

Why Not Me

by *deianaera*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: [the usual disclaimer]

This was originally written for [Omniocular's](#) Feb. 2007 challenge, Anytime But Now, on LJ.

Thank you, Leianora, for betaing this for me.

Oh, and comments, criticisms, and rude noises are all welcome. But not golf claps. That's just sarcasm for the rich.

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Twenty years before, Harry Potter died defeating Lord Voldemort. His sacrifice saved the Wizarding World. And although he never saw his eighteenth birthday, he was a larger than life hero to the world he saved. To honor his sacrifice (and boost his own popularity), Minister of Magic Franklin Pierce decreed a celebration of the victory. For several weeks, the *Daily Prophet*, still only a semi-independent Ministry mouthpiece, ran stories about the battle, the reconstruction, interviews with those who were there, and, of course, stories about Harry, his now semi-mythical life and his fully legendary death. A new statue of Harry was placed prominently in Diagon Alley. He stood alone, wand raised, triumphant. History lessons at Hogwarts focused on Harry and his defeat of Voldemort. The celebrations were scheduled to culminate next month in what was being called the Victors' Ball. Every person who fought against the Death Eaters that day was invited as a guest of honor.

So when Hermione and Ron received a request to meet with Luna Lovegood, they figured it was just another interview. They met in front of *The Quibbler's* offices. Luna's request to speak with the two of them had an edge of urgency to it; both of them privately suspected that Luna was trying to meet a deadline. So rather than wait, they went after work that night. A quick rap of the door gained them admittance and an escort to Luna's office.

Luna's office was surprisingly neat and organized, papers neatly filed in an open cabinet, the desk clear of miscellaneous debris. With her wand tucked behind her ear, Luna motioned them both to sit down and closed the door. Hermione and Ron sat down in the comfortable chairs in front of the desk and waited for Luna to say something.

"Thank you both for coming on such short notice. I have something to tell you, and I thought you should hear it from me," Luna said quietly.

Hermione leaned forward, confused. "What is it?"

"I think you'd better read it for yourselves. This article will be published in next month's edition of *The Quibbler*."

Luna slid two pieces of parchment across the desk. Hermione and Ron each took their copy and read the article. Hermione finished first and glared at Luna. "You can't possibly mean to publish this rubbish, Luna! I mean it's *The Quibbler*, but still, don't you have some standards of decency?"

"I write the truth Hermione; it's not comfortable, but it is true, and people do have a right to know what really happened," Luna replied calmly.

Ron finished reading his copy of the article and looked heartbrokenly at Luna. "Why, Luna? Why would you do this?"

Luna looked at him for a moment, then replied, "Because in the twenty years since Harry died to defeat Voldemort, Harry has stopped being human. He's become a larger-than-life myth that is used by people to represent what they want him to represent. Only a few of us knew him as a person, and now people don't even try. Maybe this will help make Harry's memory human again. Not to mention, Ronald, that doesn't Hannah deserve to be recognized for her part in bringing down Voldemort and saving us all?"

Hermione stood up and planted her hands on Luna's desk. "How about because she's lying, although why is beyond me, but there is no way Harry was dead before he hit the Veil. None. We, all of us, were there in the Department of Mysteries during the battle. We all saw Harry tackle Voldemort, we all saw both of them fall through the Veil! That's it, Luna, end of story. Harry died to save us all, and nothing Hannah Abbott or anyone else says can change that fact."

Luna fixed her with a penetrating stare of her own. "But, Hermione, what if she's telling the truth? I think she is. Otherwise, I wouldn't publish this article."

"Give me her address, Luna, and I'll find out what she's up to," Hermione demanded, holding out a hand.

Luna sighed and handed Hermione a slip of parchment with an address on it. "I hope you get what you need from this."

Ron gently cupped Hermione's elbow and escorted them both from *The Quibbler's* offices before Hermione could say something that would possibly offend Luna. Once out on the street, Hermione yanked her arm away from Ron and stalked toward home.

"Hermione, Hermione, wait!" Ron shouted at her, using his long legs to catch up with her. When he finally did, he grabbed her arm, causing her to stop and turn toward him.

