

The Trials of Matchmaking

by shalimar1981

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Prologue: A Hard Day's Night

Chapter 1 of 4

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A/N: This story is for evieeros in the summer round 2007 of the sshg_exchange on LJ made from her prompt *Romantic/PLOTFUL (is that a word?) 3-some with almost anyone (another male prefer but doesn't matter)*.

I'm happy to finally be able to thank my betas, lux_astraea and lady_karelia, for all their help and being available literally at the last minute. *hugs* Thanks also, firefly124, for helping with the brainstorming at crucial moments and for helping with the chapter titles. And finally I'm indebted to lux_astraea for all our brainstorming sessions when I came to visit after Easter and in several chat sessions after that. Without her this fic would never have seen the light of day and I would be on Shiv's wall of shame. Thanks sooooo much!!! *death-hugs* Also thanks for supplying the Chinese for Voldemort's new title. *winks* She had some really good ideas with regards to the different pairings as well and is totally responsible about how the foursome turned out. :D

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Prologue: A Hard Day's Night

On a much more sunny afternoon than one would ordinarily expect in Scotland, a lone owl was flying grumpily toward the extended grounds of a castle with high towers and turrets. It was an annoying trip since the owl had been on his way for quite a few hours and hadn't got so much as a treat before leaving. *But then what is one to expect from humans?*

The owl named Hermes swooped low, flying in through the open castle gates and along the ancient walls of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry until it reached an open window emitting unpleasant fumes. The owl eyed the window warily as he flapped about in midair.

Strange, these humans. Always mucking about with smelly things. Though this one seems not to be too bad. Those two identical redheads on the other claw...

But Hermes couldn't delay any longer. He needed to deliver this letter, or his mistress would be very displeased with him, and he didn't want to chance that. Last time he was demoted to taking only the most urgent of letters to various tradesmen. He had a feeling they hadn't been good news either by the way the butcher-person was alarmingly sharpening his knives and looking at him shifty after he'd read it. One of his tail-feathers had been shortened during *that* ordeal.

Anything had to be better than that.

Hermes settled on the windowsill and looked curiously inside the open window through which those bad-smelling fumes were escaping. The room was quite small on the inside. Two long tables were cramped together with a small space for walking left in between. The tables themselves were weighed down with a strange assortment of equipment. But that wasn't all. The whole room was stuffed almost to bursting point with all kinds of things, on the shelves, below the tables, and even hanging from the wooden beams on the ceiling, Hermes wondered how anyone could get any work done in a cramped room like this.

In the midst of this chaos stood a lone figure in a set of grubby robes, bushy hair pinned up in a manner imitating a particularly untidy bird's nest, working industriously at a cauldron emitting smoke that changed colour and odour every few seconds. Not of an owl's nest of course, since they had their nests tidily arranged in some tree-hole or snug corner beneath a roof, wedged below a guttering. More like that of a sparrow or a nightingale. They didn't care how they lived.

Hermes sighed as only a bird could sigh, dreaming for a second about his current flame, Artemis. She was a very attractive tawny owl, and if she continued to be receptive to his advances, he might very soon have a nest of his own...

A rude expletive startled him out of his daydream, making him ruffle his feathers in indignation. Humans clearly weren't the most well-mannered of creatures *Humph*.

Hermes spread his wings and leapt into the air, flying elegantly into the smoky room and making for the Human Bird's Nest, standing in the centre of it.

As he flew around to land on the desk next to her narrowly avoiding the bubbling cauldron in the process he recalled with a fondness Artemis' penchant for hot baths, thus completely forgetting what his visit had been about and staring dreamily into the smouldering fumes.

"Hey, what are you...Oh. A letter?" The Human Bird's Nest started, calling him back to himself. Really, he had to be more careful about his daydreams. Hermes ruffled his feathers importantly before stretching out his leg for the human to retrieve her missive.

"Hmm, whose owl are you? I don't think I've seen you bef...Oh no! Not again!" the human wailed loudly, not even bothering to get the letter from him before beginning to curse six days to Sunday, scrabbling frantically around the bubbling cauldron, the contents of which had turned a rather interesting stormy colour.

