

Legacy

by Sadie Beryl

He barely knew who he was anymore; the world had forgotten about him but he had to hold on... Then she came for him. Someone had remembered him, but who was she and why did she bother?

Chapter 1

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He barely knew who he was anymore; the world had forgotten about him but he had to hold on... Then she came for him. Someone had remembered him, but who was she and why did she bother?

It was as cold and windy as it had always been. Anna had been here a dozen times or so as a child, travelling with her mother up the narrow rocky path. She remembered that, as they got nearer to the building, her mother would grab her hand and pull her close and tight. Now, as then, she lowered her head downward to avoid the wind and the depressing surroundings.

She hated this place. Even though her mother worked on behalf of a select few, Anna truly believed this place was fair and just, if not merciful, for the vast majority of its residents. Most of them were monsters, most were... Anna mentally chided herself not to start that again. There was still so much anger, resentment, and blackness left over in her and everyone else.

She wondered instead whether her mother, if she were still alive, would be happy at the turn of events. Most people would have rather not done anything: "out of sight, out of mind" or, more exactly, "let them rot." But even now, the situation had to be dealt with. The building just had to be replaced. No amount of magic could keep it up any longer.

Anna had seen the blueprints of the new building. It was by no means comfortable. It was about as much of a dump as the current structure. The one thing that it had, that people demanded, was sturdy walls. There was no way anyone was going to escape, which was everyone's greatest fear.

After the rocky climb, she started going down the long, flat walkway to the entrance. Suddenly, she was startled by the swoop of a large black bird. Anna stopped and watched the bird in its flight, thinking it was terribly appropriate that the bird was black. It flew the short distance to the plot of land where they buried those who'd died. The unkempt, uncared-for cemetery was divided into two distinct sections – one large and one very small. The larger section held the remains of those whose families didn't care if they lived or, in this case, died. When people here died, the families could come and claim the bodies, presumably to lay them to rest in family plots, but very few ever did. If Anna thought hard enough about it, it might have seemed sad. First, in life, society rejected them, or they wouldn't have been here in the first place, and then, in death, their family also rejected them.

She understood all too well why these people would be rejected by their family. She'd seen it first-hand – the anger, the hatred. Most families were too scared to even have the corpse of those who died buried in the family plot of the graveyard for fear of what other people might do. So, as a result, most of the dead were buried in shallow holes marked only to distinguish where the next person's grave should be dug.

A few families, however, did make use of the smaller section of the yard. This section held the remains of people whose families cared, at least, that their loved ones not be left in unmarked holes but who could not risk bringing them home. For a sum of money, their family member could be laid to rest in a small marked grave. The graves were crowded together and a flat, ground level headstone displayed only the name and the dates of birth and death. Not that there were many people who came to read the information. Over the years, Anna had only seen a few old women in the small graveyard. She imagined that they were mothers secretly coming here to grieve for a lost

child. Their families probably never knew where the women had gone during those times; never knew what they were doing.

Snapping out of her thoughts, she noticed that the black bird had landed on a particular headstone. The bird looked at her and cawed. The sound sent chills up her spine, but she shook her head and told herself that it was just a bird and that it landed on that particular headstone only because it, unlike any of the other headstones, was raised above the ground. The bird stood there, quietly looking at Anna, occasionally tipping its head one way and then the other.

In her mind, Anna insisted that it was just a bird doing things that birds do. But a moment later, her feet, unbeknownst to her brain, began slowly walking the short distance to the waiting animal. As she was walking, the bird flew off, causing her to stop in her tracks. She watched the bird until she couldn't see it anymore, after which her gaze reluctantly fell back to the lonely looking grave marker.

She had been there when they'd laid him to rest – again trailing behind her mother, who'd led the battle with the Ministry. Her mother was an army of one. Anna never knew the man personally; he'd been convicted and incarcerated before she was born. She'd only heard her mother's stories of his courage and bravery; how the good wouldn't have triumphed over evil without him. But Anna had heard the other stories too; the ones of his treachery, his evilness, his many black deeds. On balance, she'd heard many more of the bad stories from many more people than good ones from her mother. And the tellers of those incriminating stories were well-respected people. People who had known him, worked with him, fought on the side of the light. Even the Boy Who Lived had some bad stories to tell.

Her mother fought for his name and his reputation and she had done it all her life, but it was all for nothing. No one believed her when she tried to speak out. Her friends tried to quiet her; the rest just ridiculed her. When he died, she used every resource at her command to mark his life with something; some recognition of his contributions, some lasting tribute. She even did something Anna had only rarely seen her do. She used her name.

Unlike some others, Hermione Granger never sought out the spotlight for her part in the war. To her, she did what she did because it was the right thing to do. She accepted the thanks given to her by the people, accepted her Order of Merlin, First Class, and then went on her way. She only spoke up when history tried to re-write the truth about that time, and most often, she spoke up about him. She was given a measure of leeway with her campaigns of his innocence, but they never got very far. However, with his death, she donned her metaphorical 'Golden Trio, Hero of the Wizarding World' robes, marched straight into the Minister of Magic's office and demanded something for him.

She explained. He patronized. She demanded. He cajoled. She threatened and he compromised. And the result was this – a black granite headstone that sat just 36 inches high. The marker was topped with a grey cauldron, wrapped at its base with a stone cloth that draped to the ground, where it pooled around the nameplate.

Anna moved slowly towards the marker, again remembering the ceremony during which it was set. In attendance were her, her mother and the fellow who put it in place. Her mother cried and Anna, as instructed, placed the flowers her mother had bought into the cauldron. Then they left.

When she arrived at his burial site, she thought the headstone looked much as it had all those years ago. The flowers were gone, of course, and it appeared to be a preferred landing spot for birds. Leaves covered the base and nameplate. Anna drew her wand and cast a cleaning charm, only to find that it wouldn't work. She wondered if there was some kind of ward around the area to prevent unauthorized magic.

Feeling that she'd somehow failed her mother by not cleaning the marker, Anna bent down to, at least, brush away the leaves. Mentally scolding herself that she had very important business to attend to inside the building and shouldn't be delaying her appointment; she bent down to clear away the dead leaves from the nameplate. Pleased that that chore was complete, she stood and began walking towards the building. The cleaned nameplate read: Severus Snape.

Chapter 2

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Homeward Bound ...