"Hermione, whatever you're thinking of doing---"

"Is nothing more than Hannah deserves for trying to disparage Harry's good name, take away from him all he accomplished---"

"Harry's dead and has been for twenty years. Hermione, you have got to stop blaming yourself for that. I couldn't save him. You couldn't save him. None of us could. What does it matter how he died? It doesn't change the fact that he's dead," Ron finished quietly.

"It matters to me," Hermione hissed.

"Look, let's just wait until morning, sleep on it, you know, wait until--" Ron began softly.

"You mean 'wait until Hermione's not on such a tear'. Ron, you are so transparent, it's a miracle you aren't made of glass," Hermione said acidly.

"Look, you go there tonight, you'll do something you'll regret. Why not wait until you're calmer, and you can bring that brain of yours to bear. Make a list of the questions you want to ask her. I know all you really want is to protect Harry. Why not go over there tomorrow and make sure you get the answers you need?" Ron spoke low and soothingly, wrapping Hermione in his arms and rubbing her back gently. Sometimes, knowing someone for almost thirty years pays off. Hermione visibly relaxed and calmed down.

"You're right, Ron. It's just that seeing the article Luna wrote made me so damned angry, I could barely see," Hermione sniffed. "Maybe it's this stupid anniversary crap they have planned, but it's bringing everything back up. Sometimes, I wake up and almost expect Harry to..."

"To be alive, to be sixteen and back in Gryffindor Tower, figuring out how we were going to get into trouble this time," Ron and Hermione both laughed sadly.

"Yeah, just like that," Hermione said.

"Come on, I'll take you home," Ron said.

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The next day found Hermione no less determined, but far calmer. As much as she wanted to dismiss Hannah Abbott's story as pure, opportunistic fiction, she couldn't. Too many details fit, but that could've been because she was there at the end. Before heading over to Hannah's apartment, Hermione took a deep breath and let herself remember the battle.

They had found out that Pettigrew was spying on them again; they had managed to tip off Voldemort to the destruction of the Horcruxes inadvertently, and now he was watching them carefully. They managed to get to the last one in the open, Rowena Ravenclaw's wand, just ahead of a group of Death Eaters sent to reclaim it for their Lord. Still, they had done it, and now they needed to get to the final Horcrux, Nagini, and Voldemort himself.

Using Pettigrew, they managed to trick Voldemort into coming back to the Department of Mysteries, snake in tow. They used every resource they had to give them a chance of pulling off the ambush. Order members, DA members, even a couple of people who lost members of their families to Voldemort over the last two years. Lying in wait, they lured Voldemort and his entourage down into the chamber that held the Veil. Then all hell broke loose.

Voldemort summoned every Death Eater to the Department of Mysteries as soon as he entered the room. In moments, the thrown together forces were outnumbered. To her shame, Hermione always remembered how she froze, how she let herself slip into the mix of duels that erupted all over the large chamber. It left her away from Harry's side and forced to fight her way back to him. And, to her sorrow, she was not fast enough or strong enough or skilled enough to do it. That left Ron and Harry alone to face down Voldemort. Ron stuck to his primary mission: get the damned snake. As they approached, Nagini slithered away from her master, forcing Ron to separate from Harry, leaving him alone. Ron, too, always felt guilt about that, but not as strongly as she did; he, at least, helped bring things to an end.

Still, it didn't change what happened. Harry was alone when he faced Voldemort. Voldemort taunted him, teased him, slicing at him with hexes designed to irritate, not kill, goading Harry into a rage. Harry, finally, let his temper snap and did the last thing Voldemort expected. He tackled Voldemort, who had been standing by the Veil. Harry drove the despot through the fluttering curtain, holding on tight to make sure Voldemort finally died.

Hermione remembered getting close enough to see the last hex before Harry and Voldemort died. She remembered the crimson arc of blood flying out from Harry, then his wild leap, driving himself and his enemy through the curtain to the land of the dead. She remembered her horror, her shame.

Hermione shook her head to clear the old memories away before they overwhelmed her again. She would see Hannah, hear her ludicrous story for herself, and remind the silly witch that she, too, had been there. And remind her that whether it was true or not, Hermione, unlike her, was accounted a hero of that encounter; her words against Hannah would be damning.