KABOOM was the last thing Hermes heard before everything went black.

Waking up a short time later, he found himself being fussed over by Hairy Mountain Man, who delightfully informed him that he was "Righ' as t'rain" and could go about delivering his other letters, although he gave *that* window a wide berth when he flew back.

He sincerely hoped that today wasn't a day when bad things came in threes.

~*~*~*~*~

Hermes looked warily inside the open window. After what had happened with the last letter he had to deliver, he was going to be much more careful now. And he'd heard about this one before, no treats and if you weren't careful you'd end up like old Maurice, who'd never delivered again after trying to give this guy an overdue bill.

So caution was the best course of action around Cranky Scarecrow as he was not-so-fondly known. His name suited his disposition apparently, given what he'd heard from various owls when he informed them of his latest delivery list. They'd given him some tips too, about how exactly to handle the man. He could be very... determined, he was now aware, at deflecting unwanted missives.

He'd been advised by one elderly owl, who'd delivered to Scarecrow numerous times, that letting him think he'd 'won' the battle for the letter being undelivered was the best tactic when dealing with this particular human. He should let him take two of his usual three swipes with the newspaper and pretend to fly off, then turn around at the last minute, and drop the letter in his lap or on his head if Cranky Scarecrow was standing.

Serves the Cranky bugger right, Hermes thought, flying carefully towards the man, his instructions clear in his mind. He flew bravely toward Cranky Scarecrow, who seemed to be much taller than he looked from the safety of the window, barely evaded one of the newspaper swipes, proceeded with the feint followed by a neat flourish and let the letter fall on Cranky Scarecrow's head.

Or so it seemed.

That flourish had cost him a few crucial seconds he'd needed for his return out the window. Another swipe with the newspaper hit him on his behind and propelled him forward at an alarming speed. Directly towards the wall of the building directly opposite the window.

Unable to break or evade the imminent collision with stone, Hermes hit the wall hard and slid down it, barely conscious of Cranky Scarecrow muttering, "Owl: 1, Snape: 2."

~*~*~*~*~

Having recovered somewhat from his latest 'fall', Hermes eyed the next window suspiciously. It was in the same building, only a few windows down from the one he'd been so rudely evicted from. And it was open, too. Cautiously, he peered inside, but only found a human seemingly sleeping on a narrow cot, covered with a flimsy blanket.

Hmm, it looked all right. But those situations were usually when all came crashing about your ears in a matter of seconds. There was also a curious smell wafting from inside the room. It reminded Hermes of a predator. Strange. There was only that sleeping human...

Hermes decided to chance it though. This was his last delivery before he only had ones on his list that he'd delivered to before. Better to get it out of the way.

He flew inside, one wary eye looking around to scan the perimeter and another fixed on the sleeping human, alert for anything out of the ordinary. The smell of predator was much stronger in here, although he could see nothing out of the ordinary. He landed on the rickety bedside table made up of misshapen pieces of wood and waited. Nothing happened. After Hermes had studied the human for a while, he gave a small hoot to check if said human was even still alive. Nothing. Another, louder hoot. Still nothing. This human certainly slept like the dead if he was still alive.

Totally fed up with this whole day by now, Hermes finally gave a loud screech, which succeeded in rousing the indeed alive human. Barely.

A head full of hair sticking up on the ends, not unlike Human Bird's Nest, appeared from beneath the covers. Eyes still closed, the human merely gave a 'Huh?' and turned his head this way, then that as if to check if someone was there. It certainly would've been more effective if he'd opened his eyes.

Hermes snorted, shaking his head, then gave a small hoot to alert Rugged Straw Man to his presence. One eye opened slightly as the head turned in Hermes' direction. "Ah, an owl," Rugged Straw Man croaked with a grimace that could be what humans called a smile.

Rugged Straw Man moved a hand towards Hermes, which he eyed suspiciously until... it fell to the bed again. Hermes looked up from the hand and saw the human had

fallen asleep again. Typical. Deciding he'd be best leaving the letter on the bedside table he dropped it off and made a quick exit, before something happened.

