in a friendly, non-sexual manner. I was glad I was able to do that.

"Janice and Theo came Thursday night. It was obvious she couldn't wait till you arrived."

"I'm glad I'm considered good company," I said.

"Hmm," said Narcissa, looking at me.

I got the feeling I hadn't said quite the right thing.

"Did something happen?" I asked.

"We talked about you," she said, "while you were out trying to break your neck."

I gave her a 'tell me more' look.

"I don't know how to say this," she said, "but we decided to share."

Narcissa had a solemn air as she tossed the pillows aside and rested her head on my shoulder. Our private affair had become a social arrangement. It had become more serious for Narcissa.

"What do you think of us?" she asked.

I knew she was asking what I thought of her and Janice. "You're the one for me. You're the one I want. Janice is the one for me. Janice is the one I want."

"That doesn't make sense," said Narcissa.

"I know it doesn't, but that's the way it is."

Once again, I told myself to be patient with Narcissa ... that that was the best strategy. Then again, perhaps not. What did I know? I knew my pecker was about to burst with frustration. I had agreed to come to her bed, and now she was moody. I was tempted to hop over and see Janice. I fought that down. Something told me that would be the worst thing I could do. I consoled myself with the thought that I had agreed to care for them. That meant accepting the bad times as well as the good times. I consoled myself with the thought that she had talked to me, and that was the best thing that could happen.

What did I want? I finally admitted to myself that Narcissa was more important to me than sex. A devastating thought. If she wanted to talk and cuddle, then I would listen to her and hold her. That seemed best. Then again, perhaps not. What did I know? At any rate, I let her know I admired her, I told her I was glad she talked to me, and I held her. My pecker was still about to burst. It didn't help that a solemn, somewhat melancholy Narcissa was attractive and made me want to reassure her. I could start by showing her how sexy she was.

If I'm going to comfort Narcissa, I may as well do it well, I thought. I made certain she was comfortable with her head on my shoulder and then ran my free hand through her hair, stroking her temple. I could feel her relax. I was thinking how marvelous it was that Narcissa wanted to spend the night with her arms around me.

She moved and she was sighing and pushing her inner thigh against me. She moved again and she was giving me invitational kisses while her hand was exploring my face. My pecker moved and raised the sheet several inches. She moved and draped her hair across me.

"That does it," I told her. "You coquette, you've tempted me beyond reasonable bounds. I'm no longer responsible for my actions. The animal's loose."

"I'm going to talk dirty to you," I announced.

She smiled.

"Kiss me," I told her. "Kiss me gently."

"I like it when you lie on top of me and kiss my eyes, my nose, my mouth. I like it when you explore my face with your lips," I told her.

"You like it when I stroke your temples and run my fingers through your hair, don't you?" I said.

"Yes," she admitted.

"Deep inside, you're an affectionate lady. I know you are."

"You want to be held by someone who likes you, someone who wants you, someone who nibbles on you and whispers, 'Oh, Narcissa,' in your ear, in your pretty ear."

"You want me to run my hands over you, over your shape, over your smoothness."

"You want me to make you purr, make you purr and press against me like you're doing now."

"Look at how you're dressed: a plain, white cotton flannel nightgown ... soft, cozy ... flattering your elegant figure ... inviting me to reach under it, to feel your warm skin, your firm muscles ... to imagine you moving for me. You're shameless."

"You're tempting me to nibble my way down to between your legs ... between the thighs you've raised so the nightgown slides up ... between the legs you're parting for me."

"You want me to tease my way up your legs to your pretty, furry self, don't you?"

"Yes," she said.

It was almost quiet. My lapping tongue didn't make any noise. My watching her face as she was licked didn't make any noise. Her hips and thighs squirming didn't make any noise. Her final pink blush didn't make any noise. Her whimpering and arching into me at the end made some noise.

"Cat got your tongue?" Narcissa asked, catching her breath.

"You minx, you have me aching to make love to you, to make you happy."

"Put your hands beside your head, sweetheart. I want to hold you and mount you."

"You don't mind a little possessiveness, do you?"

"Possess me," she said.

"I love it when you spread your legs wide for me. I like the way you look at me when you spread your legs for me."

"You're beautiful."

"I like the way your lips part when you're held and mounted ... your soft gasps ... your look when you feel yourself entered."

"I like watching myself sliding into you ... sliding easily into you."

"I'm too loose," she said.

"No, you're just right. You're just right."

"If you were tight, I would get halfway in you."

"I'd get halfway in you and say, 'Oh, you're too beautiful.'"

"I'd get halfway inside you and say, 'Oh, I like you too much.'"

"And then I'd gush all over the place."

"I like it the way you are. It lets me make love to you."

"I can watch myself slide into your furry center, watch as I get wet and slick from you, watch the way you move."

"You move so nicely."

"You look so pretty."

"I like your squishy goodies, Narcissa."

"I love it between your legs."

"Move for me. Slither like the little animal you are. Yes. Like that. A big, fierce snake – held down, penetrated. Yes. Sweating ... gasping ... writhing ... smiling. Give yourself to me. Give yourself to me. Gods, I love taking you."

"Yes. Like that. Cream all over me. Squeeze me."

"You look so nice when you've been taken. You look like a little girl."

"Gods, I'm jealous. I don't want anyone else having you."

"You know what's going to happen next, don't you? You know I can't resist you."

"I'm going to look at you. I'm going to look at you and think how pretty you are. I'll think about how pretty you are, and all my sperm will load."

"Then I'll think how much I like you. I'll think how much I like you, and I won't be able to stop. I'll come inside you."

"Let me move in and out of you. Let me build up the tension. Yes, I love seeing you spread your legs wider so I can have you. I can't believe you spread your legs for me, honey."

"It's happening. I can't help it. I have to have you."

"Beautiful."

"Sweetheart."

"Oh ... I like you too much."

"I like you too much."

There was a silent pause.

"I like holding you afterwards ... nestled between your legs, your arms around me. This is good for me," I whispered in her ear.

Narcissa was running her fingers through my hair. "You beast, was that any way to talk to your lady, to your witch? And now I'm going to spend tomorrow greeting guests and dripping sperm into my knickers."

"I want you to think about that every time you see me tomorrow, Mr. I'm-so-clever-I'm-going-to-seduce-the-lady-of-the-house. I want you to remember what you've done, what you did to me, and that I'm oozing your sperm into my knickers."

Okay, I thought.

Later, after she wrapped herself around me and kissed me goodnight, I tried to justify my actions. "You brought this upon yourself with your wanton ways. It's not my fault I became an animal. I can't muster any sympathy for you."

I noticed she was sleeping the sleep of the innocent. Just like a woman not to listen.

I awoke very early in the morning with an erection. I admit I was tempted to visit Janice, and possibly that would have been better, but I didn't want to abandon Narcissa. It seemed poor form to hop from one bed to another. I nuzzled Narcissa and discovered she was awake.

Narcissa awoke to find Hermann still beside her. Did he really intend to spend the entire night with me? she wondered. Does he like me that much? He's nuzzling me. Let me kiss you back, darling. Do you have an erection? I was dreaming about you, and I'm ready for you. Yes, between my legs, honey. Anything you want. Oh, he's in. It's making me wiggle. I can't help it. Oh, my gods, it feels good. He already has me. I can't stop. I'm going to come for you, darling. Want to have me? I'm coming. Oh, Oh, gods.

Yes, love, she thought. Come inside me ... yes ... oh, sweetheart.

* * *

"Good morning, you two," said Janice, standing beside the bed and holding a tea tray.

The two women smiled at each other. I was feeling embarrassed. I wasn't used to a third party, and I hadn't visited Janice as I promised. I was also feeling left out since Janice and Narcissa were discussing what they were going to wear today. I kept telling myself that I couldn't wish for anything better and that Janice and Narcissa being friends was essential for a harmonious relationship, not to mention my survival. Something told me not to interfere. Luckily, I held my petty jealousies under control while Janice and Narcissa renewed their friendship. I even recognized that the scene was pleasant and comfortably domestic. But I was a young and selfish wizard, and I felt left out.

Janice and Narcissa wanted me to help choose their outfits. Okay, now I felt better.

* * *

The day was the expected hassle. Narcissa and Janice kept making comments about what the guests did for a living. I tried to remember and secretly write this information down. I spent the day greeting people, showing people to their rooms, coordinating the food and drink, hiding to refresh my memory from the guest list, and hiding to secretly write down additional information.

* * *

I entered the kitchen as Janice hurled a burnt crumpet into the corner. It shattered.

I'm next, I thought. Draco had mentioned that Mrs. Nott "needed help" with the afternoon tea service, but he was too busy locating the rest of the sherry to spend time in the kitchen.

"You," she said, glaring at me. Thanks, Draco, I thought.

"Where've you been?" she asked. I wondered if the real answer to that question was, "With Narcissa all night." It wasn't an answer I dared give.

"I just heard you needed help."

"You just heard. I've been down here for ages. I've been carrying trays all over this bloody manor. You just heard."

She continued, "You couldn't check on me yourself, could you? No. You're the major domo, walking around with his nose in the air, not noticing anybody."

Uh-oh, I thought. Mentioning that everyone was very busy was not going to get me out of this one.

"I'm sorry I neglected you. This is the first time I've done this type of thing. I'm probably making lots of mistakes. I should have noticed you needed help earlier."

"What are you doing now?" I asked. "I'll try to help."

She seemed to soften. Taking my life in my hands, I approached her.

"I'll go get the spare biscuits from the cellar," I told her.

In the cellar, I met Draco and Theo having a nip of brandy.

"When this is over, we're getting pissed," they told me.

"Good plan," I said.

Back in the kitchen, the elves had come out from hiding, and they and Janice had the teapots on the trays. I massaged Janice's shoulders while the elves arranged the biscuits on the trays.

"You have the best shoulders." I said.

"You could be naughtier, you know?" said Janice.

"In front of the elves?" I whispered.

"I've always thought elves were kinky. They might enjoy it," she said.

House-elves might be kinky, I thought, but I wasn't, and Janice wasn't ... was she?

I was having visions of Janice bent over the table with her skirt up and the elves cheering us on, when Narcissa stuck her head in the kitchen door, nodded approvingly at my tending Janice, saw the trays, said, "Good, it's nearly ready," and dashed back to the guests.

Janice continued, "And it wouldn't hurt you to do the naughty stuff for us."

Janice thought about what she had said and then had a sudden inspiration. "But it might hurt Narcissa and me. We would be giving up some control of our lives."

By the gods, I love intelligent women, I thought. I did a quick concealment spell, held her shoulders, and planted a kiss on her forehead. That worked. Now all I had to do was distribute the tea and biscuits while concealing the growing erection I had for my brainy sweetie.

Some sanity returned as I delivered the trays. What was I thinking? Smart, capable Janice could have me for breakfast. But I still wanted her. Where's my sense of self-preservation? I'm hopeless, I thought.

* * *

It was midnight before the manor was quiet.

I went to my room where Janice was asleep. We had sent an exhausted Janice to bed at ten. Janice was our morning person, and she would have to cope with our early rising guests while the rest of us were still looking for a clean pair of socks. I quickly showered and quietly climbed into bed to discover that Janice was awake.