With determination, Anna marched out of the graveyard and headed towards the entrance to Azkaban prison. She strode purposefully, holding her head high, as she'd often seen her mother do. Anna Granger was trying to project an image of confidence, the image of someone who was a force to be reckoned with.

It had been an unusual decree from the Ministry. With the building of the new prison and concerns about over-crowding, those prisoners who were deemed safe or otherwise unlikely to re-commit crimes would be released if the Warden's Board approved of the situation into which they were being released. When the list of eligible prisoners was released, Anna was astonished to see his name on it.

Of course, some of the inmates on the probationary release list would not have the opportunity to see the outside world because no one would want to petition for their custody. And even if some well-meaning families had wanted to, they would have been thwarted in their attempts to claim the probationers due to the mountain of paperwork involved, the scrutiny of the Ministry inspectors or the determination of the local population to not have those kinds of people living anywhere near them.

But Anna persisted, having several things going for her. First, she had friends at the Ministry, and they knew some of the ins and outs of Ministry paperwork. Second, the "living situation" was a large manor house far from any nosy or fearful neighbors. And, finally, she took a lesson from her mother: Anna used the power of her last name. After all that, she was finally granted custody.

She smiled to herself, thinking of how pleased her mother would have been at what was about to happen. As hard as Hermione Granger had worked on behalf of Severus Snape, she'd worked equally hard for this man, trying to clear his name and salvage his reputation.

Anna looked behind her, imagining she could still see the black van awaiting her return. She took a deep breath and opened the heavy, ancient door.

Inside, in what may have been a reception area, Anna paused, unsure what to do or where to go. Since no one was there, she politely called out, not wanting to offend anyone when she was so close to her goal. Checking her pocket watch, she was assured that she was on time for her "probationary custody acquisition." The wording sounded more like she was picking up second-hand furniture rather than a person.

Looking around the small stone room, she saw a decrepit wooden chair against one wall and what appeared to be an old desk against the other. The floor was made of cut stone, rutted and pitted in places and most often filled with dirty water. And finally, there was a locked door ahead of her on the back wall.

Anna was just about to call out when she heard footsteps. A small creature unlocked the door and stepped into the room. Whatever it was, it clearly wasn't an elf, and to call it a goblin would have put all goblins to shame. It rather looked like a stone gargoyle come alive.

In a harsh voice, it asked, "What do you want?"

"I've come to pick up a prisoner for whom I've been granted custody," Anna said as evenly and as clearly as she could. In truth, that feeling of confidence she'd entered with was rapidly draining away.

"Parchments," the gargoyle demanded as it stuck out its gnarled hand.

Fumbling only slightly, Anna pulled a large raft of parchments from an inner pocket of her traveling cloak. She handed it to the small being, praying that he or she would find everything in order. The prior night, Anna had reviewed the many documents, verifying that they were all properly signed, dated, approved, reviewed, initialed, attested, notarized and imprinted with the official Ministry seals.

The creature snatched the parchments, scanning only the top sheet, and then dropped the whole stack on the floor. It turned, unlocked the large door, and left.

Anna quickly grabbed the precious papers before they could become soaked on the floor. Returning them to her pocket, she wondered what she might do until the small creature returned; or rather, if he returned. Lacking anything better to do, she sat on the cold chair and waited.

After what seemed like forever, she heard footsteps on the other side of the door coming towards her. But this time, there were more than one set of footfalls.

Anna stood quickly and retreated back to her place by the front door. She heard the key turn in the lock and held her breath. The gargoyle that'd been there before stepped inside the room, followed by another man who was much bigger but equally disturbing.

Stunned into silence at the sight of the large and, frankly, scary man, Anna only belatedly noticed that he was carrying something cradled in his arms; only it was not something, but someone. This someone was dressed in what looked like a long grey nightshirt, complete with a grey stocking hat and grey woolen socks. Anna guessed that this was the Ministry's idea of a traveling outfit.

Anger erupted within her as she thought of those at the Ministry in front of warm fireplaces deciding that this garment was sufficient to release someone from prison on a winter day. But before she could evoke further nasty thoughts about the Ministry, the large man unceremoniously dumped the grey swathed figure on the chair that Anna had previously occupied.

A low, quiet moan was all that escaped from the person, whose body seemed all but skeletal. The eyes were unfocused, and the body looked permanently hunched over from years of apparent mistreatment.

"That's him. Sign here," was all the gargoyle said.

Anna's eyes were transfixed on the small slip of a man. Was that him? He looked nothing like the man in the pictures her mother had shown her. Anna had to take a step towards him to convince herself that the gargoyle and his giant friend hadn't just picked out some half-dead derelict and tried to pass him off.

As if reading her mind, the gargoyle said again testily, "That's him. Sign here."

Anna quietly turned to the desk and signed the parchment the gargoyle held out. The parchment said, in part, that she, Anna Granger, had examined and identified the probationer and accepted full custody 'as is'. She could have been signing for a used broom with no bristles.

After she handed the parchment back to the gargoyle, both he and the giant man turned and left, locking the door on the way out.

Staring at the locked door, she only then realized that they were done with both of them, that this man was her responsibility and it was up to her to get him out of the building and home. Walking over to him, she said, as gently as she could, "Bet you're glad to be getting out of here, hmmm?"

She received no response. She moved over to him and slid her arm around his back and under his arm on the other side and attempted to coax him up. Again, she received no response. No effort to stand. No effort to communicate. Not even a turn of his head.

Anna nudged him again with a bright and encouraging, "Come on, now."

Still nothing. How was she going to get a full-grown man who wouldn't walk out of there alone? Though he was all but emaciated, he was still considerably taller than she was.

Perhaps she could lift him enough to get his feet underneath him and then he'd get the idea to walk. Wrapping both arms around his slight body, she heaved upward.

But heaving clearly wasn't necessary, as she nearly toppled over when he practically flew up out of the chair. Stabilizing both herself and the man in her arms, she realized with alarm that he weighed practically nothing. There was not enough meat on his bones to constitute a child. He had to weigh 20 lbs less than her.

Adjusting the unresponsive man in her arms, she stamped down the anger at the Ministry that rose in her and threatened to spill out all over the building. How could they? This was just abusive, inhuman.

She forced her thoughts to more cheerful ones, as she didn't want to subject him to her anger. His life must have been bad enough already without him being the victim of her temper.

With the happiest voice she could manage, she said, "Well, I've got an idea. We'll have you out of here in a flash and into a nice warm van."