Swooping outside, Hermes decided a quick rest was in order after that explosion. Being swatted at like a giant fly and being knocked out twice he thought he deserved it. Settling himself on the guttering above the window he'd just left, he looked out onto the street below, thinking this might be indeed a nice place for him and Artemis to settle. He'd barely closed his eyes for a few minutes when...

SNAP!

That was all Hermes heard before he found himself hurtling towards the ground still clutching the guttering that had come away from the side of the house.

Sod it all, was his last thought for a while as he landed in a hedgerow.

The other invitations on his list were thankfully delivered by another owl, a nice, elderly, snowy one named Hedwig he'd known socially while at Hogwarts. Hermes meanwhile was put in the loving care of Hairy Mountain Man with his lovely Artemis on grounds of multiple concussions and a stress disorder.

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A/N: All my chapter titles are taken from popular songs. This one's of course 'A Hard Day's Night' by The Beatles.

Chapter 1: It's My Party

Chapter 2 of 4

After the war Molly Weasley decides that Severe Matchmaking Tactics have to be employed so everyone will be paired up happily. What does that mean for Hermione and the two men interested in her? Of course, this is Molly Weasley's version of 'happy' we're talking about. Warning: wacky pairings, misunderstandings, machinations and general silliness ahead. Not DH compliant of course. A gift to evie_eros in the Summer Round of the SSHG exchange 2007. **Nominated for Best Multiple Partner Story at the Quill to Parchment awards! Nominated at the OWL awards 2008!**

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Trials of Matchmaking by shalimar1981

Chapter 1: It's My Party...

Remus wondered if it was possible to do permanent damage to facial muscles by keeping a fake smile plastered on it for hours on end. He hoped not; the 'party' had only been going on for about an hour, and he knew he had no chance of escaping just yet.

Making sure to mingle enough to keep certain, *ahem* organisers out of his way, he chatted amicably with various people in the room.

He was counting on something happening, as it had at the last party, to give him the opportunity to leave unnoticed, but it had yet to occur. Looking about, he did notice that a certain Ministry official and Ex-Death Eater were chatting with their heads rather too close together for polite conversation. Maybe they'd be the ones to provide the distraction tonight.

In fact if there was one *good* thing about Molly's machina...uh, parties, it was that everyone seemed to pair up rapidly and in the most interesting of combinations.

After the somewhat anti-climactic end of the war, everyone seemed to be in the mood for romance and he couldn't blame them. He was in the mood for it as well, although he knew fairly well he was no great catch. Besides the witch he had his sights on surely was too smart to fall for him, he thought, his mood rapidly going downhill.

As his Horcruxes were destroyed one after the other and the pieces of soul then returned to him, Voldemort became rather worried... not that he told his Death Eaters that.

However instead of creating some more Horcruxes, like any other evil Overlord would've done, some kind soul (Remus suspected Snape) told Voldemort the rest of the Prophecy. Some other kind soul (Remus suspected Draco Malfoy, judging by the ever-present smug smile on his face) also threatened to off his pet snake, Nagini, the last of the Horcruxes.

Voldemort then did something surprising; he thought long and hard over the situation, the Prophecy and his options. He finally came to the conclusion that it just wasn't worth the hassle, someone else could take the Dark Lord job, and went to a remote town in the border region between Siberia and the People's Republic of China, where it was not too warm, and founded his own religion.

There he had minions who were neither too demanding nor too educated, he was the undisputed religious head without a bloody Boy-Who-Lived and could levy taxes to live like an undisputed religious head should. The Ministry was mainly fine with it as long as he didn't violate the Statute of Secrecy and had put some magical binding on him so all he could use of his magic was of the equivalent of a common Muggle magician. Just in case. It was quite a surprise to Ministry officials that, considering his history, Voldemort didn't seem to mind much having to live as a Muggle from now on. He'd seemed to have acquired a taste for manipulation and coercion instead, so the loss of his magic didn't weigh too heavily.

So Voldemort, who called himself *Regou-mai*, the Great now, was happy, finally having what he'd wanted all along: power, wealth, loyal minions and fame, since after a while celebrities from a town called 'Hollywood' started showing up on his doorstep exclaiming how 'cool and realistic his make-up was' and that the Dalai Lama and Kabbala teachings were so passé, didn't he agree?