I wished Janice was still asleep. I had played 'The Butler' all day, and I had no social energy left. Part of me said Janice deserved better treatment than I could provide at the moment. Part of me wondered why Janice and Narcissa couldn't believe they were the most desirable women on the face of the earth and stop pestering me about it.

"You had a hard day," said Janice.

"Uh-huh," I said as I stared at the ceiling.

"Narcissa and I thought you were going to fry Mr. Helksimer, right where he stood."

"That never occurred to me," I said. "I tried to find out what his complaint was and what we could offer him to make him happy. He calmed down a little, but I never found out what he wanted."

"How did your day go?" I asked.

"Like Narcissa's. Helped the elves with the food. Helped Draco and Theo with the trays. Spent most of the day socializing. Spent most of the day looking at you. I had to change my knickers twice."

"You're making that up. I like it, but I think you're making it up."

"Ask Narcissa. She had to change hers three times. You really got her juices going last night. And you didn't even visit me. You cad!"

"So what do I do to make it up to you?"

"I don't know. I don't know if you can. I'm all hurt and betrayed," said Janice.

"I understand," I said as I nuzzled her. "I done you wrong. Where does it hurt the most? I'll kiss it."

"My heart."

"Let's see, that's right about here, isn't it," I said as I poked a finger into her left breast.

"Ah. You barbarian."

"Oops. That's okay. I can kiss it and make you feel better."

"Are you sure you've done this before?" said Janice.

"No. Am I supposed to tickle you now?"

"Ahhhhh! Stop that!" yelled Janice.

"Do you think that's enough foreplay?" I asked.

"I'm good to go," said Janice.

The next forty five minutes were routine and sappy. I began by kissing my darling Janice, who responded like a mature woman who liked the affection. What can I say? It was fun being affectionate to Janice, to let her know how much I liked her. She returned all the affection. Janice made me feel like I was the one she wanted in her life. The lavish affection became more sensual as she offered me her breasts and I ran my hands over her. Janice was eventually moaning and asking me to take her. I told her that of course I would. I first parted Janice's legs, parted Janice's folds, and applied my tongue to Janice. Of course I enjoyed listening to Janice moan with pleasure, and of course I enjoyed feeling Janice writhe with pleasure. It's what I wanted for her. I was happy when she cried out and her thighs rhythmically pressed against me. Then I entered her. It's boring to talk about, but there's nothing like entering your lady. It's the best part. It's coming in out of the cold. I was patient after entering Janice. I waited to see what she wanted. I felt her get wetter and slicker, and I saw her face glow with pleasure. Janice wanted more sex. I entered Janice all the way and pressed against her since that would give Janice the most pleasure and it would let me last the longest. I made love to Janice as she moaned and wiggled, as she grunted and thrashed, and as she cried out and gripped me with her arms and legs. I held Janice as the tendrils of warmth and bliss and oneness spread through her. I then moved in and out of Janice. I liked it that Janice was a mature woman and that the friction was light and slick. I liked being in Janice. We celebrated the slow, steady buildup of tension and my final release. Thusly, I laid Janice.

I lay there with Janice asleep on top of me, and I briefly wondered what two highly desirable women were doing with a Durmstrang student since we had been surrounded by rich and powerful men. I had seen both Janice and Narcissa decline several advances today. They might be having affairs unknown to me, but it didn't seem likely. Just before midnight, Narcissa had asked me to escort her to her room. Narcissa had whispered to me that she would understand if I spent the entire night with Janice, and it would be proper of me to do so, but I could visit her if I wanted. There were no spells or locks on our adjoining doors.

* * *

It looked like it was going to be a rotten New Year's. Draco's and Theo's little friend, Hermann, had been banished from the Malfoy Manor because of the unfortunate incident after Christmas when little Hermann, temporarily forgetting his manners, had eaten their mums. Draco and Theo had been furious. "You go to your Durm," they told little Hermann, "and you Strang in your Durm."

My eyes popped open. It was another nightmare not to tell Narcissa. Or Janice either.

* * *

My eyes popped open again at eight when an elf brought me breakfast. Everyone was being considerate of lazy Hermann. I was at the front door of Malfoy Manor a half hour later to greet people and organize the second day of meetings.

* * *

It was shortly after lunch, and all the guests were in meetings. Forewarned by the near disaster with Janice yesterday, I went looking for Narcissa and found her in the reading room.

"You managed to get marvelous photographs of the Snitch-Birds," I said.

"It's the photographer's hard work," she replied. "At first he was frustrated, but he came to see them as a challenge."

We were standing before a large photograph of Lillith. Checking that no one was looking, we held hands. She waved her wand for a privacy spell. No one would be suspicious since we had all taken to giving ourselves short time-outs. Narcissa turned, placed one arm around my neck, and laid her head on my shoulder. I gently moved my hand across her shoulder and down her spine. I would take a minute to show my lady that I cared for her.

"I have to be careful, Narcissa. I could spend all day holding you." My nose was in her hair, she was in my arms, and the rest of the world was fading away.

It then occurred to me that I was here holding her because I was weak and poor. The powerful guests were in their meetings, discussing how they wanted to make money next year. When they left their meetings, women like Narcissa were at their beck and call. They didn't have to worry about namby-pamby cuddling.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

I was thinking that I had to cure my addiction to perceptive women.

She stepped back and gave me a sharp look. "Are you thinking about Janice? Did you have fun last night?"

Oh, wonderful, now I had to confess. "The house is full of rich and powerful men who could help you on your way to greatness."

She smiled. "You're jealous."

"Who wouldn't be?"

"Hold me," she said. Yes, she thought, the house is full of men who would like to get their hands on me. But even if I liked them, they really wanted to get their hands on the Malfoy fortune.

"Are you after my money?" she asked me.

"What!"

"Of course you're not," she said. Independent, touchy, barely-this-side-of-arrogant Hermann wouldn't be, she thought.

She thought about similar half-bloods, but Hermann hadn't had the experiences that had tempted them to the dark side. Unless Janice and I count as the dark side.

Welcome to our pits of depravity, sweetie.

* * *

It was about six in the evening, and we were having a social gathering on the lawn outside the dining room. Almost all of the business had been concluded. The guests were relaxing, and some were becoming boisterous.

Someone voiced that I was occupying Lucius Malfoy's rooms.

"Hey, does Mrs. Malfoy have a protective spell on that door between you?" asked someone.

"I never thought about it," I said without thinking.

That gormless response turned out to be the best answer.

"He never thought about it!" resounded one voice in its masculine supremacy.

"Ha. Ha. Ha," went the entire crowd of dominant males.

"He never thinks about it," sing-songed the voice of some self-satisfied womanizer.

"It must be the runt of Durmstrang," grunted a virile specimen.

"Ha. Ha. Ha," went the entire crowd of dominant males.

"Well, well, well, it's little Hermann," asserted a model of manliness.

"We don't have to worry about you and our daughters, do we," stated a father figure.

"Ha. Ha. Ha," went the entire crowd of dominant males.

It was time to play the role of an aristocrat.

"I'm glad to have provided you with some entertainment," I said, "but I'm acting as a guest in the Malfoy home. I can assure you that your wives and daughters would be safe here."

The reply didn't make much sense, but it was important that I say something. This is what associating with the Malfoys will do to a person. It was getting to the point that even I could act like a nobleman.

When I left the gathering, to leave those real men to their plotting, I saw Janice and Narcissa looking at me with concern. They had heard everything. I walked erect, and I winked at them. They smiled. They totally lit up. I had endured scorn, remained calm, and given an adequate reply that had not offended any of their guests.

For reasons known only to Janice and Narcissa, they had to show their appreciation. They took me by my arms and led me to a small room beside the kitchen where they held me in the type of soft, intimate embrace that said 'tear my clothes off and have me right here on the floor.'

'The verbal and physical affection, the psychological comfort, that two devoted witches can deliver could be overwhelming.'

I almost lost it; I came within a millimeter of ruining everything; I was very, very close to blurting out, "Let's go somewhere private and make a little Narcissa and a little Janice."

Only women of intelligence and class could have a positive response to what I had just done. I thought, once again, that I would never find another Janice or Narcissa, and this would mark the rest of my life.

Later, when they released me, I was staggering up the stairs to meet Draco and Theo.

"What's wrong, Hermann?" Draco asked.

"I think our mums kissed him for being so brilliant," said Theo.

"Is that all?" asked Draco, raising his eyebrow that someone would be affected by their mums.

"We have to get you a girlfriend, Hermann," said Draco with real concern.

"Yes," said Theo, "you've been a friend to us, but we haven't returned the favor."

"We could talk to Shan," said Draco.

"... or Luna," said Theo.

"... or Su," said Draco.

"We would even talk to you-know-who," they said.

* * *

The strategy for New Year's Eve was to have a multi-course dinner that began early and lasted until nearly midnight. To lengthen the banquet time and to provide entertainment, the five of us did a stage production.

Witcherella

A classic wizard tale performed for a group of Death Eaters and Death Symps at the Malfoy Manor

Actors

Janice Nott, Slytherin, wife of a Death Eater

Theo Nott, Slytherin, son of Janice Nott

Narcissa Malfoy, Slytherin, wife of a Death Eater

Draco Malfoy, Slytherin, son of Narcissa Malfoy

Hermann Busch, evil Durmstrang student

The Play: mime with narration

A long time ago when the world was a different place, there was a Brave Wizard (Theo) and a Good Witch (Narcissa) who loved each other deeply. As deeply as they loved each other, they loved all other witches and wizards. It could not have been otherwise. At that time there was no special place for witches and wizards. There was no place to raise a castle or create a thunderstorm without arousing the envy of their neighbors who would immediately construct a telly antenna higher than the castle or do a fireworks display noisier than the thunderstorm. Things were not working out. Something had to be done.

The Brave Wizard (Theo) and the Good Witch (Narcissa) decided to create a space that only witches and wizards could find and inhabit. This they did. There was a price, however, since the space encroached upon demon territory, and the Brave Wizard (Theo) and the Good Witch (Narcissa) had to fight the demons in one last desperate battle. But the Good Witch (Narcissa) had a brilliant idea. The Brave Wizard (Theo) and the Good Witch (Narcissa) would make a vow upon the sanctity of their marriage to fight bravely and truly, and thus they would win and survive. Before the battle, the Brave Wizard (Theo) and the Good Witch (Narcissa) had left their daughter, Witcherella, in the care of her Godparents.

At this point, the fable does a flashback to a meeting between the Brave Wizard (Theo) and the Good Witch's Sister (Janice). To punctuate the story, the Good Witch's Sister (Janice) shimmied on stage to the delight of the audience.

Definitely overacting, Mum, thought Theo.

The Good Witch (Narcissa) had been nagging the Brave Wizard (Theo) about his indifference to her family. That can be remedied, he thought. Now Witcherella had an Evil Step Brother.