She noticed that this time there was a response. In contact with her body, he'd begun to shiver. Galvanized into action, she quickly set him back down on the chair and removed her own cloak, spreading it over his form. She mentally kicked herself for not anticipating this and bringing some warm clothes for him.

Tucking the cloak around him as best she could, she stepped over to the front door and opened it wide. As if to mock her efforts to keep the man warm, a cold wind blew forcefully into the small stone room. With haste, Anna stepped back to the frail man and slipped her arms under his legs and behind his back. Cautiously lifting him, she was again appalled at his condition. He was as light as a bird. She carefully maneuvered his still lengthy body out the door. She briefly thought about closing it, but, if nothing else, her leaving it open was only a small sign of her contempt for this place.

Outside, the wind picked up the loose flaps of her hastily arranged cloak, exposing some of the grey nightshirt he wore. Her biggest fear was that if she didn't get him to that van fast enough, he would somehow freeze to death. Walking quickly, she spared a short glance at the black granite headstone in the graveyard. Deep inside her, she whispered, 'Mom, you tried to save Professor Snape. You tried your best. But I promise I will save this one. I promise you, Mom.'

In a vain attempt at cheerfulness, she began a non-stop monologue of encouraging and happy statements. So concerned was she that she might fall or he might slip that Anna wasn't even sure what she was saying. In her ramblings, statements like 'We'll be home soon' and 'It's going to be warm in the van' and 'I have a nice room made up for you at home' or variations thereof figured prominently.

Anna was running out of breath during her run/walk down the path coupled with her non-stop chatter, and despite his emaciated state, he was getting heavy. Fear gripped her when his shivering became stronger, and she felt him turn slightly towards her in an attempt to avoid the cold winds.

Finally, around the last bend, she saw the magical boat launch where the small boat waited to take her back to the mainland, to where her van and driver were waiting. Carefully, Anna stepped into the boat, glad to see that it was firm and steady in the water despite the waves breaking on the shore. Remembering the crossing on the way over, she sat quickly and hunched herself over the man as best she could to protect him from the wind and the spray. Without pause, the boat began the slow but steady way across the grey expanse of sea. The trip seemed like it took forever. Anna looked around and saw nothing but grey grey water, grey skies, grey boat. The spray occasionally blew over the sides of the boat and stung her face, and the immensity of her task threatened to overwhelm her. She brushed the moisture from her face, but she couldn't tell if the salty water was from the sea or her eyes.

As she focused her thoughts away from her fears and back to her charge, her endless commentary quickened. She told him that they were close and they would be home soon.

Getting out of the small boat and stepping again onto solid ground, she hollered to the driver, "Boowie, come here and open the door. Hurry!"

The annoyed driver, who had worked at the manor for many years first for her mother and now her, obliged at his own pace, opening the car's sliding side door. Anna stopped at the opening, at a loss as to how to get her and her charge into the vehicle. Boowie didn't appear to care much about his mistress' dilemma. Finally, Anna conceded to ask for help. Boowie worked for her and he'd do as he was told.

"Hold out your arms," she ordered.

"What?" the astonished man said. "I won't be touching one of them! I..."

"Now!" Anna bellowed.

Reluctantly, he extended his arms, turning his head as though something smelled very bad.

Anna placed the man into the driver's arms, fully aware from the look on Boowie's face that this needed to be quick.

Relieved of her burden, Anna hopped up into the back of the van and then reached to take the man from Boowie. She gingerly maneuvered the body into the vehicle and onto the seat and, before releasing her driver to his task, said, "Get home quickly, but drive carefully and take the back roads."

Boowie closed the door with a huff, all the while shaking his head in confusion at the contradictory instructions, mumbling, "Them kind don't deserve it."

Setting her passenger on the bench seat and propping him up as well as she could manage, she quickly prepared the interior. Before the inevitable bumpy ride home, Anna locked the door, lit two small interior lights, and darkened all the windows. In addition, she transfigured a wall between the front seats where Boowie was and the larger space in the back of the van.

Closed off from any prying eyes, she drew her wand and cast several warming charms and then transfigured the bench seat into a reclining seat that was large enough to lay her passenger down. Turning to the man, Anna slowly slid him down until he was lying flat, all the while speaking quietly to him, as though he were a scared rabbit ready to bolt into the night at any moment.

Anna positioned herself next to him. She pulled a traveling blanket from the storage box and folded it to use as a makeshift pillow. Gently lifting his head, she placed the blanket under him and carefully laid his head on it. Doing this brought the two of them quite close, and for the first time, Anna searched the man's face for his thoughts, his feelings at being taken from that hellhole.

He said nothing, but his eyes turned up towards her and seemed to be trying to focus on her. Taking this as a sign of... something, she again ratcheted up the chatter even brighter and cheerier than before.

"Now, we'll have to figure out a way for you to tell me if you need anything, if you're too warm or too cold or if you're hungry. We'll be home soon, and I have a nice big room waiting for you with a big fireplace. My mother told me you like corn muffins, so I had some made, and you can have butter or jam or honey on them, whichever you prefer. And I got you some new clothes. I hope they fit. If not, we'll have them tailored or get you some different ones. And you definitely need a bath. There's a big claw foot tub in your bathroom. We'll fill that up with nice warm water and some bubbles. Oh, no, no bubbles, a man like you doesn't need any girlie bubbles, eh?"

As the one-sided conversation continued unabated, Anna moved around the man, tucking her cloak tight around him, although by now it was getting rather warm in the moving vehicle. She moved to tuck the cloak around his legs, but his feet clearly weren't going to be covered by the short garment. Moving to pull his woolen socks up as far as they would go, she brushed his shin with her hands. Her conversation stopped at the feel of his skin. Under her hand, his leg was as cold as ice practically frozen.

Fearing that her discovery and her silence would embarrass the man, she quickly began talking again. She finished pulling up his socks as she was speaking, but was distressed that a couple inches of skin on both legs were still exposed. Without another blanket or cloak to use for warmth, she decided to simply lay her hands on the bare skin, hoping to transfer a bit of her own body heat to the frigid flesh. To her surprise, the man seemed to make a noise. It sounded like a quiet sigh. After several moments, she moved her hands slightly to give a different patch of skin what little heat she could.

Suddenly, the whole van bumped up and down as it hit a large hole in the dirt road. Anna felt that she needed to be by his head for his protection. Another bump like the last one and he'd arrive home with a concussion.