So the wizarding world was happy, having won a war without having to fight it, and Voldemort...pardon,*Regou-mai*, the Great was happy in China.

But were all happy? Of course not. Naturally that would've made things too easy.

No, the former Death Eaters weren't happy at all, both with Voldemort's decision and with the fact that their master had apparently bound their magic to him with the Dark Mark, which meant they now were reduced to near-Squibs as well and competed for the vacancy of the new Dark Lord, most killing each other neatly in the process before Aurors had a chance to intervene (although it would've been hard for them to take *more* time answering that particular floo-call).

With most Death Eaters dead and the rest reduced to near-Squibs, the survivors either pleaded 'Imperio' in an almost bored fashion and were set a trial date in a month along with being assigned sponsors to oversee them during that time, or in the case of Snape and Draco, were exonerated almost immediately by some handy Pensieve memories buried in Hagrid's pumpkin patch of all places.

That was why Weasleys, Ministry officials and Ex-Death Eaters came to mingle at the last party at Grimmauld Place before refurbishment started and everyone would move to number twelve, Grimmauld Place. And that meant *everyone*. Or rather almost everyone.

It had started with Harry's best friends, the Weasleys, whose abode was finally going through some much-needed refurbishments due to Arthur's improved standing at the Ministry. Then some friends had fallen on hard times and the sponsored Death Eaters were released and had to be put up *somewhere* since their possessions including their habitations had been confiscated until further notice. Remus himself had just found a job as a Muggle school teacher, but had some debts accumulated which made renting a flat by himself impossible. Harry had been kind enough to offer him the use of the attic for as long as he needed to. The only one *not* living at Grimmauld Place aside from Hogwarts staff seemed to be Hermione.

The younger generation seemed to want to shake off all the more 'expected' relationships they had been involved in and started to date across the board, experimenting a little. Though most choices seemed to become permanent quickly, they seemed genuinely happy about it even though those choices were sometimes somewhat... eccentric.

The same went curiously for the older generations as well.

While no one had been really surprised by Argus Filch and Mrs Figg pairing up (because let's face it, no one really wanted to think about it if they were totally honest). But the two of them eloping to Timbuktu and leaving their cats in Harry's care certainly had thrown everyone most of all Harry.

Harry was not very pleased about all those cats running around his house all the time, not to mention that everything smelled like Mrs Figg's house now which annoyed him to no end.

It was because of these new circumstances that Harry had managed to get out of today's party. Some of the cats had had a nasty fight and had had to be taken to Hagrid.

Sympathetic to the cats, Molly had agreed to Harry taking care of the 'poor dears' (considering the magnitude of the fight, totally undeserved compassion) but had drawn the line when he and Snape had magnanimously offered to help Harry with this task. Harry was damn lucky as always.

Then again... maybe not. Molly had never forgiven Harry and Ginny for breaking things off amicably and without even explaining why. Now that Harry had got out of attending this Matchmaking Madness there, would be no stopping Molly trying to fix him up with someone.

As Remus himself had learned the hard way (with Nymphadora), trying to resist Molly's considerable will was the equivalent to gaining her unswerving attention.

That was why he was here, completely aware of the real nature of this gathering while pretending otherwise and making very sure to talk with everyone equally.

Oh-oh, clearly the evasion technique is no longer working. Molly Weasley was approaching, dragging a miserable-looking Hermione Granger along.

~*~*~*~*~

Hermione stood glowering in one corner, determined not to be in a good mood for the rest of the evening. As it was, this 'party' wasn't voluntary anyway and seemed to have one purpose alone: matching up the remaining singles in the social circle of Molly Weasley.

She dearly loved the woman, but she'd gone too far.

Besides, the potion she'd been experimenting with had been mucked up by that dratted... uh, misled owl. It had been in a critical stage when the owl had wanted to drop off the blasted invitation to yet *another* party. This had to be the seventh in the past three weeks. She loved her surrogate family, but there was such a thing as too much contact.