With the demon world bearing down on them at the demon standard speed of thirty-seven miles an hour, it was not the appropriate time for the Brave Wizard (Theo) to engage in a lengthy discussion about how he had been improving relations with some of his in-laws. He took the vow. They won the battle, but to the brief befuddlement of the Good Witch (Narcissa), they did not survive. Luckily for him, the Brave Wizard (Theo) was already dead.

Thus ended the first half of the story.

The second half of the story begins with the Evil Step Brother (Draco) ruling justly and fairly over the lands won from the demons. Taxes were light and fair; punishment for crimes was community service; and there was peace with the neighbors. The citizens, however, hated the Evil Step Brother (Draco) because he was not Witcherella, who couldn't govern her own backyard. At the end of every parade, the Evil Step Brother's (Draco's) carriage was filled with twice his weight in rotten fruit; he was constantly being hanged in effigy; and he was the brunt of every joke about sexual inadequacy.

These experiences made the Evil Step Brother (Draco) bitter. He was that type of person.

To replace the Evil Step Brother (Draco) with the true heir, the Godparents had to make a wand for the true heir from the Willow at the End of the World and the golden thread in the horn of the True Unicorn. Of course, to get the thread the Godmother (Janice) had to remain chaste.

The Godmother (Janice) steps forward to declare her willingness to make the noble sacrifice of an unconsummated marriage. She goes into enough graphic detail and describes her missing joys with enough fervor that she works herself into an excited state and starts chasing her husband around the stage, intent on breaking her vows. The Godfather (Hermann), however, resists.

How did the Godfather (Hermann) resist the blandishments of his wife? Well, he had figured out that the 'plot requirement' was a chaste wife, and the Godmother (Janice) had a Sister (Narcissa). To punctuate the story, the Sister (Narcissa) shimmied on stage to the delight of the audience.

Definitely overacting, Mum, thought Draco.

How history does repeat itself. Nevertheless, the Godmother (Janice) remained chaste. They took a branch from the Willow at the End of the World, and they took the golden thread from the horn of the True Unicorn, who had his own opinion about the Godmother (Janice) having remained chaste. The Godparents made a wand for Witcherella (Narcissa, playing two parts).

Thus armed, Witcherella (Narcissa) snuck into the throne room where the Evil Step Brother (Draco) presided.

Thus relieved of their duty, the Godparents snuck into the room behind the throne room.

The enactment ended with audience participation. The narrator asked, "And what did Witcherella do to her Evil Step Brother when she reached the throne room?"

The crowd shouted, "She did his arse!"

At this point, for dramatic effect, Witcherella (Narcissa) hurled a thunderbolt. She can do that.

The narrator asked, "What did the Godparents do to each other behind the throne room?"

The crowd roared, "The same thing!"

There was thunderous applause as the audience congratulated themselves on a clever answer.

And now came the bestest part of the whole play.

"And what was the moral of the story?" asked the narrator.

Here was catharsis: the healing of those childhood scars. All those times in the lower grades where the teacher insisted that the story had a moral, and the student was certain the author intended no such thing. The teacher, however, was the teacher, and the student was not going to pass the course unless the student found the moral to the story.

The crowd shouted, "Evil sisters rule!"

"No," said the narrator. Bad class. Try again.

The class thought and thought. What did that teacher have in mind?

Finally, the narrator said, "Anyone?" And that was the signal.

The crowd roared, "Watch your arse!"

"Yes!" said the narrator. The class passed the test. Everyone was a good kid. The childhood scars were healed.

Such was 'Witcherella.' A timeless story with a universal moral.

* * *

The evening ended with a bonfire and group dancing that took us through midnight and into the morning hours. We distributed potions that reduced the effects of celebrating the New Year. As 'The Butler' I made certain all the guests were in their rooms and comfortable before going to my room.

It was two in the morning on New Year's day. I had watched Narcissa and Janice work all day and all night. They had appeared to float between and around the dining room where we gathered for meals and where there were always refreshments, the hallways where the guests were glad to engage them in conversation, and the study which invited people in to relax and enjoy the pleasures of the fireplace and the photographs of the Snitch-Birds.

Janice and Narcissa were fully clothed and asleep on my bed. To be honest, I must record that I found that very domestic. Six months ago I was a sentimental young wizard, and I found it touching that they had found my room comfortable. I decided to do the best for them that I could, even though it was presumptuous. Without waking them, I got them out of their clothes, into their nightgowns, and under the covers charms for the charming. I knew the proper action for me was to sleep on the couch or get them to their own beds. I wanted them to be able to keep their intimate lives private. I realized how emotionally vulnerable they were. I looked at the peaceful faces of two admirable women, climbed under the covers between them, and coaxed them into snuggling while they slept. That's me: a man of principle.

And what good did it do me to violate my principles? When I concentrated on Narcissa, it felt great. When I concentrated on Janice, it felt great. When my awareness included both of them, I hardly felt anything. It was pleasure center overload. I consoled myself with the observation that Janice and Narcissa were cuddling as if they liked it, and I couldn't untangle myself without waking them.

* * *

I awoke to discover Narcissa propped on her elbow and looking at Janice sleeping on my shoulder.

"I'm sorry," I whispered as I ran my fingers through Narcissa's hair. "I'm weak. I couldn't resist. I need to make a New Year's resolution."

"What are you talking about?" asked Narcissa looking perplexed.

"I shouldn't be sleeping with both of you," I said, "not together."

"That's what we wanted. You even tucked us in." Narcissa snuggled. "You take care of us."

Not here, I thought. Not now, I thought, as I responded to Narcissa pressing against me, as I responded to her nibbling my lips, as I responded to feeling her breasts, as I responded to running my hands up her nightgown, as I responded to finding Narcissa ready for sex. Perhaps if I take her discreetly, I thought. Not like this, I thought, as Narcissa got on her hands and knees, as she cradled her head in her arms, as I got on my knees behind her, as I lifted her nightgown, as I admired her gentle curves and elegant body. Not with Janice in the same bed, I told myself as I followed my erection into soft, elegant, eager Narcissa. Not with Janice watching, I realized, as I held Narcissa's hips and we listened to elegant Narcissa turn sloppy wet.

Janice reached over and held Narcissa's hand.

I can't believe this is happening. This is embarrassing. This is the best damn fun.

Janice watched as Hermann made love to Narcissa in a stately manner, as Narcissa sighed with pleasure, as he moved her hair so that he could see her pretty face while he had his pretty lady. Narcissa's eyes shone. She's his witch, thought Janice.

Janice watched as Narcissa began her slither, as she started to whimper, as her face softened. Is she an elegant lady even when she's squirming for Hermann? wondered Janice.

Janice watched as Narcissa's slither became intense, as her whimpers became high-pitched cries, as her face became flushed. Janice could see her friend's thighs getting wet. The liquid sound of Hermann stroking her friend contrasted with her friend's lady-like whimpers. It's beautiful, thought Janice, appreciating how sexy Narcissa was.

Narcissa gave Janice a helpless smile. Janice had never seen a woman surrender. Then Narcissa was rhythmically gripping Janice's hand. Janice knew her friend was rhythmically gripping Hermann.

"Do you want to?" Hermann asked Janice. Janice released her friend's hand and arranged herself on her knees beside Narcissa. Janice sighed as Hermann reached under her nightgown and moved his hand up her leg. She was ready from watching Narcissa.

Hermann's left hand was on Narcissa's hip, he was in Narcissa, and his right hand was fondling Janice.

The two women looked at each other: Narcissa in afterglow, Janice in foreplay.

Narcissa slid off Hermann and lay sprawled on the bed. Hermann moved behind Janice.

Narcissa saw Janice's mouth and eyes open wide as Hermann mounted her effortlessly. They're a couple, thought Narcissa. Narcissa reached over and held her friend's hand.

With heightened arousal comes a change in perspective. As Hermann took Janice it seemed perfectly natural that the two witches would hold hands as their wizard made love to them.

Narcissa watched as Janice wiggled and moaned, as Janice gasped and pressed against Hermann. I never imagined sweet Janice would be an animal, thought Narcissa, as Janice groaned and writhed and slopped. Then it changed. Janice, mouth wide open and gasping, was making high-pitched sounds from the back of her throat. Her body was slowing twisting. Narcissa had never seen anything that intimate and personal.

Narcissa watched Janice smile. Then she watched her friend's face contort. Janice clutched the sheets and Narcissa's hand.

Narcissa watched as Hermann let Janice recover. Then his lady grunted and slopped as he made love to her. Does she always make those lovely, sexy noises? wondered Narcissa.

Narcissa watched Hermann possess Janice. Narcissa felt a small pang. The next time we do this, I'm second, she thought. I want to be the one completely possessed.

A while later we were back in bed with the two of them cuddled around me.

"Thank you, Hermann."

"That was sweet, Hermann."

"You're welcome," I said. Somehow that sounded inadequate for the occasion.

Under the covers, two pairs of cold feet sought the warmth of mine.

* * *

By noon on New Year's Day, the guests were gone. As they arrived in the dining room, we had the potions, coffee, tea, juice, and pastries they required to make them fit for the new day.

* * *

Draco and Theo had been invited to spend the rest of the holidays with the other Slytherin boys at the Zabinis.

Theo approached me. "Hermann, Draco and I would like to ask you for a favor."

"Okay."

"We really have to go to the Zabinis. They'll be insulted if we don't. But could you spend some time with our mums?"

Theo continued, "Draco and I know you'd rather go back to London, but we think our mums like you, and they need some company. I described croquet to Mrs. Malfoy, and she wants to try it. We know we're asking for a big favor. I told my mum that I was thinking of asking you to stay with her, and she said she would like it, if you didn't mind."

"It's okay," I said. "Besides, we can go to London together."

"Thanks, mate. That's great. I'll go tell Draco you agreed."

Several hours later, Draco and Theo had left, grateful that I would provide their mums with some company.

* * *

The fight was occasioned by the fall of a teapot. It was later in the afternoon at the Malfoy Manor, and Janice had tripped over a rug. Before she righted herself, the pot had slid off the tray and broken on the floor. It was a plain pot that Narcissa prized from her childhood days. The quarrel began with who was the clumsiest and proceeded to who was the worst flirt with the guests. I repaired the teapot, cleaned up the spill, and waited for the pent up venom to come my direction.

"You didn't have to be pawed by those pillocks!" shrieked Janice. "You got to stand at the front door and smile at them!"

"We were being chased around the room, and all you did was have Draco and Theo deliver more cold champagne!" shouted Narcissa.

"You didn't even notice or care," they both accused me.

"You both handled yourselves very well," I said.

"Listen to him," said Janice. "You'd think we're his whores to hand to the guests."

"Not at all," I shouted back. "At least you two were treated as adults and equals. I was a servant. I played 'step and fetch it' to help you out."

My shouting turned the women's anger and attention towards me instead of each other, which I thought was a good thing.

"If you want to be angry at me for playing 'The Butler' well," I shouted, "then so be it."

Janice and Narcissa were calming down, and I was never really angry.

I struck a heroic pose:

"I face two witches

Eager to fight.

Greatly outnumbered,

I hold my ground."

Narcissa replied,

"He thinks he is brave.

He doesn't know

The peril he is in

When witches growl."