Shaking her head again, Hermione checked to make sure she had everything she needed and then left to meet Ron for the journey to Hannah's.

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When Hermione and Ron arrived at Hannah's apartment, they were both shocked by the conditions. Broken glass glittered in the weak sunlight, and the buildings were a half-step away from condemnation. The rickety staircase groaned under even Hermione's slight weight. Ron tried not to cling to the railing, which looked like it would give

way under if blown on by a toddler. Cautiously, they made their way upstairs until they reached the landing. More glass was scattered about, this time joined by litter and trash. The scent, even in the cool spring weather, was enough to cause both of them to choke for a moment. Still, after resolving to breathe shallowly, they walked down the landing to Hannah's door.

Ron laid a restraining hand on Hermione's arm and knocked politely. Instead of opening, a harsh woman's voice asked, "Who's there?"

Before Hermione could demand entrance, Ron said, "It's Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. We'd like to talk to you for a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"Ha! Likely a joke," Hannah muttered from behind the door.

"No, it's not a joke--" Ron began before Hermione cut him off.

"We've seen Luna Lovegood and the article about the pack of lies you want her to publish for you," Hermione shouted.

There was silence for a minute, and then Hannah responded. "So that's what this is about," she said. "Just a moment, I'll let you in."

Ron and Hermione stood on the landing, listening as bolts and chains were maneuvered to allow Hannah to open the door. When it opened but a crack, Hannah called out, "Come in."

Ron and Hermione stepped inside the apartment. Inside, it was like a different world. The entire space was warm and welcoming, a perfect blend of earthy browns, rich greens, and deep sea blues. While everything in here was worn, in some cases, downright shabby, it was still in good repair and looked quite comfortable. Hannah, however, was anything but.

The intervening years had not been kind to her. The girl with the bright blond pigtails Hermione and Ron remembered was gone, replaced by a woman in obvious middle age wide hipped, soft-bellied, lined face. The fresh face was now careworn. The pigtails were gone, as was the bright blond; it had been replaced with an indifferent shoulder length of dirty blond. Hermione was acutely aware of her own appearance in that moment: she wore black robes still new enough to swallow light. Her hair, which would never be tamed, was still well cared for and pulled back in a neat bun. Her skin still retained the elasticity of youth, and her figure was still slender. The difference the years had made was enough to make her want to squirm uncomfortably.

With care, Hermione and Ron sat down on the overstuffed couch. Hannah remained standing, her arms folded against her chest. After a moment, Hannah said, "Well," exasperation in her tone.

"Well, what?" replied Hermione just as waspishly.

"Aren't you going to tell me how I'll be so ruined, so shunned, so..." Hannah began angrily. She stopped, and the anger vanished, replaced by weariness. "Whatever. What are you going to threaten me with to try and keep me silent about your oh-so precious Harry Potter?"

Ron, wisely, spoke before Hermione did. "We actually didn't come to threaten you, Hannah. We just wanted to hear your side of the story."

Hannah blinked and looked shocked for a moment. "Really? I thought that you already read Luna's article."

"We did," Ron replied. "Now we'd like to hear from you exactly what happened that night."

Hannah shrugged, but moved over to only chair in the room and sat down. "Since you put it that way, sure. Although it's pretty straightforward. I was waiting as part of the ambush with the rest of the Army, the Order, and everyone else. When Voldemort entered and summoned all of the Death Eaters, I jumped out to attack, like everyone else. I ended up facing off against Theodore Nott. I didn't want to hurt him; he was someone I knew, someone I went to school with. But he didn't feel the same way.

"After he landed a couple of nasty hexes, I managed to stun him and started moving forward, toward Harry; for some bizarre reason I'd thought I'd be safer near him. What an idiot I was! I saw you, Hermione, get pulled into a duel, and you, Ron, go after that snake. By then I knew Harry was not a safe place to be, I just wanted to get out of there. Since no one was behind the stone arch, I thought I'd be safe there. So I saw what happened to Harry. Voldemort was slicing Harry to ribbons. Harry couldn't even get a shield up to protect himself. He was bleeding from a dozen places.