She regretted having to withdraw her hands from his cold shins, but she felt she had to crawl up to sit next to his head. Anna took out her wand and elongated the socks to cover his legs where the cloak didn't.

Actually, the presence of the very rutted road was a good sign. It meant that they were halfway home. But another large bump sent everyone bouncing, and Anna quietly wondered if it wasn't really Boowie making his opinion of the events known. She'd have words with her pig-headed driver later. She quickly assessed the condition of her passenger; he looked to have survived the shock, although his head had slipped off the small pillow.

Looking down at him, she decided that she had to do something about the situation. She had to cushion his head against any more potholes. Carefully, Anna slid her arms under his head and down underneath his shoulders. Lifting him slowly, she shuffled herself enough to sit beneath him and then gingerly lowered his head down into her lap.

Feeling that her charge was sufficiently protected for the rest of the journey, she allowed herself to relax a bit for the first time that day. She looked down at the old man whose eyes were closed. In a brief moment of panic, her gaze shot to his chest. Anna released the breath she was holding when she saw the slight but reassuring rise and fall of his breathing.

With him asleep, she allowed her head to fall back against the wall. She closed her eyes, thinking about all that had happened, not just today, but from her earliest memories of her mother's crusade for him and Professor Snape. Her mind wandered down that well-worn path of what might have been. Anna didn't want to go there, but the images were all so wonderful all bright and warm and inviting. She could have stayed there forever. Her life certainly would have been different. A bump in the road roused her from her imagination, and as she raised her head, several tear drops rolled down her face. She quickly wiped the moisture away, scolding herself for her weakness. Looking down, she found herself being observed by the gentle eyes of a concerned old man.

Chapter 3

The sound made by the wheels changed, announcing their arrival at the manor. Anna squinted through the tinting covering the window to confirm their location. Abruptly, her cheerful banter resumed, waking the prone figure from his nap. Anna was pleased that he seemed to be rested and feeling better as he too attempted to look out the window.

Anna smiled broadly and announced, "We're home."

The black van entered the circular drive in front of the house and pulled to a stop. Boowie turned off the engine and got out of the driver's seat. Lumbering to the door, he opened it and was instantly hit by a blast of heat escaping. Anna slipped out from under her passenger and moved across the vehicle towards the door. Knowing there was no way to disembark the old man except with the help of the disgruntled driver, she fixed him with a hard look and commanded, "Hold out your arms."

Anna carefully lifted the man and wiggled and scooted him around to the door. She slowly slid him out of the vehicle and into the reluctant arms of Boowie.

Next, the young woman stepped out of the van and promptly collapsed to the ground.

"Miss?" Boowie asked.

"No, no, I'm fine. My legs just fell asleep," Anna said, a bit embarrassed, as she stood up and brushed off her skirt.

Anna held out her arms to retrieve her guest, and Boowie was happy to oblige.

Looking down at the man who was quietly watching her, she hurried up to the house, delighted with her accomplishment. If only her mother could see this. But, her mother aside, Anna was genuinely thrilled that he was here.

As she approached the front door, her house-elf, Sera, opened it right on cue. "Miss is here with the man," the small elf with the big eyes squealed excitedly.

Anna breezed through the door and headed down the hall, calling back, "Follow me, Sera."

She had worked all week to prepare his room a first floor study with a beautiful view of the gardens and a big fireplace. She'd acquired a hospital bed and decked it out with new sheets, a spring green comforter, and a myriad of pillows. She also had a wheelchair waiting and had outfitted the bathroom just like the wizard at the medical equipment shop had suggested.

Her steps didn't slow as she half walked/half ran up the hall, cursing herself once more for not thinking ahead and pre-positioning the wheelchair at the front door. Again, her precious cargo was getting heavy.

"Sera, open the door to the room quickly," Anna said, almost breathless, "and light the fire."

Obediently, the elf scurried ahead, opened the large ornate door and then entered the room.

Anna, arriving outside the room, stepped carefully to wiggle the old man and herself into the room without physical harm.

"Sera, lower the guard on the bed."

The elf rushed and lowered the bar on the far side of the bed.

"No, no, lower the one on the other side."

Instantly the elf popped to the near side and lowered the other guard.

"Now close the other one," Anna said as she neared the bed, not wanting her charge to roll off of the bed and hit the floor within minutes of entering her house.

When the bed was prepared, Anna gently set the bedraggled man down, slipping her arms out from under him. She looked down at him with a mix of pride, joy, sorrow and fear.

"I'm sorry," she said, at first for the jostling of the arrival, but in that moment, seeing his face, she wanted, desperately wanted, to express her feelings. Why it had taken so long for her to come for him, and how she felt totally inadequate for the job of caring for him. But she bit back the words, unsure that once she started she'd ever stop. She settled simply for another, "I'm sorry."

He looked up at her with an expression of confusion, wondering why this woman would apologize for the miracle she'd wrought. She had plucked him, totally undeserving of such kindness, out of that hellhole. He didn't know why she'd done it; why she'd bothered. He didn't even know who she was.

Moments passed in silence with their eyes locked; each trying to express and understand the rush of emotions they felt and wanted to convey.

Anna couldn't bear the torrent of feelings washing over her. She lowered her head in a desperate attempt to forestall the tears she knew were just below the surface. She would work for the rest of his life to care for him, to make up for everything, but, right now, he didn't need to see her this way. She'd better pull herself together, wear a big smile and make him feel safe and welcomed that's what he needed and deserved.

Lifting her head and pasting on the brightest smile she could muster, she tried to mask the deep emotions battling inside her.

"Come on, now, let's get you settled," she bustled, lifting the bed guard back up. She carefully lifted her cloak off his body and gently straightened his nightshirt. Reaching down, she grabbed one of the many blankets on the bed and pulled it over him, tucking it under his chin.

"I hope you're warming up, but let's turn the bed to face the fire, eh?"

In the large room, she was able to turn the wheeled bed completely around. Now the old man could see and, more importantly, feel the warmth from the large fire.

"How is that? Better?" Anna waited briefly in case he was going to answer.

"You know, we really need to figure out a way to communicate. Can you say 'yes' or 'no'?"