Janice said,

"We will show him what

He should have feared.

His bits are now ours;

We have him now."

I could only say,

"There's better ways

To have my bits.

You women are

The best I've seen."

"Is that an invitation?" they both said.

"Do you have to ask?" I said, holding them both.

In the midst of everything, while I was holding them, the strangest thought popped into my mind. Why were their husbands out eating death when they could be comfortably at home eating their wives, their beautiful wives, the two most desirable women on the face of the earth?

* * *

I was walking hand in hand with Janice to her room when she asked me what I was thinking. I was never able to hide anything from Janice, and I said, "I was thinking

about you and all those rich, powerful men who were here."

She looked at me. "You thought I might be attracted to them?"

I nodded yes.

She smiled. "You're jealous," she said. She thought about the men who had been at the Malfoy Manor. They had tried to paw her, but she knew that was because she was handy. They had mistresses, but they were in their twenties or younger. Their mistresses were pliable girls. They didn't have independent lives and minds of their own. They weren't respected professionals in a difficult field. They didn't have stains on their hands or several small scars on their faces from potions.

It's funny how the mind works. Everything Janice was thinking made her feel closer to Hermann. It made her feel that he had chosen her, an individual, and not some amorphous playmate. Janice could feel her nipples against her bra. We're companions, she thought, and among other things, we want to make love to each other.

I shouldn't be this serious about him, she thought. I'm thinking I don't know enough about him. How does he act when he's angry? I haven't seen him angry. Is he violent? Is he sullen? Will he talk to me?

Lost in thought, she missed what Hermann had said. "I'm sorry," she said.

"I'm glad you're a Potions mistress," Hermann repeated. "Well, I mean, some kind of professional. It doesn't have to be Potions."

"That's nice of you to say," said Janice. You're going to strip away all my defenses, you fiend, she thought.

They reached her door and stepped inside her room.

Janice held her lover in a light embrace. She let him feel her breath on his neck, her breasts on his chest, and her thighs on his legs. She was caressing him with light kisses. Hermann had his arms around her waist and shoulder. She was her own individual, and he was giving her the time she needed to become intimate. She continued with her light embrace and kisses.

Janice enjoyed her growing sense of intimacy. His hands feel good on me, she thought. It's comforting to be held. I want more. She unbuttoned her blouse and unhooked her bra. She guided Hermann's head to her breasts. Yes, she thought. He covered her left breast with kisses that were nearly teasing. He whispered in her ear that she was lovely and moved to her other breast. She was making soft sounds, and her knees were feeling weak. He moved her to the bed. She unzipped her skirt and slid it off. She was on her stomach with her legs open in invitation. He ran his hand up her thighs and over her smooth, silk-covered hips, feeling the softness and warmth within. He kissed her and told her she had the loveliest legs. He was between the thighs of his Potions mistress.

"Not many people realize the ingredients for a potion should be carefully selected and well tended. An excellent potion requires the Potions master choose the ingredients himself, to pick the best, the ones that he prefers. Then they must be cared for. They can't be neglected. The best ingredients respond to this. It's a long-term, loving relationship. The Potions master handles the ingredients himself. When he removes their wrappers, he does it with great care. He admires their beauty, their inner qualities. When they are out of their wrappers and spread out before him, he must treat them tenderly. But of course he does. Their attraction is overwhelming. He has chosen them himself, and he knows there are none finer. What he desires most is at his fingertips, and their need for his attention is tangible. He carefully prepares them. He takes the time they need. His intercourse with them is demanding and assured."

"Mature ingredients and familiar recipes are not boring to a skilled Potions master. On the contrary, they are dear to his heart and a comfort to his soul. He returns to them again and again. They sustain him. But they are not dull. They respond to him. They generate their own heat. They stir themselves. He enjoys their simmering. He brings them to the boil. He revels in their hot, steaming beauty. He owns them, they are his, and he prizes them. He will never leave them."

Janice boiled over.

When rationality returned, she realized she had been yelling and gripping the sheets. My gods, my son heard me all the way to the Zabinis ... but I don't think I squealed.

Hermann moved her damp hair away from her face and kissed her soft, sweaty skin. He told her she was a lovely lady. He held her and inhaled her, and then he told her she should roll over on her back. He wanted her legs up and her feet in the air.

She knew he was going to get the whole copulation package, that she was going to do the impregnation routine for him. She knew her moans and whimpers would encourage him and signal that he had captured her. They would draw him further into her. She knew her writhing would excite him both mentally and physically. It would not be possible for him to pull out of his squirming, yielding lady. She knew her final involuntary thrashing accompanied by her primitive gasps and grunts would cause his climax, his climax into her, into her benignly slimed and eagerly receptive self. She knew her muscle contractions would simultaneously give him pleasure and squeeze everything out of him.

Janice's legs were pressing Hermann into her, and her arms had him in an iron grip. The female was not going to release the male until the service was complete.

That is what happened. Her moans and whimpers had him bound to her. Her writhing had him driving into her. Her final thrashing, grunting, gripping, sobbing convulsions had him gushing into her ... into the welcoming, sopping wet, throbbing pit of his lady, into his proud and beautiful Janice.

Once again, she slowly regained rationality ... to find Hermann cuddling her, accepting her, bonding with her.

Oh, please, please, tell me I didn't dig my fingernails into him, she thought. What would Narcissa think? Right now, Narcissa would think that he was covered with my sweat, saliva, and juices, that he reeks of Janice Nott in heat.

"Hermann, let's take a bath together." I can check him for fingernail marks. Why aren't I more jealous? I must have been isolated too long. I like the company.

* * *

Freshly scrubbed and wearing a bathrobe and slippers, I went looking for Narcissa.

She was wearing a bathrobe and waiting in her bedroom. "Well, did Janice leave anything for me?"

I sat down beside Narcissa and stroked her hair. I had just given another woman sex, and I was giving Narcissa time to adjust.

"You took a long enough time," said Narcissa accusingly.

"I treated Janice as if she was the one and only witch in the world," I said, "as if she was the only witch for me."

I held Narcissa as she mused over what I had said.

"You would, wouldn't you?" said Narcissa. "And what about me?" she asked.

"You're the one and only witch in the world, Narcissa, the only one for me."

"That still doesn't make sense, you know?" said Narcissa, but she was relaxing and cuddling.

I noticed with relief that Narcissa wasn't angry. She was curious.

"I don't understand why you didn't bonk us both right away. We were ready. You did it last night. You took us like we were your witches, and we held hands while you had us. We both liked it."

"I'm working out how to do this," I said, giving Narcissa an affectionate hug.

Narcissa was lightly nuzzling me. I said, "I thought I should spend some individual time with you."

Narcissa ran her fingers through my hair and gave me an appraising look. "I think there's more to it than that. You want us to keep our dignity. You're letting our intimate lives be private."

"I'll never be able to keep a secret from you and Janice, will I?"

"No," said Narcissa, "we'll both know right away if you're a bad boy."

Narcissa was being demurely affectionate, as if she appreciated her intimate life being private, as if Hermann were the lover she had waited for. Her demure affection had given Hermann a tremendous erection.

"Hold my cock, Narcissa."

"Yes, dear." She reached down and wrapped her elegant fingers around the cock she wanted.

"Kiss my cock, darling. It's for you."

"Yes, sweetheart," she said. He felt Narcissa's warm mouth sliding over his cock.

She likes this, Hermann thought. He lightly stroked her hair while his darling took him deeply and her lips and tongue tended the erection he had for her.

Hermann arranged the pillows for Narcissa to lie beside him. She kissed his lips, his cheeks, his eyes. He whispered that she was his darling. He had come to realize how passionate Narcissa was, to accommodate her gentle way of having sex, and to appreciate her intense coupling.

Janice and Narcissa were warm elegance and cool elegance. Together they offered him so much and they complemented each other so well, that he was not aware of his complete absorption by them. He had taken the warm Janice, and now he would take the cool Narcissa. He would quench his remaining fire in her soft intensity.

Narcissa felt cuddled and wanted in Hermann's embrace. She liked it that he held her gently close enough that he could feel her warm breath, close enough that he could get her warm kisses, close enough that he could hear her warm sighs as his caresses warmed the soft, inner girl. The inner girl sighed as he ran his fingers across her temples and through her hair. The girl warmed as he returned her kisses and whispered that she was lovely. The warm girl pressed against him as he told her that she was his darling.

He parted her legs, placed his cock at her entrance, slid onto her, and then lay there inside her. As the shock of joining subsided, he still held her close enough to hear her sighs as she began her slither. She sighed for him as he let her sexuality blossom. Narcissa felt wanted as he absorbed her soft sighs and let her sexuality spread through her until it became an all-consuming hunger. She whimpered at the piercing pleasure, the deep and sharp pleasure that only her lover could give her. She writhed in the joy of mating with her lover. She whimpered and writhed and clutched him as she felt the terrible agony of want.

Hermann held her and looked into Narcissa's eyes as her face contorted with her agony and her whimpers became desperate cries. He enjoyed the incredible beauty of Narcissa caught in the grip of sex. Caught by his affection, she locked eyes with him and let him see her trust and her need. She wanted him to see that part of her. He looked into her eyes as she could no longer control herself, as she writhed in copulation, as he took her. She gasped, arched her back, and gripped him. He felt her soft, liquid ripples. She slowly went limp. Narcissa slowly went limp in the arms of her trusted lover.

This is private, he thought. This is intimate. No one else should see her like this. I'm selfish. I don't want anyone else seeing her like this. His affection for her traveled the length of his spine and blanked out conscious thought. Narcissa felt content as Hermann lost himself in her soft intensity.

Narcissa, covered by a sheet, was sitting up in bed with Hermann's head in her lap. He held one of her hands, while she ran her fingers through his hair. She was sliding down from her emotional and sexual high into the depths of rational companionship a relationship that nurtured her.

Part of the relationship was Janice, who was her friend. They needed entertainment after their dreary and lonesome autumn, after their hectic holiday. Hermann could take them dancing. Later, while dancing in London, they discovered they became aroused when watching Hermann dance with the other. Hermann dancing with another girl didn't affect them. Their dancing with another bloke or watching the other dance with another bloke didn't affect them. Hermann dancing with Narcissa or Janice struck the other deeply. They talked about it, giggled over being kinky, and concluded something was happening.

Returning to the present, Narcissa decided they should shower. It wasn't fair to Janice to let Hermann wander around with the satisfying, delectable, and entirely agreeable aroma of a reptile in rut. Janice had been considerate and had scrubbed Hermann instead of sending him to her with the enticing aroma of a panther in heat. On the other hand, the combination might be heady. She thought of Hermann taking her while he reeked of cat. She thought of Hermann taking Janice while he reeked of snake. It was deliciously decadent. She tingled.

But Hermann was trying to keep everything proper, Narcissa thought, and everything did seem to be working out okay. Janice and I are married, Herman is the same age as our sons, and we're a threesome, but other than that, we have a normal, healthy relationship.

Narcissa and Hermann showered.