Hermione looked at the doorway again, wondering if she could make a dash for it. Checking the room again for any barriers to this plan, she saw that, no, she couldn't. The Misguided Matchmaker was doing her rounds, and it looked like she was next. Oh, to be able to disappear into thin air! But no, Harry had to keep the Anti-Apparition wards active. A few dozen fangirls in your bedroom were nothing really compared to the plight of your best friend, honestly?

Hermione drunk deeply from her drink (generously dosed with Firewhisky) to prepare herself for the oncoming menace. And then there she was: Molly I'll-manage-to-pair-up-everyone-in-my-neighborhood-or-else Weasley. Hermione wondered what that woman had done before all of her children had left school. *Oh, right! The twins.* She snorted.

"Hello, Hermione! How good of you to come. Are you enjoying yourself?"

Like a day in Hell.

"Oh, yes. It's a nice party."

"Glad to hear it," she said, looking about. "Now then, why don't you go talk to Remus, I'm sure he'll be pleased to see you."

If he has any sense, he'll have left by now.

"Yes, Mrs Weasley, I'll talk to you later?"

Now, if I could just make it to the door...

"Not that way dear, he's over there." The Matchmaking Menace steered her away from the doorway and even further into the room.

I'm never going to escape, she lamented.

"Hello, Remus! Look who I found trying to hide behind the family clock!"

"Hello, Molly. Why, what have you been doing behind the family clock, Hermione?" Remus teased her with a smile.

"Just the usual, collecting dust samples for my project, counting spiders..." Hermione joked back.

"You two will be all right, while I go check on Ginny?"

"Yes, Molly," they chorused, smiling at her.

They waited until Molly had disappeared in the crowd before succumbing to the laughter they'd just barely held back before.

"She's incorrigible!" Hermione gasped once their laughter died down a bit.

"That she is," Remus agreed with her. "I could shag you on this settee in front of all these people and she'd still approve."

"Remus!"

"What? Don't deny it, you know as well as I do that I'm right."

"Of course, she would approve of anything that would pair us up, but... you and I, that's just..." Hermione said, staring at him waiting for the correct words to come out of his mouth so she wouldn't have to say anything.

"... crazy," he replied, staring right back at her with a kind of searching look of his own.

"... ridiculous," she finished on her own, feeling quite confused. She was simultaneously glad she hadn't made some blunder and down-right disappointed because of his answer.

"Exactly. I mean we're friends right? The idea even..." he trailed off, his stare now fixed to one of the potted palms in the far corner.

"Right," she replied feeling more down than ever.

A short uncomfortable silence descended on the two as it always did when a conversation drifted into that particular direction, each wondering what the other was thinking.

"So how is your project going?" Remus finally asked, grasping at straws to break the silence.

She merely groaned in agony and hid her face against his shoulder at the memory. Then she told him all about the poor owl and her botched experiment the day before.

When she reached the point when Hagrid had scolded her sternly with the surprising back up of Professor Sprout of all people, who were both ignoring her assurances that she would never use animals for her experiments, Remus was laughing tears. Even she could see the humour in the situation *now*, though it hadn't been very funny then.

"Oh, I needed that," he gasped, wiping his cheeks dry.

"So glad to amuse you," she replied dryly, but smiling nevertheless.

"Good," he replied with a grin, then continued more seriously, "You could always ask Severus to help you."

She laughed in disbelief. "You must be joking!"

"I'm not, actually," he replied, though a smile was playing about his lips at her aghast expression. "Sure, he is bound to put his old show on, and he'll probably not take you seriously for a while, but he still *is* one of the foremost Potions Masters in the UK. Plus he has a vested interest for your project to succeed after all, its results will affect him, too." They looked at Snape sitting in a dark corner, who was hanging onto his glass with a grim determination.

"He's drinking his way through the bar!"

"Well, I'd do the same if I were him. I mean, what has he left? There were two things he did and did well in his life: spying and teaching. No more spying, and who would've guessed that Voldemort had bound his powers to that of his followers leaving them near-Squibs. So he has nothing to do to speak of. His whole way of life is gone with the loss of his powers."

"I know, I know. That is one of the reasons I'm working on this project in the first place."