He thought about it. He couldn't remember the last time he'd said anything. There really hadn't been many people to talk to back in prison, not that he wanted to speak to any of them. The guards never spoke, and honestly, he'd always assumed that each day would be his last. How could they not sentence him to the Dementor's Kiss? How could he have been spared when those around him who were equally involved had been hauled off? Well, all except Severus. But then Severus died, and there was no one left to speak to.

But this woman had already done so much that he'd try. He opened his mouth and pushed air from his lungs, but all that came out was a hacking cough. In fact, a cough so deep it triggered a paroxysm of coughing. He turned on his side away from her and curled up in a fetal position, all the while violently coughing and desperately trying to breathe.

Terrified by his attack, Anna was momentarily frozen not knowing what to do that would be of any help. She knew that there was truly nothing that she could do. Her doctor friend, Roscoe, would be here in the morning to assess him. But watching his body convulsing with coughs, she had to do something. Anna cautiously lowered the bed guard and sat next to him. She slowly leaned down and gathered the poor man in her arms, providing him with what little comfort she could just by her embrace.

He hated this, the coughing fits. He could usually keep them at bay by breathing very shallowly, but eventually the need overtook him. He hated it worse when the coughing came after meals because, more often than not, he'd lose the one and only meal of the day.

In the midst of cursing his life and everything in it, he thought he felt the bed shift slightly. He paid it no mind until a pair of arms encircled him. Her movements startled him as she gently held him. The coughing continued as it always did, ejecting whatever material his lungs had deemed unhealthy. He was both comforted by her touch and embarrassed at the thought of the mess that would inevitably be left after such a fit.

She held him tentatively at first, but the embrace grew tighter as the violent convulsing persisted. She was still terrified that his frail body wouldn't tolerate the shaking and would fall to pieces at any moment.

They stayed together like this throughout his fit holding and being held. After what seemed like an eternity, his coughing and shaking abated. Anna waited until she was sure the attack had run its course. She gave him a final squeeze and sat up.

"Well, that was something, wasn't it?"

He didn't move, too worried about what he might now look like. His eyes focused in front of him as he saw the small spots of blood that insulted the cheery light green blankets she'd honored him with. He would have reached out to try and wipe them away if he could have moved his arm, but the fit and his life in general had left him feeling weak and hollow.

Unfortunately, but as he expected, she got off the bed and came around to the other side.

"Oh, dear," she said quietly as she assessed what lay before her.

He felt embarrassed and humiliated.

"Well, I guess you shouldn't try singing opera if this is what happens when you try to speak, eh?" she said brightly.

His brain paused for a moment. Was that a joke? Gratitude quickly replaced his embarrassment as he peered up at her smiling face. Mustering all he could, he slowly but distinctly nodded his head.

Lowering her head to his level, she excitedly exclaimed, "Yes? Yes? Was that a yes?"

He attempted a smile, caught up in her excitement, and nodded again.

"Good. Excellent." And, just to ensure that they had established a means of communication, "Can you also shake your head 'No'?"

Looking up in her face, he slowly shook his head.

"Excellent," she said, but immediately stopped, fixing him with a suspicious look. "Wait, was that 'yes, I can say no' or was that 'no, I can't say no'?"

His face reflected his amusement at her consternation. There was even a bit of a smirk.

"Oh, you! You've got a streak of mischief, don't you?" she chided him warmly.

"Now we've got to get you cleaned up. I think it's time for a bath," she announced.

Fear shot through him vaporizing his previous amusement. How was this going to work?

"Sera," she called out, and the brown eyed elf instantly popped into the room. "Sera, run a warm bath in the tub, and then, when we're in there, change the bed clothes here."

"Yes, Miss," the elf replied as she scurried into the en-suite bath.

Now the old man was really nervous. First, he didn't remember the last time he'd had a good washing, and second, well, um, she was, you know, a girl who was at least 25 years younger than him and, and, and ...

But his concerns were brushed aside as Anna made short work of getting him out of bed, into the wheelchair, and off to the bath.

She leaned down and asked gently if he needed to use the toilet. He shook his head emphatically no. He was, instead, riveted to the full, warm and inviting bathtub in front of him. Anna produced her wand and flicked it at the bath, muttering some kind of charm. Immediately the tub was filled with puffy white bubbles.

Stopping the wheelchair at the edge of the tub, Anna tried to cover her own slight embarrassment with busyness.

"Ok, let's get you into the tub," she said, her words tinged with concern at the prospect of bathing him. Truth be known, she was also worried about how to maintain his dignity throughout this process. She quickly plucked the hat off his head and then moved around to drag his socks from his feet, tossing the garments in a pile on the floor. Looking up at him, she struck on an idea of how to get that nightshirt off gracefully.

Stepping to the side of the wheelchair, she reached out and lifted him, nightshirt and all, and swiftly but gently deposited him into the tub.

The look on his face was priceless. If Anna hadn't been so concerned that the temperature of the water would somehow kill him, she'd have burst out laughing. He was surprised and stunned and confused and warmed all at once. And just as quickly, Anna slid her hands down his sides and grasped the end of his nightshirt and began wiggling it out from underneath his body.

A few more tugs and pulls and she had the sodden garment off over his head and tossed it on the heap of his other clothes on the bathroom floor.

"OK, now for the rest of it."

Thanking the fates for the everlasting bubble charm, the old man watched as she valiantly reached in and took hold of his underpants on each side.

"Now when I pull, promise you won't slide under the water and drown," she said, using a joke to hide her discomfort.

He nodded and did his best to brace himself against the sides of the tub.

As if to cover what she was doing and to preserve his dignity, she babbled on, "Yes, wouldn't want you to die within an hour of getting to your new home, now would we?" Her prattle never ceased as she cautiously slid his underpants off and down his legs.

"I hope the water is warm enough for you. If not, I'll spell it hotter." After freeing the garment from his body, she quickly tossed it on the pile with the rest of his clothes.

"There we go. Are you all right now? Is the water warm enough? Do you need anything? You're not going to slip under the water, are you? If not, can I step out and get you some new clothes?"

Suddenly her barrage of questions halted as she took in the look on his face. He was stymied as to how to answer all of her questions at once. Heck, he couldn't remember what her first question was.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I am a bit of a chatterbox in case you hadn't noticed." The sardonic look on his face clearly conveyed, 'No, I hadn't noticed at all,' complete with a passable smirk.

"OK, let's try that again. Just 'yes' or 'no' questions, alright?"

He nodded.

"OK. First, are you okay just now?"