Some time later, after Narcissa and I had composed ourselves, Janice joined us. Are those two telepathic? Both were refreshed and ready to organize the investment tips they had gathered. We decided to work in the dining room with its large table for our notes.

* * *

As we gathered our information, I pursued my latest train of thought. Why were Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Nott Death Eaters? They were rich and powerful. The rich and powerful don't go out and die, they send other people out to die for them. The rich and powerful don't buy into charismatic leaders, they buy charismatic leaders.

It struck me that Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Nott were heroic. It was the British 'fox hunting generals' system. It was 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eaton' attitude. That thought made little Hermann the lowest of the low. Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Nott had placed their lives and their freedom on the line for what they believed in. While they were prisoners of war, Hermann was seducing their wives. But their wives didn't regard them as heroes. Both women were obviously glad their husbands were gone.

The natural profile of a Death Eater was a half-blood or a mundane-born wizard. These were the people who had suffered torment from a society that didn't accept those who were different. Purebloods, raised in a wizard environment, were exempt from the early childhood traumatizing and the resulting life-long hate. Now that I thought about it, there was no reason to doubt this profile. The fact that the people suspected of being Death Eaters were pure-blood aristocrats only meant that those were the people who dared speak their minds. They had led, and still led, a protected existence away from the wrath of the mob. The hard-core, hate-filled Death Eater knew enough to be discreet.

There was no solution without understanding what was happening, only continued conflict conflict in which I was participating without knowledge or understanding. This can only end badly, I thought.

I sometimes wondered if I should get involved. The deciding factor in my involvement was conversations with Hermione Granger, although it wasn't her efforts on behalf of

house-elves that influenced me. Speaking of which, it struck me as both surprising and appropriate that Hermione Granger's first effort in the real world came directly from the heart without involving her intellect.

"Last year, Harry and I organized a Defense-Against-the-Dark-Arts club," she'd informed me one day after a study session.

I had learned to nod appreciatively and not offer any analytical comments when Hermione Granger talked about her adventures with her male friends. It was an acknowledgement that I would never have a meaningful relationship with one-way Hermione.

"There was this absolutely horrible instructor sent to Hogwarts by the Ministry," she continued.

"In Defense Against the Dark Arts?" I asked.

"Yes, she tried to keep us from learning any practical skills," said Hermione Granger.

Makes sense, I thought, sarcastically. Why would the Ministry want people defending themselves against Death Eaters? More realistically, I asked, "Why do that?"

"The Ministry was afraid of the students," she said.

My ears perked up. This was outrageous, even for the Brits.

"The Ministry thought the Hogwarts Headmaster and some students could dispose the Minister and set up their own government," said Hermione Granger.

Hermione Granger continued talking, and I continued nodding, but I didn't hear what she was saying. I was thinking that any government that could be toppled by a schoolmaster and a few students did not have the popular support of the governed. The English Ministry couldn't act effectively against the Death Eaters without the support of the people.

Remembering all the crazy things Hermione Granger had told me about some magical stone, I made additional inquiries, but everyone agreed with what Hermione Granger told me about the Brit Ministry of Magic.

Wizard England is a banana republic, I concluded. It cannot counter an international terrorist threat within its own borders. It is a danger to its neighbors. Later, whenever I had any doubts about my actions, I reminded myself of what Hermione Granger had told me about her government.

"Did the Ministry penalize students for disagreeing with the official version of events?" I asked Hermione Granger.

"Yes, they did," she replied emphatically.

"Was there torture?"

There was a pause before Hermione Granger, in a weak voice, said, "Yes."

"Death threats?"

Remembering the Dementors sent after Harry, she nodded yes.

Either she or one of her friends had been a victim, I thought. She continued with the story despite the painful memories. The brave Gryffindor was admirable in her own way. Once again, my adolescent self took over, and once again, I was wondering if a powerful witch had a soft and fluffy place for some lucky wizard. I returned to listening to her telling me about a group of adult wizards and how brave they were. They needed to be brave since, as far as I could tell, their major function was to be picked off one-by-one by the Death Eaters. I interrupted because I had one more question to ask.

"Did the Ministry organize a Goon Squad at school?"

"Yes," she said, immensely pleased by my insight and sympathy.

I had learned what I needed to know about the Brit Ministry of Magic. I let her tell me the rest of the story without interruption.

"And Harry was great," Hermione Granger concluded. She was giving me a warm, satisfied smile.

She was glad that I had listened to something important that she wanted to tell me.

It struck me that she had told me this story as part of her campaign to convince me that Harry Potter and her other friends were wonderful people. I was convinced, and I thought it an admirable quality of Hermione Granger that she was hoping I could become friends with her and her friends. But I thought the gap was too wide, the suspicions were too numerous, and the past incidents were too painful. My poor social skills were not up to the task. And my heart wasn't in it. I did not have their talent for adventure. If I became involved in one of their terrifying escapades, I would not survive to thank the gods for the experience. I still thought it warmhearted of Hermione Granger to try.

I had made my way back to the Ravenclaw Tower for tea and Arithmancy, thinking that Hermione Granger's latest story sounded realistic, unlike the first story she had told me about the magical stone. There should have been several armies surrounding Hogwarts trying to capture such a stone. She would have me believe that the faculty and her friends were so pure of heart and stoical that eternal life did not tempt them. She didn't appear to be lying, which implied someone had altered her memory a subtle method of controlling her emotions and actions. I wasn't interacting with the real Hermione Granger. Why weren't the Headmaster and the Head of her House trying to do something for her? Whatever was happening was deep and dangerous, and I didn't want any part of it.

After Hermann left, Hermione Granger sat at the table feeling puzzled. She hadn't talked to anyone else about the terrible things that had happened last year, and she hadn't realized how much it had been eating at her. Hermann had listened, had understood her side of the story, and thereby had lifted a burden from her. Hermione Granger felt such incredible relief that she didn't care that she might be talking to the enemy. When she told Hermann there had been torture, she thought for a moment that he was going to put his arms around her. But he didn't put his arms around her. He didn't ask her to study Arithmancy with him. He didn't invite her for tea in Ravenclaw Tower. He had listened carefully, made her feel great, said goodbye until the next time, and then walked away. I have half a relationship, she thought. It's like he's half a friend.

* * *

Returning to the task at hand at the Malfoy Manor, I brought up the timetable chart that we had hidden in a room by the kitchen. We produced a rough draft of the investment prospects. I was surprised by how much my knowledge of who was meeting who helped. We told the elves to take it easy, to bring us some wine and sandwiches of leftovers as we produced a more organized document.

At last, we were finished, and we were on the couch where I had my arms around Janice and Narcissa. They told me about their last several days. Janice had found the goblins down in the kitchen. Narcissa had switched the 'before's' and 'after's' for one meal. There were lots of things they had to tell me. This was my first chance to stop and listen to them, and all their experiences came tumbling out. Their pent up stress and strain vanished as their wizard listened with great interest to the ordinary events of their lives.

* * *

The next morning, after the three of us had arrived at the Nott Estate and while Janice and Narcissa were setting up the croquet hoops, I wrote an apologetic letter to my

mother explaining that she was once more invited to participate in English affairs. The investment tips culled from the social event at the Malfoy Manor offered numerous opportunities, both in England and on the continent. Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Nott wanted to include the Busch family. Besides, they appreciated my mother's business sense and wanted to include her in the discussions. My mother's reply to us was that she would be glad to see Mrs. Malfoy again, wanted to meet Mrs. Nott and see the Nott estate, and that the Busch family was willing to invest in some British and continental assets. My mother would arrive at the Nott Estate next week, and she hadn't played croquet in ages.

* * *

"Draco. Theo. Ladies and gentlemen on the train back to school. Let me pass around some 8x10 glossy photographs of my Winter Holiday at the Notts, kindly taking care of two ladies."

Das ist ja geil. = (idiomatically) That's cool. = (literally) That's horny.

Combat

Chapter 17 of 19

"Let me recount the minority position at Durmstrang that agrees with Shan Li."

Chapter 17: 23 April 2:00 PM -- 29 June 5:00 PM Combat

The emergency message arrived Wednesday just before afternoon tea. It contained the coordinates for the mobilization point. I'm becoming a Brit, I thought. I was irritated the emergency hadn't waited until after tea. I dashed to my dorm room to get my stuff.

"How many wands do you have?" asked Shan, standing in the doorway to my room.

"Three," I said. "One for each hand and a spare." Verdammt. Where did she come from? Will I never escape the eagle eyes of these girls?

Shan and I took a brisk walk to our favorite willow tree. I had been keeping an irregular schedule, including skipping meals. I would not be missed for some time. "I expect to be back by morning," I told her.

I ran through the tunnel and jumped to the mobilization point where I found four wands pointing at me. I identified myself.

The rumor among those waiting was that a German witch or wizard or both had penetrated one of the Death Eater groups or become a Death Eater's lover or had stolen documents from a Death Eater safe. Whatever might have happened, there was now a small group of German spies with information. They were surrounded by Death Eaters eager to kill them and retrieve the information. This ring of Death Eaters was surrounded by German spy wizards determined not to let that happen. I would be part of a defensive perimeter facing outwards to stop Death Eater reinforcements. I was paired with an old wizard named Emil. We were given the challenge and recognition signals. We were then assigned a street, told not to hurt any innocents, and cautioned not to let anyone past. The ring of German spies was strong enough to prevent magical entry. Any reinforcements would have to walk or fly in. Emil said he would post himself in the street to turn back innocents while I hid and watched. I positioned myself to be behind anyone stopped by Emil. Several hours before midnight, a couple strolled down the street.

"I'm sorry," said Emil, "but there's been an accident up the road."

The wizard of the couple said, "I'm sorry to hear that ...*AVADA* ..."

I hurled two, quick, one-syllable curses at the pair. I heard their spines snap. I saw the two of them and Emil collapse. I had revealed my presence. I cast a detection spell. It revealed my position, but my presence was already known. There were two people lurking in the alley across the street. I flung a counter spell and challenge sign at them. No response. I flung another counter spell at them, and then I charged towards them, hurling curses. I saw a mundane communication pole splinter, bricks disintegrate, and dust bin lids fly as I hurled my curses. I felt myself falling. I rolled and came back up. I could not use my right arm. I continued to charge and hurl curses with the wand in my left hand. I staggered into the alley, stumbled over two crumpled forms, and passed out. When I regained consciousness, I discovered that one of the forms was dead, but the other was out cold but still alive. I looked at the one still alive, knew I was going to pass out again, and knew what I had to do.

I killed her.

I regained consciousness again as I heard the scouts approach. I gave the challenge sign. They responded with the recognition sign.

"Here's another live one," I heard them say. Emil, too, had survived.

I told them to gather my right hand wand as they carted me to central command. They placed its pieces in my hand. I received emergency medical care and was taken to the haunted hut just after dawn. My attendant asked if I could make it back by myself. I stumbled, nearly passed out, and said I couldn't. He took me through the tunnel. I told him there was a good chance people would be waiting for me at the end. When we reached the end of the tunnel, I poked my head out.

"He's here," I heard Luna say.

