

The Lion and the Dragon

by MDB

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Chapter One

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Ron tore down the marble staircase, swearing under his breath. Of all the mornings to oversleep ñ well, not so much oversleep as have your best mate/walking alarm clock forget to wake you because he has a ãbreakfast dateí with your baby sister. The next time he saw Harry and Ginny he was withdrawing his support for their relationship like a shot

He skidded to a halt outside the dungeons and hesitated. Although Snape no longer taught Potions and therefore Ron had the wrath of Slughorn to deal with instead, arriving late to a lesson was still not good. He took a deep breath, pushed open the door and let out a sigh of relief ñ Slughorn did not appear to be in the classroom. Ron was just sliding into the seat between a shamefaced Harry, who hissed ãSorry, mateí, and an irritated looking Hermione, who tutted and growled, ãHonestly, Ron!í, when Professor Slughorn backed out of the supplies cupboard.

ãNice to see you keeping good time, Mr Weasley. We will have to think of a suitable punishment, won't we? Now that we have the whole class here, I will begin. As I am sure you are all aware, now that your NEWTs are over you only have three weeks until you leave this fair castle. I'm sure you wanted to spend those weeks enjoying yourselves down by the lake, butí The rotund wizard chuckled into his moustache. ãI have decided to set you a little project to occupy your eager young minds in these golden hours! Now, now, don't fuss; it won't be very hard you will work in pairs

At the word ãpairsí most of the class began giving each other subtle sideways looks and raising their eyebrows in a way that meant, ãYou wanna?í

ãMy only stipulation is that your pairings be boy/girl

At this there was a surprised murmur, and the glances and eyebrow raising increased tenfold. Ron was just turning to look at Hermione when Slughorn turned to him with a jovial wink and continued

ãMr Weasley, as punishment for your tardiness I will choose your partner.

Ron groaned and banged his head down on the desk in mock despair. The other Gryffindors grinned apologetically; all except Hermione, who muttered, ãWell if you will be late

He raised his head to find Slughorn scanning the room for a suitable partner. Ron noticed the teacher's gaze linger on the group of Slytherin girls sitting in the back.

Ron gasped and silently, desperately pleaded with every divine being he could remember, ãNot Parkinson, please not Parkinson

ãMiss Sommers, if you don't mind?

The girl in question started a little and then shrugged. ãOf course not, Professor.' She began to bundle her equipment into her cauldron and moved to the desk near the front that Slughorn had indicated.

Ron groaned again and picked up his bag. Harry shot him a sympathetic look and even Hermione smiled a little as he moved forwards.

Slughorn turned to address the whole class. 'Well? What are you waiting for? Spread out, one pair to a desk. I will be handing out your poison shortly. You will have two weeks to discover the precise recipe of your poison and the appropriate antidote. And I will want a detailed report on how you came about your findings. A vial of the antidote and your report should be on my desk by the end of lessons on the fifth. You may begin.'

In the general hubbub that followed, Ron turned to his partner.

'Hi.'

'Hello.'

'I'm Ron.'

'I know, you're Potter's friend.'

'Yeah.'

'I'm Persephone, but you can call me Sephy.'

'Right.'

She had a pleasant, demure voice, and when she smiled as she did right now, a faint flush of embarrassment staining her cheeks, she was quite pretty. 'Hang on there, mate,' Ron thought, 'don't get too friendly now, she's a Slytherin.'

'Don't get too friendly now,' he thought Sephy. 'He's a Gryffindor.'

Despite the pair's best intentions, by the end of the lesson, they were actually getting on quite well. Sephy turned out to have a bit of a flare for Potions (although my real passion is Transfiguration she confided nervously as though expecting a sarcastic comment, but Ron just smiled). Ron predicted himself an easy two weeks, and whilst they knew they were not meant to be pleased with their partner, as Slytherin and Gryffindor, they both realised that it could have been worse.

Imagine, he thought Ron, as he glanced sideways at the brunette fiddling with a ring on her thumb whilst she put down some details on the poison, even if it hadn't been Parkinson, it could have been Lavender. He winced at the thought. His recent messy break-up with Lavender meant that he was not the favourite edish of the day with her or any of the other seventh-year girls (bar Hermione that is).

All in all, by the time the bell went, Ron was actually quite glad of his partner. When he left the dungeons with the other two, who offered their commiserations at his snake of a partner, he surprised them by turning to grin lopsidedly and saying, 'Don't worry about it, it could have been worse.'