He nodded.

"Next, is the water warm enough?"

He nodded again.

"Is it too warm?"

He shook his head; although he thought he could tolerate it a bit warmer, he figured he shouldn't push his luck at this point.

"Do you need anything?"

He shook his head.

"Do you feel like you might slip under the water or should I hold you up?"

He firmly shook his head. No, he may not be as strong as he used to be, but he was tall enough that his feet touched the far end of the tub enough to keep his head above the water.

"Good, now do you think I can step out to get you some new clothes? I wouldn't want you to die while I was gone."

He nodded his head, not to the fear that he might die but that she could go and do her chores.

"Good, I'll be back shortly." Turning, she drew her wand and flicked it at the pile of clothes on the floor. They promptly burst into flames and incinerated. Anna was not going to chance cleaning them; first, because they were ugly and scratchy and she had bought him better stuff, and second, because she worried that they might contain any number of creepy crawlies.

With a last check on her guest to ascertain his well being, she left the room with a chipper, "Be right back."

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 5

Settling In...

Left alone in the relative silence, though he could hear the woman speaking to the elf, he mulled over her many voiced concerns that this or that might kill him and the possible reason behind them. He knew he was perfectly safe sitting here in the tub, and quieting his thoughts, he simply allowed himself to absorb the comfort and warmth of the water and the surroundings. He did consider that if he had to die now, that this would be a far more wonderful way to go than any he'd contemplated in Azkaban. Drowning here would be a most welcome way to die, sinking in the warm water with the smell of vanilla emanating from the bubbles. The soft moonlight filtering through the pale yellow curtains added to the low light coming from the couple of sconces around the room. Despite the many places on his body that ached, he felt the heat of the water beginning to seep into his muscles overcoming, if only a bit, the years of bone-numbing cold he'd lived through in prison. Yes, if he had to die anytime soon, this would be the way to go.

Shutting his eyes, he allowed his body to simply relax and absorb the wonderful sense of peace blanketing him.

It was probably a good thing that Anna bustled back in at that moment because he was about to fall asleep. And it would have been very rude of him to nod off, slip under the water and drown after he had specifically promised this angel he would not die while she was gone.

Half opening his eyes, he turned to look at her.

"You look sleepy," she stated.

He nodded and couldn't quite stifle a yawn.

"Well, let's get you washed up. I've got some clean clothes, and then we'll get you back to bed. Then would you like a bit of supper?"

The old man nodded eagerly, practically salivating at all the wonderful sounding tasks she'd just listed. He hadn't been clean in a month of Sundays. New clothes were unheard of in prison, and he was sure the ones she had would be soft and not scratchy. And a bed, a real bed with a proper mattress, a pillow, and warm blankets! And food! This would be his second meal today. It would mean two meals in one day. He hadn't had two meals in one day since he'd been sent to prison.

Anna knelt down at the side of the tub and pushed her sleeves up. Grabbing a washcloth from the nearby towel rack, she soaked it and soaped it up. She methodically washed each part of him, first telling him what was to be cleaned and then reaching under the sudsy water to lift and scrub gently. Anna was gratified when she felt him trying to flex his body to aid her washing. She also made a mental list of each part of him that appeared to cause him pain as it was washed and of each wound that needed medical attention. She would run down her list with Roscoe the next day so he could see to whatever her guest needed medically.

She gently washed his face and neck and then turned to pour water on his head to wash what little hair he had. She had to wash his hair a couple of times to get out the caked dirt, but after the third time, when the shampoo suds bubbled white, she was satisfied that his straggly, grayish hair was as clean as she could get it.

She rung out the cloth before offering it to him and then asked, "Umm, do you want to wash yourself, um, there?"

He seemed to want to and tried to raise his hand to take the cloth. Anna took his hand and placed the cloth in it. She was rewarded to see him close his hand around it. She moved the hand to the approximate location and released it so he could do whatever he was able to. She assured herself that whatever cleaning was done, combined with the sheer presence of soap and water, was more than had happened in a very long time.

After a moment of waiting, she asked brightly, "All done?" Although, she was not entirely sure if anything had actually been done.

Anna reached to the bottom of the tub by his feet and released the stopper. She stood up to grab several towels and then returned to her place by the tub. As the water slowly drained away, whatever part of him appeared from under the water got dried. She would have used a drying spell except for something that the wizard at the medical equipment store had said. He said that often elderly or neglected people craved touch and that anything she could do to touch him would revitalize both body and soul. So, she rubbed him with the towel to dry his hair and face, neck, chest and arms. When the water got dangerously low to his private areas, she deftly tossed a large towel across him, all the while busying herself drying his toes and feet.

Once she was done drying him, she pulled the wheelchair close to the tub and spread a dark green blanket over it. When she leaned down to lift him, he startled her by pulling away.

"What?" she said, but not fast enough to keep the hurt tone out of her voice. "Is there something wrong?"

He felt beyond embarrassed. How was he supposed to tell her he needed to use the toilet? And he was crushed that she felt hurt at his hesitancy.

He looked over to the toilet and tried to gesture with his head.

Following his line of sight, Anna saw the toilet and it clicked.

"Oh! No problem, no problem at all. I've gotten it all set up for you to use."

He saw that around the toilet was a lot of equipment.

Lifting him up, being careful not to shift the towel, she carried him over to the bowl.

"The man at the store showed me how to do this. I just set you down and put this strap across you so you don't fall over and snap this thing up into place, adjust the towel, and voilà. I even have a screen for you for privacy."

He had little choice but to use the equipment she provided, which seemed to work reasonably well. Seeing the set-up did alleviate one of his worries about living here with her.

After a moment, she inquired if he was done. Peeking discreetly above the screen, Anna saw him nod. She quickly unstrapped him, picked him up and carried him still draped with the towel to the wheelchair. When she'd set him down, she snugly wrapped him in the blanket, all the while humming a quiet tune. She then rolled him from the bathroom to his bed in the next room.

He saw that the bed had been changed and new sheets and a clean comforter had been laid out. On top of the bed, lying open, was also a white night shirt of some sort.

Parking the wheelchair, she opened the blanket and lifted him to the bed atop the white night shirt. Her hands moved speedily as she folded it around him and buttoned it up from the bottom. When she'd fastened it up past his waist, she took the edge of the towel that had been maintaining his modesty and slid it out. She eased his arms into the long white sleeves of the shirt and finished buttoning it up.