I thanked my escort, gave him all my wands, and asked him to dispose of them. He nodded. I pleaded with him to dispose of the wands. He said he understood me the first time, it was a sacred trust, he knew what these wands had done, and these wands would not fall into the hands of Hogwarts scum. He waited a short distance into the tunnel to make certain my help had actually arrived.

I crawled out of the tunnel on two knees and one hand. "Good morning," I said to Shan and Luna.

They shrieked. I told them they couldn't do that at this end of the tunnel. I thought that was funny.

I must have been delirious. Much to the girls' dismay, I was singing.

"Looked over Hogwarts and what do I see,

Coming for to carry me home,
Two pretty angels coming for me,
Coming for to carry me home."

As they hauled me to the infirmary, I told them that I had slipped and fallen. I told them to pick out a good place for me to have fallen. Luna chose a place on a stone stairway. We all nodded agreement. I told them to agree on a coherent story. They told me they weren't stupid.

* * *

I awoke to find Pansy standing beside the hospital bed and holding my hand. I reached up and ran my fingers through her hair. I was about to tell her that I was glad to see her again and that I had missed her.

"Don't touch me!" Pansy snapped as she jumped back and ran out of the room.

* * *

When I awoke again the nurse told me it was Friday morning and I had been out for twenty-four hours. The Headmaster wanted to see me. If what people had told me was true, the old coot would want to let me know the cover story for my predicament and would want to tell me that he knew better of course. If what people had told me was true, the old coot would want to convey the information in an oblique manner. Let him do what he wants, I thought. The fact that I was alive meant that the German spy wizards had kicked Death Eater ass.

"I'm told you'll be out of here tomorrow morning despite the severe injuries from your fall," the Headmaster said.

"Shan Li and Luna Lovegood said they noticed you weren't at breakfast and wondered if something had happened to you during one of your early morning walks. The two separately identified where they had found you, a treacherous spot. I was surprised they were both able to identify the spot so precisely. Usually, the shock of finding a friend injured causes confusion. The nurse said she had never seen such extensive injuries from a fall."

I nodded. It had been a hard fall.

"I received a message from the German Minister asking me to overlook any irregularities in your recent behavior."

I cocked my head in surprise.

"This morning's newspaper has a number of articles about gang warfare involving the Death Eaters. It seems a gang attacked a Death Eater group for some unknown reason. A very tough gang, I might add. No Death Eater survived, and no body of a gang member was found. The death toll is high enough that the Ministry of Magic is worried about what is happening within our borders. Unofficially, I can tell you that it would have taken our entire corps of Aurors to do that much damage to the Death Eaters in one night."

My expression conveyed polite interest about internal British affairs. If you like our spies, I thought, you'll love our assault teams.

"Shan and Luna are reading the articles with great interest."

My expression conveyed satisfaction that Hogwarts students were taking an interest in national events.

The Headmaster passed his hand over me.

"The physical damage will heal quickly," said the Headmaster. "The mental scars from extreme actions can behave in strange ways."

"You might develop a sense of adventure," he added. He thought that was amusing.

"The profession of Potions master has never looked better," I said. "I'm even thinking of teaching at some quiet school where nothing ever happens."

White Potion Master speak with forked tongue.

"One last thing, a package arrived for you this morning," the Headmaster said, handing it to me and leaving. The package looked the right size to contain two wands.

Draco appeared after lunch. He had thoughtfully brought our books and notes. We had made steady progress throughout the year and had only two potions remaining in our independent study. We wanted to finish them this weekend, which was a month before exams began. We did not want to sit an exam immediately after a psycho-active potion accident. Draco had put in enough extra effort that it appeared my injuries would not delay the potion work. Barbara and Shelly arrived to take Draco to tea. They knew where he would be.

As they were leaving, Shan and Luna arrived each carrying one small flower and a teapot. I threatened to eat the bloody flowers if they didn't supply some bloody biscuits.

"With gifts, it's the thought that counts," they said, "and the manner in which the gift is received."

Under their combined glares, I agreed to accept the tea and not eat the flowers. They told me their version of finding me sprawled on the stone steps after my fall, and then in a jumbled and disjoint manner, each of them told me what she had been doing the last two days since I had gone down the hole. I was surprised by how pleasant it was to hear about the ordinary details of their lives.

It must have been the medication. I kept thinking how their different hair would feel in my hands and face. I thought about their legs. It must have been powerful medication. I wondered how their faces would look in the midst of passion. I decided that for today's menu I would like Luna before dinner and Shan before bedtime. Tomorrow was Saturday. I could get an earlier start and be more leisurely. What about Shan before breakfast and Luna before dinner? Alas, no such thing was going to occur.

As they say in the Durmstrang Boys' Dorm, "No nooky for Batman."

The nurse insisted they leave, which I considered a mistake. Girls have more healing power than potions. I was left to the melancholy contemplation of the huge difference between my reality and my fantasies. I questioned the purity of the Hogwarts potions. I should not have been having those thoughts about Shan and Luna.

The newspapers Luna and Shan brought me were full of speculation: "One Hundred Deaths in Gang War." Most articles were human interest stories: "Widow's Flower Bed Trampled," "They Stupefied My Husband and Our Kids Didn't Notice," and "Our Family Hid in Terror."

The note with the wands, when decoded, had an accurate report. The information stolen from a Death Eater cell had remained in the hands of the German spy wizards. The German casualties were eight dead and eleven injured. The German spies were in no position to take prisoners, and the Death Eater toll was forty-nine dead. The Death Eaters were caught by surprise, and they swaggered in thinking that only they would dare use deadly curses.

There was one more piece of information in the note that confirmed what I had already guessed: The Death Eater cell had been located from the financial trail uncovered by my operatives. If Patricia and Penelope went to German Wizard Spy Headquarters and identified themselves, they would each receive a medal in a secret ceremony.

* * *

A little after midnight I heard soft footsteps approaching my bed. I grabbed my wands, dived from under the covers, rolled, and crouched behind an empty bed.

"Gottverdammt, Hermann," whispered a female voice. "Who did you think it was? Hermione?"

"Hello, Li Shan. When did you start swearing in German? And I scooped Hermione twice in Transfiguration last week."

"I'm picking up bad habits from you. Twice? No wonder you're hiding behind the furniture."

"Uh, could you turn your back until I get back in bed? I'm not decent."

"Oh, listen. You're shy around me. You weren't worried when you thought it was Hermione. And just the Hermann bits she'd want to hex, too."

"Li Shan!"

"Just because I'm a Hufflepuff," complained Shan, turning her back, "doesn't mean I can't be naughty."

"I peeked, by the way," she said later. She was lying on top of the covers as a chaste Hufflepuff should. I was running my fingers through her hair and feeling much better. "I like the oriental version of my name when you say it," said Li Shan.

* * *

Saturday morning I walked down to the Slytherin common room to meet Draco and finish our Potions project. I walked into a Slytherin common room in mourning.

"Oh my gods, thank goodness you're here," said Jessica, grabbing me and dragging me to a couch to sit beside Pansy.

"She needs you," said Jessica.

Jessica and some other girls sat me beside Pansy and draped my arm over her. Pansy didn't seem to be aware of anything.

"Hermann is here," they told Pansy.

Pansy stared into space.

"Her parents were killed," said Jessica. "She just found out."

The Slytherins watched as I cried first, silent tears, and then wracking sobs.

* * *

By Sunday noon, Draco and I had finished our potions for independent study. We would take a rest break and begin the final report that night. When we arrived in the Great Hall for Sunday lunch, we discovered it had been snowing all Saturday and Saturday night. We hadn't noticed. The girls wanted to build snowmen. Shan and Luna wanted to do more than that. They had built a snow column and were now carving it. For their model they had taken the poster from my room that I had for the 'Maltese Falcon.'

I saw Pansy walking alone. "Her parents were killed," I told the girls. Shan and Luna looked at each other. They knew what that meant.

"Would you rather be alone?" Shan and Luna asked Pansy as she stood looking over the countryside, not seeing anything. There wasn't any real response. Shan and Luna took Pansy in hand, and the three girls finished the snow sculpture. It was my job to hold the poster of the falcon. Shan and Luna led Pansy to Ravenclaw Tower, which was empty and warm. Pansy sat cuddled between Shan and Luna on a couch in front of the fireplace, and the three girls had brandy and sweet biscuits for tea. Shan and Luna held her and comforted her and cried for her.

"I'll get them," I heard Pansy say as I left. "Whoever did this, I'll get them."

* * *

A number of Hogwarts students attended funerals for friends and family. If the Death Eaters weren't aware that the resistance against them was organized, then the Death Eaters would openly attend the funerals of their fallen friends and families. The German spies would be there in full force, photographing and getting the names of everyone. The net would spread wider.

There were four new orphans at Hogwarts.

* * *

To my relief, a professional operative took over my spy job. I had exams coming and couldn't spare the time. I also was glad to not have any more information. I already had located two more Death Eater cells from the information Patricia and Penelope had provided me.

The combination of insider information on financial backing obtained from the New Year's Eve gathering, access to all the English Ministry's files that Patricia and Penelope Clearwater had obtained, and knowledge of private financial arrangements obtained from Penelope's bookkeeping business was laying the Brits open to full-scale invasion.

'One spy is worth a thousand soldiers.'

My guess was that in about two months the German Ministry would have located all, or almost all, of the Death Eater cells and be ready to strike. They would use assault teams and strike all the known cells at once. There would be a hundred Dark Wizards and several hundred assault team troops ready if the Dark Lord appeared. Finally, if the Dark Lord appeared and all else failed, the Potions and Arithmancy masters would destroy several square miles of England including its inhabitants in an effort to eliminate the Dark Lord. It would not be a joint operation with the Brits since we didn't trust the Brits and the British Auror Corps was too weak and unreliable. Even the Hogwarts Headmaster had admitted that a ragtag group of German spies was more effective than their Aurors. We would be at war with England, and we would be the invaders, but the pressure to strike at the Death Eaters would be too great to resist. Because of what the wizard spies had done, the War Department would be chomping on the bit.

It was out of control. Espionage could verify that Mrs. Malfoy, Mrs. Nott, and their sons were not Death Eaters, but a military assault could catch them in the cross-fire since they had friends and family who were. Patricia and Penelope Clearwater were the deadliest opponents the Death Eaters faced, but the Clearwaters had become foreign agents paving the way for the invasion of their country.

I hoped it would take more than two months to mobilize and train the assault teams for an invasion of England. I didn't want to be here when the strikes were made.

None of this, I thought, would do any real good. Not even a precision strike that eliminated the Dark Lord would do any good. The basic problems that created the Death Eaters, and gave them their allies, would still be there. Durmstrang should have sent its history and social studies students to Hogwarts, not me.

In the midst of these uplifting thoughts, it occurred to me that Harry Potter was supposed to be the Brit's 'precision strike' against Voldemort.

(Come in under the shadow of this analysis, and I will show you something different from Harry Potter striding behind you or Voldemort rising to meet you. I will show you despair that it does not matter.)

I will put these thoughts temporarily aside and be a school kid faced with exams. After the exams, I will think about Draco and me being destined to face each other across a battlefield.

