

Choices

by PlaidPooka

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Chapter 1 of 1

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AN: This hasn't been beta'd, so any mistakes can only be blamed on me. I've proofed it many times, but I always seem to miss something!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I just take them out to play.

Sometimes he apparates there--late at night--when the ramshackle house's windows are dark and all within fast asleep. Standing alone in the shadows, he regards the house with serious eyes. How he once hated this very house, its constant state of disrepair, its unrefined lines and shabby appearance. He had been willing to do anything to improve his lot in life. He once dreamed of being respected, being noticed, being judged by his own merits instead of his hair color and hand-me-down robes. He'd fought for his dreams, clawed his way to top marks in all his classes, learned the rules backwards and forwards, become a prefect, become Head Boy, left Hogwarts with an unblemished record and gone to work ready to clamber his way into position; fight his way to finding the respect he so desperately sought. He'd been a fool. He'd been a seventeen year old boy, a studious, childish, foolish boy. Was it any surprise then that he had made such ridiculous choices?

When he had gotten his job at the Ministry, he had been thrilled beyond reason. He knew it was an unimportant, paper-pushing position, but he was inordinately pleased with it. He had his beginning, his foot in the door towards respectability. Just as every student started out as an "ickle firsty," he knew that every great man started at the bottom of his profession. Undaunted, he threw himself into every insipid project with the same ravenous determination that he had thrown into his schoolwork. In examining every nuance of the petty details of issues like cauldron bottom thickness, he had no idea how blind he became to the world around him. He was tunnel-visioned in his intensity and he ended up paying for it dearly.

He had adored Mr. Crouch. Crouch had seemed everything his own father had not, intellectual, organized, and wealthy. Crouch was a man who respected the rules; you'd never catch him embarrassing his children by being caught with an enchanted car. His boss had seemed--on the surface...to be everything that was respectable and therefore worthy. The impressionable boy mistook Crouch's penchant for rules to be wisdom. Surely if this respected man thought this was the way the wizarding world should be, it must be so? When Crouch began behaving oddly, the boy...so used to schoolbooks and so lost in the real world...mistook his boss' behavior for simple over-work. Finding himself making excuses for Mr. Crouch to others, young Weatherby...as Crouch often called him...worked twice as many hours trying desperately to help the man he so admired. As eighty hour workweeks piled up, one after the other, it was little wonder that the exhausted boy noticed nothing particularly amiss in Crouch's behavior.

When it came to light that Crouch had been a pawn of his insane son--manipulated for months under the Imperious curse--Percy Weasley's whole existence fell abruptly apart. He hadn't garnered the respect he sought; his tireless hours of toil had been for nothing. Instead of being Crouch's right hand man he was a hopeless fool, duped for months by one of the former Death Eaters. Percy had been questioned for days by the Ministry's Aurors. Coming to realize that the Aurors questioned him so extensively because they found it hard to believe he had been so ignorant as to be fooled for so long, Percy's fall was complete. He was a broken young man whom no one in their right mind would ever want to employ. Trying so hard to earn the respectability he thirsted for, he had instead become the wizarding world's biggest prat. Never in his short life had he felt so utterly worthless. He wanted to go home. He wanted his mother. That is when Cornelius Fudge made his move.

Fudge could have cared less about respectability, all he wanted was power. Too frightened to even entertain the thought that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had returned, when Albus Dumbledore insisted that this was the case Fudge was convinced it was some deep ploy of Albus'. Despite the fact that Albus had turned down the position of Minister of Magic, Fudge was convinced the old wizard had changed his mind. After all, what wizard wouldn't want such a position? It was beyond Fudge's comprehension that Albus was perfectly content where he was. Fudge needed a spy to keep an eye on Albus and that blasted Potter boy. He needed a spy and he needed one fast. When he saw the young Weasley boy falling apart before his very eyes, he knew he had found what he sought. The boy was a fool; if Crouch's son could fool him so easily, Fudge should have no trouble.

Percy grabbed onto Fudge's offer of a job like a drowning man. Here was some hope at last! Fudge gathered him in with his smarmy, fake, father-like persona, and Percy--in his despair...fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Desperate to make the most of this unexpected second chance, Percy fell into the very same habits that had caused him so much trouble with Crouch. He had learned nothing. Becoming equally as intense and equally as single minded as he had been before; Percy ignored anything that would jeopardize his new position. After all, the Minister of Magic himself had appointed Percy, and surely Fudge knew more about what was going on in the wizarding world than his father or the Headmaster of a children's school. Once Percy had respected the opinions of his parents; now he ruthlessly turned his back on the very people who truly cared about him. Ignoring their warnings and ignoring their love, Percy turned away from his family. Once they had been his support, now they only embarrassed him.

When Percy found out about the attack on his father and how Arthur Weasley had been admitted to St. Mungo's gravely injured, Percy's first impulse was to rush to the hospital to see his father. Unfortunately, Minister Fudge came upon the young man as he was preparing to depart and insisted that Percy come to his office for a cup of tea before going out. The smooth-talking Fudge talked to Percy for two hours, filling his head with all sorts of nonsense and logical sounding double-talk. By the time he was through with the lad, not only did Percy forgo visiting his father, he went so far as to return his Christmas gift, a Weasley jumper that his mum had painstakingly knitted him. With the sneakily charming Fudge making Percy a pet project, the poor lad really never stood a chance.

By the end of Harry's fifth school year, the whole wizarding world had proof that everything Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter had said was true. Voldemort was indeed back. Even Percy's misguided beliefs on the matter had to at last fall. Percy was forced to admit that Fudge was at best a fool, and at worst a misleading bastard who thought only of doing whatever was necessary to achieve his own ends. Once again Percy found his whole world falling apart. This time there was no Fudge to lift him up. This time Percy was too ashamed of his own actions to even imagine going to face his family. At last he finally saw his father for what he truly was. Poor, certainly, but also brave, loyal, intelligent, and honest. Percy realized that while his family may lack the material things that others thought so important, they had the qualities of spirit that made them the best of the wizarding world.

So here we see him, standing alone in the dark before a ramshackle monstrosity of a house that has become for him the most precious sight in all the world. He wants to go home. He wants his mother. Silent tears trickle incessantly down his pale, drawn cheeks. Percy comes in secret to stare at the house every night, fighting an internal battle of wills that leaves him weary and full of sorrow. Wanting nothing more than to creep up to the front door, fall to his knees, and beg forgiveness, Percy never progresses farther than this silent vigil. It is his greatest fear that should he approach the door he may find it warded against him. He worries that if he were to look now in his mother's kind, loving face, he would find nothing but shame and hatred there. One really can't blame him, he cannot forgive himself, so it is inevitable that he believes even a mother's loving heart could find no forgiveness for him. He stands there, weeping, staring at the front door while he clutches in one hand a tiny phial. Knowing the phial contains a permanent escape from his torment, he still cannot decide what to do. All his choices in his young life have been foolish, what shall he choose now? His wet eyes dart from the front door to his hand, clenched tight around a tiny bottle that has become to him an icon of peace, of rest, of final forgiveness. The door or the phial? The door or the phial?

Exhausted, Percy once again puts the choice off, deciding to go home to his lonely flat. He will return to stand silently weeping--night after night--before The Burrow until he finally makes his decision.

Within the house, Molly Weasley's dreams are uneasy. Dreaming that her son needs her, she tosses and turns as she mutters in her sleep. "Poor Percy," she murmurs, "poor Percy." Downstairs stands a grand clock. Every night, while his parents are sleeping, Percy's clock hand comes to rest on "at home." There is no one awake to see it.