She proceeded to place two long white socks on his feet and then pulled a blanket over him. Next, she pushed a button on the side of the bed that raised the head so that he was in more of a seated position. Taking a comb from a sideboard, she gently combed his wet hair into place and then cast a drying charm on it.

Standing back, she admired her handiwork. "You look great!" she said brightly. "I hope you like it."

'Like it?' his mind exclaimed in astonishment. 'Like it?' He hadn't been clean in forever, and now he was swathed in clean soft cotton clothes, and he was warm, even his toes were warm. Merlin's beard, he could even feel his toes now. 'Like it?' Maybe he HAD died and somehow mistakenly ended up in heaven. Yes, he liked it, but not wanting to take a chance with his voice again, he nodded as vigorously as he could and tried to smile in measure to his delight.

Anna burst forth with a smile from ear to ear. "Good," she said moving back towards the bed. She lifted her hand and patted his shoulder. "You deserve it."

Pop! His thoughts and her chatter halted at the sound of the house-elf arriving. Immediately, his nose picked up a smell, no, an aroma. Food!

"Thank-you, Sera, put the tray on that tea cart and push it over here." The elf did as she was told, removing the lids from the dishes to reveal two bowls of chicken broth, a basket of corn muffins and a saucer of butter pats.

As he tried turned his head to locate the marvelous aroma, he only hoped he was not embarrassing himself by drooling.

"Tomorrow a friend of mine who is a Healer will be over to check out that cough of yours and give you a 'once-over,'" she informed him.

She lifted herself up on the bed next to him and leaned down to pick up one of the bowls of broth and a spoon. Stirring the broth and blowing some of the steam away, she served up a spoonful to him. He took in the warm liquid and thought that it had to be the best thing he'd tasted in 20 years.

"OK?" she asked hopefully.

He nodded as enthusiastically as he could.

She served up another spoonful that he greedily downed. Her monologue began again. Something about that blasted wizard from the medical equipment store and his helpful suggestions. But he heard none of it. His sole focus was that spoon and its movements.

In no time he had consumed the entire bowl of broth. Anna was a bit surprised at his voracious appetite, but she scolded herself that it shouldn't really surprise her considering where he'd come from.

"Well, now, how about a muffin?"

He nodded and turned to watch her take one of the mouth-watering golden biscuits from the basket. She broke off a small chunk and placed it in his eager mouth.

He couldn't describe its wonderful flavor and texture. It was scrumptious. He swallowed and looked expectantly at Anna who delightedly broke off another piece and gave it to him. Again that marvelous taste enveloped him. He'd never tasted anything so wonderful. There was a hint of honey in the mix, and it felt as though there was a pound of butter baked in. Lost in the euphoria of this delicacy, something in the back of his mind tried to push forward. It was something about corn muffins; some memory he tried to capture but couldn't.

Like the broth, the muffin was gone too quickly.

"Well, would you like something more? Broth or muffin?"

Again he felt stuck. That was not a 'yes' or 'no' question.

Realizing her error, she corrected herself, "Sorry, more broth?"

He nodded.

"OK," she said and picked up the other bowl. "Sera," she called.

Anna spooned the first bite into his mouth. Pop! The sound of the house-elf arriving was heard. Not taking her attention from the task of feeding him, she asked for another bowl of broth.

Addressing the old man, she said, "I hope you don't mind if I also have something to eat."

He smiled and his eyes turned upward to the ceiling, as though considering what he might answer to such a question. Then solemnly he looked back at her and regally nodded.

"Oh, thank you, your Lordship," she giggled.

Sera popped back in the room with another steaming bowl, setting it on the table and taking away the empty one.

He finished his second bowl and was hit with a sudden wave of fatigue. He yawned widely.

"Oh, tired now, are you?"

He slowly and contentedly nodded.

"OK, now I have something for you," Anna said as she slid off of the bed. Fishing around in her pocket, she produced a small object.

"It's getting late and we should get some sleep." The object she showed to him had a bell on it. "This attaches to the side of your bed. If you need me in the night, just make it jingle, and I'll be here."

She opened the small green band and wrapped it around the bed guard near his head. The gold bell attached to it glowed with a low light on the inside.

"It's charmed to ring when you stare at it for five seconds, even in the dark. Go ahead, try it. Just stare at it."

He focused his eyes on the shiny bell, thinking that there was no way this was going to work, but soon both he and Anna heard the happy jingling of the bell. It sounded like the bells heard at Christmas time.

He was thrilled with the new way of calling her, but a new fear now overtook him. Where was she going to be if he needed to summon her? Where was she going?

"It works!" she said in a tone that clearly indicated that she was pleased with her new gadget.

Once more he felt the cold fear of her leaving, of leaving him alone. He feared she might not come back. He'd be abandoned, forgotten again.

Calling the elf once more, "Sera, bring down some sheets and blankets and my pillow. Oh, and my nightgown and slippers, and make up that couch by the window for me."

When she turned back to the old man, she found him looking at her with an expression of profound relief and gratitude.

Startled by his deeply emotional expression, she exclaimed, "What?"

He inclined his head towards the couch she had just instructed the elf to make up.

Following his gaze, she suddenly realized what he'd feared. "What? Do you think I'd leave you alone on your first night? Don't be silly. If I did that, you might run off with the silver," she said in mock sincerity before giggling.

The relief on his face was mixed with amusement.

"No, no, later, when you're well enough to make it to the bathroom yourself, I'll move back to my room, but for now," she said, her voice softening, "I will be here for you."

The elf interrupted them, saying, "Miss Anna, your bed is made up."

Both he and Anna looked over to the couch to see it had been made up as a bed and that a flannel nightgown was draped over the arm.

"Thank you, Sera," Anna said, taking the new bowl of broth and a muffin. "You can take the rest of this food back to the kitchen."

Anna looked back at the old man and caught a frown on his face as the food disappeared.

"Oh, don't worry. There'll be plenty in the morning. Besides, you shouldn't stuff yourself if you're not used to it. It'll make you sick."

He looked hungrily at the bowl of broth remaining in her hand and the beautiful corn muffin in the other.

Noticing his leer, she squeaked, "Hey, this is for me, mister!"

She walked over to the couch and set the food down on an end table. Looking back at her guest, no, he wasn't a guest, he lived here now, Anna saw him yawn again. He was tired and probably eager to sleep, especially in the much nicer conditions. Inside her she felt a swell of happiness so powerful that she paused to regain her equilibrium.