* * *

It was another quiet, but tense, late evening in the Hufflepuff common room. I was quietly reading until Li Shan wanted to go on Prefect patrol, while the Hufflepuffs were glaring at the psycho-active oddity in their midst. Draco and I had finished all our special brews, but the Hufflepuffs had discovered I wasn't normal, and they weren't going to forget that anytime soon. Li Shan had adapted to my Ravenclaw habit of focusing on the task at hand while the rest of the world went by, and she had become adept at recognizing when I was taking a mental break. I finished the chapter and looked around to see if anything was happening.

Li Shan stood up and said, "Okay, let's go."

My study habits had added an irregular element to her patrolling, and initially, she was catching more people out after curfew. It was a nuisance, but the students soon learned to give Li Shan a wider margin. Now we could take an undisturbed walk.

"You're not doing your 'correspondence' anymore," said Li Shan.

"No, I'm not," I admitted, when I realized what she was talking about. The 'correspondence' was all the spy stuff, which I had only done in the Ravenclaw common room when no one else was around. Somehow, Li Shan not only knew that I had been doing it but knew that I had stopped. Either I was a poor spy or Li Shan was observant.

I recalled that the official secret services investigated anyone close to any of their agents. Was Li Shan close to me?

"Hermann," said Li Shan, "I've tried not to think about it. I know it's your secret. But I think about it all the time. I can't help myself."

"Did you want to talk about what's bothering you?" I asked.

"Hermann, the night you were gone and came back injured, was that a German raid?" asked Li Shan.

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"Luna and I are keeping your secret, but we've been reading the newspapers, and a lot of Death Eaters were killed. We don't know any group in England that could do that. I talked to Harry and Hermione, and they're as surprised as anyone else. But if other Germans are like you, they could do it."

"You overestimate me," I said.

Li Shan wasn't listening to me. "Why are you doing this, Hermann?" asked Li Shan. "You're a student. You shouldn't be doing these things. Why do the Germans care what's happening here? Why are they killing us?"

Li Shan had a grip on my arm that hurt, really hurt. I decided to tell her why the Middle Europeans were involved.

I spoke to Li Shan in American, "Your fucking Voldemort isn't a fucking Dark Lord until he's killed a fucking million people."

The enormity of what I said slowly penetrated Li Shan's consciousness, and she released my arm.

"We're scared, Li Shan," I said quietly, "really scared. We're not worried about a sociopath and a gang of thugs. That's bad enough, but that's not what we're afraid of."

"What?" she said.

"We're afraid of a sociopath with the resources of a country behind him a national treasury, efficient administrators, eager warlords."

I continued, "The Middle Europeans believe that if Voldemort defeats Harry Potter, then the rest of you Brits plan to give up. You will serve the Dark Lord. The Dark Lord will not be happy with England. He will want the continent as well, and he will invade with the resources of England behind him."

Li Shan started to disagree, but then she remembered her aunt and uncle and their attitude towards her half-blood status.

"But Vol ... but he's one of the most powerful wizards ever," said Li Shan. "Harry Potter is the only one who can stand up to him."

"That might be true," I said. "Harry Potter is the only one, but is he the only ten, or hundred, or thousand? It might be that Voldemort can defeat several thousand German wizards at once, but we're going to try anyway."

"Then will you finally give up?" asked Li Shan. "After all that useless killing?"

I should not have continued talking. I should have given an equivocal answer. "We don't know what the Ministries have in mind, and we don't know what the European wizards will decide to do, but at Durmstrang we do not think that will be the end of it."

"How can it not be the end of it?" asked Shan.

I said the most terrible thing to Li Shan that she had ever heard. "If we can't destroy Voldemort, we will try to destroy his national resources."

"You mean you will destroy us, all of us."

"No," I said, "we will try to destroy Wizard England as a power. That's not the same as killing everyone."

"I don't think there will be much difference," said Li Shan. "The power of Wizard England is based on having wizards."

"Not entirely," I said. "There's your government, your manufacturing system, your transportation system, your communication system, your educational system, your potion and medical system."

Li Shan was looking at me in vacant-eyed horror.

"That's what we'll try to destroy, but history says these systems are resilient. History says the other side fights back. The most likely outcome is a long war that destroys the countries involved."

"Then why would you do it?" asked Li Shan in utter desperation.

"We've experienced Dark Lords, and we've decided a long destructive war is better."

That was the last time I talked to Li Shan.

I'll remember Li Shan's last words to me for some time.

"Did you kill anyone, Hermann? I think you did."

* * *

It's tempting to end this chapter with a young wizard damned and abandoned by the girl he has come to love with her accusations ringing in his head, reverberating with the guilt of murder with her words and rejection leaving deep, searing scars. But in the midst of my betrayals, let me remain true to the Durmstrang tradition of intellectual analysis. Let me recount the minority position at Durmstrang that agrees with Shan Li.

It's okay if Voldemort kills Harry Potter. In fact, that's the preferable outcome.

There are two parts to the argument. First, there is general agreement that if Voldemort kills Harry Potter, then Voldemort can rule the Brit Wizards. If the Brit Wizard society and government are this weak, then they can easily be ruled by any tyrant, and sooner or later, they will be ruled by a tyrant. Second, since Brit Wizardry is destined to be ruled by a tyrant, it's better for us Middle Europeans that they be ruled by a weak tyrant. Voldemort is weak because he supports a minority (purebloods) against the majority and because he indulges in cruelty towards, and torture of, the majority. Voldemort will never have the whole-hearted support of the population, and he will drive the best and brightest away.

As Thucydides says, "Only a democracy can be an imperial power."

The logical extension of this argument is that we should not wait for that stumblebum Voldemort to kill Harry Potter. He keeps botching it. Our assault teams and a few Dark Wizards can eliminate Harry Potter and his friends.

I am a weak person. Despite the logic of the position above and the obvious ease of doing so, I am glad no one requested that I assassinate (or set up for assassination) Hermione, Harry, and Ron. We may all live to regret this lapse.

Nott 2

Chapter 18 of 19

Medieval sex charms are not to be trifled with.

Chapter 18: 26 August 10:30 AM -- 30 August 5:00 PM Nott 2

"Wow! What a concoction!" Janice had said.

Janice and I had returned from London to complete the cleansing of the Nott Estate. We had prepared a potion to drive everything out of the cellar and attic of the house. It drove everything out and then chemically broke down after two hours. Janice had decided that everything in the cellar and attic had been spoiled by the Death Eaters, and we had hauled it all out and were burning it.

There was one room left, the study on the upper floor in the southeast corner. It had once been the favorite room of Janice, a morning person. Now it was inhabited by a swarm of big, ferocious, flying insects.

The drones were easily stunned and then levitated to the bonfire for the cellar and attic junk. That left the adult male and female formidable creatures. Janice would stun them while I provided backup.

We entered the room. I saw them out of the corner of my eye as they began their attack. Without thinking, I hurled two quick curses. They exploded in mid air. They were mist.

Throughout the preparation of the noxious potion and the cleansing of the cellar and attic, Janice had watched Hermann work with single-minded concentration. Of all the things for me to get excited about, she thought, fighting down her arousal.

Then she had seen the violent streak in her kind, gentle Hermann. Is this the kind of woman I am? she wondered. I see his violent side, and my nipples press against my bra, my twat soaks my knickers, and I ache for his cock.

"My apologies," I said, turning to Janice. "I know you wanted to do it. It was reflexes."

A sweep of my wand cleaned the place. A detection spell told me nothing else remained in the room.

Janice had a strange expression on her face, as if she had never before seen two beings obliterated in a split second.

Janice had a wild look in her eyes that inflamed me. Not knowing I was such an animal, I said, "There is a ritual that a wizard can do with a consenting lady."

I held my hand over a carpet, performed an incantation, and motioned for Janice to stand on the carpet.

She kicked off her shoes and stepped onto the enchanted rug. She was aware that her toes had curled into the carpet, that her wand had slipped from her fingers and clattered to the floor, and that she had closed her eyes and let out a most enchanting moan.

Oh damn. What has he done to this rug? Oh, yes.

She lowered her head and gave him shy glances as he placed one hand on her waist. She sighed as his other hand massaged her neck. She was breathing heavily through her mouth. Standing on the rug, she believed what he had said this morning about liking her figure.

Let me show you what you like, darling. My blouse and bra can join my wand. Shouldn't you be doing more with your hands? It's not nice to tease your witch.

"Lie down, Janice."

You mean right here! Oh, you mean on this nice, comfy rug.

"Lift your skirt, Janice."

One view of soaking wet knickers. That's kinky! Coming right up, sweetie.

"Spread your legs, Janice."

You mean right now! Okay, we'll get this nice, sexy rug all wet.

Janice lifted her knees and let her legs fall open. She placed her hands beside her head in invitation.

You could have waited till we got to a bed, darling. And what's taking you so long?

She felt him penetrate her with no effort. She felt him part her flesh. She put her feet in the air. Her body and the mounds of her breasts rocked. Everything was quiet except for the sounds from between Janice's open lips and open thighs.

The room was filled with the sound and scent of Janice. Hermann was filled with an animal that wanted Janice.

Janice was filled with the realization that Hermann wanted her, Janice. He wanted Janice sex. He had entered her to give her pleasure. He had mounted her because he wanted to feel her softness, her firmness. He wanted to be nestling between her thighs, watching her face, hearing her moans, and enjoying her. Oh my, she thought. His affection penetrated her deeply, and the last of her defenses dropped away. She was moved by his affection, and she moved with him and for him. When it arrived for her, it started gently, but it built upon itself, and it ended with her entire body clenching him. She had never felt anything like this. She lay in languor ... too happy to be concerned about how completely he had possessed her.

I waited, still inside Janice, as the instructions suggested. Sweat rolled off her. Juice oozed out of her. Soon, everything was soaking wet.

I eased out of Janice. She looked at my still rampant erection. "Medieval magic can be crude," I explained. "This spell is just for you. Just your juices. Give me your knickers, Janice."

She lifted her hips, slid her knickers down and then off. I went to the center of the room and threw them to the floor. There was a soft splat. I held my hand over them and recited the incantation, seriously this time. Back in the dormitory at Durmstrang, we had found a book on medieval sex charms. We thought it hilarious and practiced them many times in jest. I never thought I would be doing one for real.

When I finished the incantation, I finally stuffed my erection, which wouldn't go away, back into my trousers ... rather painfully back into my trousers actually. A change began where Janice's wet knickers lay in the middle of the floor and spread to the rest of the room. The room had a subtle glow that enhanced Janice's complexion. It had a subtle fragrance that reminded me of Janice. A smile spread across Janice's face as the room welcomed her. Her eyes were shining.

"This room is yours, Janice. You can furnish it as you like. You can work in it, rest in it, meditate in it, pray in it, whatever."

She looked at her knickers. "The spell is finished," I said. "They're just laundry now."

I took Janice in one hand, picked up her knickers with the other, and led her out of the room. "Let's give it time to finish adjusting," I suggested.

After we left the room, Janice stopped, and lightly placed her hand on the bulge in my trousers. "What about this," she asked softly.

That erection was not going away.