"When he was done playing with Harry, he cast another hex, slicing Harry's throat. I saw him die, right in front of my eyes. The blood sprayed out, his face went slack, and he started to fall. I panicked and started to run, I didn't want to be next. But Theodore was back up, and he was running toward me. I started to fire off a tripping hex, but Theodore grabbed my wand arm, and I misfired. I hit Harry, and he went flying through the arch with Voldemort.

"Theodore hexed me, and I passed out. By the time I woke up in St. Mungo's, it was too late, Harry was already a hero. I didn't have the heart to tell the truth, not at first."

Ron looked at her for a moment when she finished her story. "What changed your mind?"

Hannah smiled bitterly. "It was you and Hermione, actually. When all of those stories started to come out in the run up to the celebration this year, my name wasn't anywhere in them. Same thing as last time, actually. Everyone else was recognized for their contributions to the defeat of Voldemort, but not me. Even Ernie, and he spent the entire damn battle cowering in a corner! But not me, not nice little Hannah Abbott, such a good little Hufflepuff, so quiet, so helpful, great member of the team. But that was ok, I told myself. I did my part; I didn't need to be a hero. So while you got your cushy Ministry job, and Ron went to play for the Cannons, and Ernie was taken on as an assistant to Scrimgeour, I was left to fend for myself. But that was ok, too, I thought, I mean, I wasn't really a hero, I was part of the team, and I did my part, right?

"But then all this anniversary stuff came up. And they started interviewing everyone. No one contacted me. No one. Then they started planning the Victors' Ball. I wasn't invited. And it hit me. I did deserve to be recognized. I did deserve to be known, to be honored, just like all of you. And Harry, Harry Potter died by Voldemort's hand, and if it hadn't been for me and my hex, Voldemort would've won."

Hannah finished her explanation with that ringing pronouncement. Ron and Hermione sat stunned and silent. Hermione looked down at her hands, which were twisting her robes in her lap. After a moment, she looked up at Hannah, her eyes wet with tears. "You're really telling the truth, aren't you?" she whispered.

Hannah nodded, smothering the vicious grin lurking at the corners of her mouth. "Yes, I really am. For twenty years, I've watched everyone all but genuflect every time someone mentioned Harry's name. I watched everyone treat the two of you like some sort of demi-gods, the best friends of Harry fucking Potter, so bereft by his loss, still hurting after twenty goddamn years. I just can't take it anymore. I deserve my share of credit. I deserve the perks, the honor, all of it!"

Hermione stood up. "I hope you get exactly what you wish for. I hope you choke on it!" she hissed and stormed out of the flat.

Ron stared at Hermione's retreating figure. After she slammed the door behind her, Ron looked at Hannah with pity. "I'm going to tell you something my Mum told me after everything was over. She said, 'You are still my son, Ron.' It took me a while to understand what she meant, but what she was saying is that all of the fame, all of the worship, the articles, all of it, doesn't change who you are, and it doesn't bring you happiness."

Hannah merely stared at him bitterly. Ron sighed and continued. "I'd like you to reconsider having Luna publish that article. Not for Harry's sake, but for your own. This will not make you happy, Hannah."

Hannah glared at him and then nodded toward the door. "You'd best leave now. You've overstayed your welcome."

Ron simply nodded and left quietly.

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Three days later, Hannah received a package from the Ministry.

"Miss Abbott

We would like to apologize for the grave oversight of failing to recognize your contributions toward the defeat of Voldemort. To rectify this mistake, we would like to make the following restitution:

1) We are awarding you the sum of 1,000 Galleons. These have been deposited in your Gringott's account.

2) Enclosed in this package is your Order of Merlin, Third Class. At the Victors' Ball, we will hold a formal ceremony recognizing your award. Your invitation to the ball has also been included in the package.

3) We have several opportunities open at this time in the Ministry for someone of your abilities and stature. Please contact our hiring department secretary, Lilah Moon, when convenient for you to discuss these opportunities.

Again, Miss Abbott, we apologize for the oversight. It is my, and the Ministry's, hope that this restitution is acceptable to you and will allow us to put the unpleasantness of the last twenty years behind us.

Yours,

Minister Pierce

Minister of Magic

Order of Merlin, Third Class"

Hannah crumpled the letter in her fist and laughed hysterically.