Knowing that she shouldn't, she picked up her muffin and walked back to him.

"OK, since it is your first night here, I'll share my muffin with you," she said conspiratorially, producing the golden delight from behind her back. "But don't tell anyone."

He briefly debated whether he should accept her generous offer. He really was full and it was her supper, but they did taste heavenly.

He watched her sit back on the bed. She proceeded to break off a chunk of the yellow bread and pop it in her mouth. Next she broke off a piece for him. She moved her hand towards his mouth, and as he opened it, she quickly pulled her hand away.

She smiled mischievously, laughter making her eyes sparkle.

He pulled an angry face at her that conveyed something like, 'If I could get up, I'd grab that muffin and stuff it all in my mouth, girl!'

"OK," she said in mock-chastisement. "Here." She put the muffin piece into his mouth.

Then the two of them ate the rest of the muffin in companionable silence.

When the food was finished, Anna wiped off her hands and skirt as she got up from the bed.

"You tired?" she asked, and in answer, he yawned and nodded his head.

"OK, remember, if you need me, just stare at the bell for five seconds and I'll be right here."

She proceeded to re-level the bed so he could sleep. She straightened the blankets where she'd been sitting and generally fussed around him.

He watched her sleepily, amused at how the motherly instinct had come to the fore. He would have watched her all night, but Morpheus had stolen into the room, ready to whisk him away to dreamland.

He watched as she lowered the lights until the fire and the small bell at his side provided the only illumination in the room. She quietly made her way to the couch. His last thoughts before he slipped off to sleep were of her name Anna. He thought that it was a very pretty name. It was his grandmother's name.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 5

And so it ends and begins...

Despite the heavy curtains covering the second floor windows, the bright sunlight had snuck into his bedroom and was, at this moment, glaring at him.

He rolled over in an attempt to go back to sleep. After all, it wasn't like he had anyplace to be. But each time he tried to relax into sleep, something would annoy him into wakefulness.

Opening one eye, he looked around at the increasing amount of sunlight and cheeriness that had ruthlessly invaded his inner sanctum. And, as if that wasn't enough to get him out of bed, various parts of his body had joined the chants of 'Get Up!'.

Dragging himself reluctantly to the edge of the bed, he reached for his walking cane, and giving one last mournful look at his pillow, pushed himself to a standing position. He paused only a moment to ensure he was stable on his feet before setting off for the bathroom.

After shutting off the warm water of the shower and carefully stepping out of the stall, he steadied himself on the handrails that encircled his bathroom. Making his way to the sink, he proceeded to brush his teeth and hair. He idly glanced out the window to see that the day was shaping up to be another hot one. The gardens were in full bloom, and the trees were a glorious mid-summer green.

Combing his shoulder-length blond hair, he noticed that it had filled out quite nicely since his arrival at the house. His hunch had straightened, and he'd put on a few pounds. Well, more than a few, he admitted to himself as he rubbed his hand around his slight potbelly. Yes, a lot had changed for him – a lot.

Setting down his comb, he hopped over to where he'd set his cane in order to cross the bedroom to his closet. True, he noted, his right leg hadn't fully mended and probably never would, but he got around quite nicely using his cane. And what a nice cane it was. It was a gift from Anna a couple months back. It had a black shaft and a silver crook. He thought it made an old man look distinguished.

As he finished dressing, the sound of an elf popping into his room was heard.

"Good Morning, Master," the elf said as she bowed.

"Good Morning, Sera," he politely responded.

"Your breakfast is waiting. Where would you like it served, sir?"

"Is it nice out today?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes, sir. Quite nice."

"Good, good, then I'll take breakfast out in the gazebo in the garden."

"Very good, sir."

"Sera, is Anna up yet?"

"No, sir. Miss Anna is still abed."

"Thank you, Sera. That will be all."

The elf bowed happily and popped away.

"Still asleep, is she?" he said to the air.

He knew it was her habit to work late into the night when she had a writing deadline, and he properly reprimanded her each time for neglecting her health in this way. But the truth was he missed her in the mornings. He missed sharing breakfast and corn muffins with her. It was the only part of day when her life seemed to slow down enough so they could spend some time together. He understood that she was a successful author and sold millions of books and was paid well for her hard work. He truly didn't begrudge the claims on her day. He just missed her sometimes.

He walked out of his room and made his way to the stairs. He held the banister and slowly descended to the first floor. Passing through the foyer, he stopped, as he always did, at the oak side-table. He picked up a caramel from the crystal candy dish, unwrapped it, and popped it in his mouth. Then, he picked up the framed picture beside the dish. It was a photo of Hermione and Anna when Anna was about twelve. They were both smiling and giggling. Hermione still had that bushy brown hair and those sparkling

brown eyes. Anna was equally beautiful, though her hair was straighter and lighter than her mother's. Her eyes, pale blue, alternately looked happily at the camera and at her mother. He couldn't help but smile, too, at the joy the two shown.

He set the picture back down on the table and ambled down the hall to the door leading to the gardens.

Opening the back door, he was greeted with a beautiful day, warm and bright. The air was pungent with the scents of the many flowers.

The old man strolled slowly to the gazebo, truly enjoying the day. He breathed in the sweet air deeply, turning his face towards the sun.

He arrived at the white-painted structure and climbed the couple of steps inside. Sera had laid out breakfast – fruit, eggs, and the ever-present basket of corn muffins. He picked up the copy of the *Daily Prophet* as he sat down. It was his habit to read the paper while he ate his first muffin. However, in the process, he would always manage to drop crumbs all over it. Anna constantly griped that the crumbs left stains on the pages. The bickering was always good-natured and part of a comfortable routine they'd made for themselves. And he reveled in it.

He perused the pages of the paper, often surprised at the editorial judgment or lack thereof of the publishers. Now and again, he even caught sight of his name in it. Much of that was speculation on his whereabouts and current dealings and if there was any possibility of his return to wizarding society. But that wasn't about to happen, not now, not ever. Any conjecture about whatever had happened to the evil Draco Malfoy would simply go unanswered.

Draco set down the paper as he heard footsteps entering the gazebo. He smiled up at Anna.

"Good Morning, Princess," he said brightly.

Leaning down to give him a quick kiss on the head, Anna said, "Morning, Daddy."