"Legend has it that the incantations were performed by powerful wizards," I said.

"Yes, powerful wizards," Janice sighed, not letting go of the bulge in my trousers.

"Legend has it that it was done for gentle ladies, who were grateful."

"Yes, very, very grateful," Janice breathed hoarsely, pressing herself against me.

"I have a bathtub," she whispered. "It's not huge, but it's big enough for two."

"We could tub Japanese style," I replied. "We can shower first, and then soak in clean water."

In the shower I covered Janice with soapsuds ... every inch of her. I rinsed her off. It was still there. I covered myself with soapsuds and rinsed off. It was still there. Janice kept looking at me and grinning. I refrained from saying, "I'm glad you're amused."

"Well," said Janice, "if we're going Japanese." She stepped over to her closet, picked out a kimono and flaunted how nicely it draped over her figure. She sedately walked over to her bed and arranged herself.

"Am I properly modest?" She was on her knees, head cradled in her arms. Her head was covered by her hair. The rest of her was covered by her kimono. We were going to play the secret ravishment of the innocent. It would be acceptable to everyone since no one could tell that Janice was being ravished. Except her feet weren't covered. I would watch her toes curl as she had her orgasm.

Easy. Easy. Easy. Innocent. I placed the tips of my fingers in the small of her kimono-clad back. I walked them up to her shoulder blades and then to her shoulder. I did it again even slower. I did it again just as slow. All innocent, except my erection against Janice's silk-covered round softness. I kept to the strict discipline of the finger-tip walk up her back until I felt Janice make small hip movements. I savored the slow surrender of the innocent lady under the kimono. I changed to just resting my fingertips above her hips. Deprived of the sensory input, Janice rotated her hips to compensate. She pushed her round silk-covered softness against me. I reached back to her ankles and slowly walked my fingertips up the outside of her legs. I calmly watched Janice rotate her hips. I reached back to her ankles and slowly walked my fingertips up the back of her legs. I watched Janice push against my erection. I pulled away from her, reached back to her ankles, and slowly walked my fingertips up the inside of her legs. Janice tried to push herself against me, but I kept my distance as I lightly stroked the inside of her thighs. I lightly stroked the inside of her thighs as Janice changed from rotating her hips to flexing the small of her back. It was the loss of innocence as I calmly watched the woman under the kimono offer herself.

I raised the kimono, placed my hands on her hips, and placed myself at the entrance to Janice. I kept her from pushing back. I enjoyed the silky softness as I slowly worked into Janice. I calmly enjoyed being inside the once innocent woman under the kimono. I listened to her softly moan for her lost innocence. I pulled out and slowly penetrated Janice again, listening to her sigh with pleasure. Once again, I pulled out. As I slowly worked back into her soft body, I saw that Janice was flexing her feet and ankles. I stayed all the way inside her as I moved my hands from under the kimono. I rested them gently at her waist. I felt Janice moving. I watched the silk kimono move. I watched her silky hair toss around, her shoulder and back muscles flex, and her round, silk-covered hips rotate as Janice began the repetitive moves of copulation. I felt Janice get slicker. I listened to the silk rustle as Janice was captured. I listened to the involuntary gasps as all innocence fled and Janice yielded to the iron grip of mating. I felt her desperately press against me. I heard a choked sob and watched her hands move from under her head and grip the bedspread. I felt Janice ripple and turn sopping wet. I watched her toes curl as she began her orgasm. I stayed in Janice and calmly enjoyed her contractions.

Afterwards, I was still erect. Janice regarded me with some concern.

"I just thought of something. Maybe I can talk it down," suggested Janice.

"What?" I asked.

"I'll tell you what a bad boy you are," replied Janice. "I'll tell you all those things about yourself that you don't want to admit."

"Oh, yeah. You'll deflate my ego and erection in one fell swoop. That's really considerate of you, Janice. I'll be forever grateful."

"Yes, when I finish you will be grateful," said Janice, straddling me. "Now, let me take care of this."

Straddling me, resting on her knees and elbows, Janice began gently running her fingers through my hair. "You're gentle," she said very quietly. "You really, really like the woman you're seducing, and you want her to know it. You want her to feel loved and appreciated."

Janice softly kissed me. "You want her to know she's attractive, elegant, kind, and understanding." Janice continued to softly kiss me. "That's why you want to have her."

With her skin just gazing mine, Janice slowly moved. "You go slowly with her. You give her time to get aroused."

"You give her gentle, but hungry kisses, like this." Janice gave me her sweet, hungry kisses.

"You continue to gently stroke her until she starts breathing heavily," said Janice starting to breath heavily.

"You embrace her and nuzzle her," said Janice, embracing and nuzzling me.

"You hope she moans with pleasure," moaned Janice.

"It's only then that you dare look into her eyes." gasped Janice. "It's only after she's aroused that you can reveal your possessiveness. You want to take her, the whole woman, not just use her body. You look into her eyes as she surrenders to you and spreads her legs." Janice looked into my eyes as she slowly spread her legs.

"You continue to look into her sparkling eyes as you enter her." Janice made a low, soft sound as she looked at me and slid part way onto my erection.

"You savor how it feels to penetrate an intelligent, mature woman." Janice raised herself on her hands so I could watch her face as she was entered. "Oh, gods," Janice whispered as my erection entered her.

"She's yours now. You can have her," sighed Janice.

"You press gently and rhythmically into her," said Janice moving her hips.

"Oh. You take the beautiful and capable lady. Oh, you're an animal, oh gods. You take the lady lovingly and kindly. Oh, Hermann."

"You possessive bastard!" gasped Janice, beginning the hip movements of a mature woman caught in coitus.

Janice described my terrible behavior, as her demanding hip movements took me deep into her.

"You watch as she loses control ... You let her fuck ... You let her screw her own brains out ... You gently take her ... You beast! ... You watch her wiggle ... You know you have her ... You watch her smile ... You feel her cream your prick ... You've taken her ... You beast!"

Janice smiled. Her thighs and vagina did their short, intense dance.

"There's more," said Janice, catching her breath. "You are a really, really possessive bastard."

"You hold her nice, round hips and stroke her juicy cunt. You do it slowly and deliberately."

I held Janice's hips and stroked her juicy cunt, enjoying every inch of the penetration.

"You reassure the mature woman that she's desirable, you demon."

"You call her 'Sweetheart' and make her feel wanted, you monster."

"You tell her with your eyes that she's wonderful, you fiend."

"She knows you want all of her, not just her vagina, you ungodly beast."

"You look into her eyes as you take her. You have her. She's yours. You devil!"

I looked into Janice's eyes. She was mine.

When we untangled, I was limp.

Janice was triumphant. "I told you that you were a bad boy."

In the tub, Janice was humming and batting her eyes at me and stretching first one leg and then the other out of the water for me to admire.

Janice was right. I had to stop being possessive.

She licked her lips, writhed in the suds, and sighed, "I'm yours, Hermann. All yours, darling."

Reflecting on what an animal I had been, I decided there were some incantations I had best avoid.

"I might be sore tomorrow, Hermann," Janice announced, "but we can do this again the day after tomorrow."

For a moment, I thought the little panther actually growled.

Intelligent and passionate women are dangerous, and medieval sex charms are not to be trifled with.

Farewell

Chapter 19 of 19

"He is saying goodbye to England."

We were on the train back to London.

On the up side, the academics were a success. The official results weren't posted yet, but the examiners had said 'easily outstanding' to both Draco and me when we took our NEWT exams in Potions. I had done as well in Charms as Shan, and she was the top of her class. I now had three Brit NEWTs, whatever that might mean to Durmstrang. It meant their first exchange student to Hogwarts hadn't fallen on his face. Luna, Barbara, and Shelly had performed extremely well for their OWL exams. Of course they did – they had been tutored by Draco. Arithmancy was just another Arithmancy test. Go in, work all the problems, and hand in the test. For extra credit, do a James Joyce Potter: Prove by Algebra that Harry is Voldemort's Ghost. In Transfiguration, I was determined to scoop Hermione. It was all for House points, nothing personal. Would you believe that two weeks before the exam she started to nag me? It must be in her blood. I worked extra hard to get ahead in order to nag her back. She didn't take it well. Reflecting on the year, I knew my success was due to my study partners. With Draco, Su, Shan, and Hermione, I had the best that Hogwarts had to offer.

On the down side, it was time to say farewell – temporarily for most and permanently for me. Draco, Barbara, and Shelly had a compartment to themselves. I had lunch and tea with them but otherwise left them alone. Theo and Terry visited them to plan how they could all keep in touch over the summer. I noticed Padma looking at me several times. She blushed when I looked back, but she did not approach me, and I respected her desire to not see me or talk to me. Luna came and talked to me occasionally, but she spent the rest of her time with her friends. Hermione and I passed each other once in the corridor, and we thanked each other for a wonderful time in Transfiguration. Hermione wanted to know if I could possibly come back next year. I didn't know study partners were that hard to find. I saw Shan several times and waved at her, but she just waved back and ducked into a compartment. Pansy gave me stone-faced glares that hurt more than I believed possible.

I had plenty of time to reflect that I was alone and to wonder if I was at fault. I decided it was happenstance. None of the girls I had met had cared for me, and there was nothing that anyone could do about that – a run of bad luck. They were temporarily interested because I was a novelty, but that's all it was. That meant I had not hurt anyone's feelings, which was good. I was in pain, but I was weak and romantic, a fault that I would have to outgrow.

At the platform, Draco was met by two friends of the family and escorted home. Had things become that tense for the Malfoys in England?

Barbara and Shelly were basket cases. I watched both their families go through the same routine. Each family was amused by their daughter's distracted manner, then they were annoyed by their daughter's incompetence, and finally they were concerned by their daughter's zombie-like state.

My family arrived late. My sister ran over, grabbed me, and told me how well she had done her second year at Durmstrang. My parents beamed at her. She was a star, indeed. We located my luggage and were ready to leave.

I turned back to look at the platform one last time and to recall the people I had met.

My regards to Narcissa, the most beautiful and elegant woman I have ever known. At one time, I imagined it impossible to relate to anyone with real ability. I now know it is possible to love and cherish a witch of incredible power.

My regards to Patricia, whose capacity for long-term affection was greater than anything I could imagine. I had never seen such an intense combination of class and sensuality.

My regards to Penelope, whose ability and determination were daunting. I had never experienced such bravery towards friends and family.

My regards to Janice, whose knowledge of me was frightening. Before Janice, I did not believe it was possible to have a relationship with someone who understood me.

"Isn't he coming?" said my father.

"Leave him alone a moment, dear," said my mother. "He is saying goodbye to England."

To Luna, a butterfly who can fly higher than all others.

To Padma. She once was a true love of mine. The medieval poets say only a new love can drive out an old love.

To Li Shan, a true love, waiting to be driven out.

To Pansy, proud and vulnerable, a victim of my betrayal.

My final and best salute is to Draco: my friend from the first day until the last. The best friend I ever had. I now realized Draco was the only person at Hogwarts who could be my friend.

God's speed Draco. May you prosper.

I joined my family, and we left England.

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