"Oh, really?" Remus asked with an amused smile. "That is interesting. And here I thought you despised him like everyone else. Do I sense the remnants of a schoolgirl crush?" he teased her, but didn't want to admit that he'd really like to know the answer and not for very altruistic reasons.

"No! A crush? On him? Don't be ridiculous! There is a middle ground between 'despise' and a 'crush', you know," Hermione said firmly, but a deep blush was rising in her cheeks, and she couldn't help but look over at the man in question again.

~*~*~*~*~

Scowling, Snape looked about the room, noting with satisfaction that there was a conspicuously empty space of floor around him. The fact that he was next to the drinks table and it was now empty was just a coincidence, of course.

That was the only thing to get him through one of these insufferable 'parties'.

The only thing more ridiculous than the actual parties themselves, was the unofficial goal of each and every one of them. Molly Weasley had come to the conclusion that now that the war was over everyone should just pair up, marry, and have lots of offspring. Snape grimaced at the thought and took another large gulp of his drink. She'd even started in on *him*. What a preposterous thought.

Her 'matchmaking' had the most eccentric results so far. Not that he was interested in the romantic escapades of his fellow Order members, but since he had nothing else to do... It was at least moderately entertaining to watch how Molly's efforts were foiled time and again.

She had naturally started on her own offspring first. With Bill safely married and Charlie Weasley off to India with Luna Lovegood, she skipped over Percy Weasley and his *amour*, wisely deciding not to interfere there, and focused on her twins next.

People being stupid, everyone would naturally assume that one set of twins would fit perfectly with another set of twins. And Fred's choice in Padma Patil seemed to undermine that theory. When Parvati Patil came out of the closet, however, and snogged her long-time 'best friend' Lavender Brown at the Graduation Ceremony, that bubble had burst.

Molly had subsequently tried to throw George in the way of available witches everywhere, but she had been too late. George had taken some, uh, 'backup lessons' at Hogwarts to improve his flying prior to the End Of The War That Hadn't Been and was now happily involved with Rolanda Hooch.

If one could believe it.

So next on her list were of course Ronald and Ginevra. These two were much harder to pair up, which surprised everyone but him.

Ron Weasley was being as jittery and shiftily-eyed as he'd ever been while breaking rules at Hogwarts, and since Harry-bloody-Potter was busy trying to hide his homosexuality everyone knew of already and Hermione Granger was apparently busy blowing up owls at Hogwarts in search of some potion (curiously he felt like crying at that, but at least it wasn't Longbottom), Snape guessed the younger man was already involved with someone he was afraid to tell his mother.

If Ronald Weasley thought deflecting every attempt his mother made to pair him up with someone would get her off his back sooner or later, he didn't know his mother at all. Already she seemed to consider other options. Options which could prove to be highly entertaining. So Snape resolved to sit back and watch.

Ginevra herself seemed to be a hopeless case. Every male pushed at her soon turned out to be either involved with someone else already, homosexual or paired up with someone else immediately. And her mother was fast running out of options.

Harry-bloody-Potter himself, who Molly considered another one of her children, just like she did with Miss Granger, seemed to flit from one flower to the next (here Snape had to stifle a chuckle; he was getting tipsy and found this very funny for some indefinable reason), always being so conspicuously careful, everyone already knew that it was only a matter of time for him to come out of the closet officially.

Now Hermione Granger seemed to be the one exception (aside from Ginny Weasley of course) in this pairing up game. After breaking up amicably with Ron Weasley after only being together for three weeks before the end of the war, she had made no move toward dating anyone at all. Instead her hair was more bushy than ever, she always wore the same grubby, Potions-stained robes (which unaccountably made him smile fondly if one could believe it) and threw herself into her apprenticeship with Hogwarts' new Potions mistress. At that he 'humphed' loudly. Not that anyone heard him.

Though she was sitting awfully close to Lupin on that settee. And she was laughing with him, Snape observed, frowning. They seemed to get along very well, judging by the ease of their animated conversation.

Now if she'd only talk to me that wa... his thoughts ground to a halt at the blush rising in her cheeks. Then she looked up directly at him, and their eyes locked for a long moment.

Lupin said something else to her, and she turned her gaze back at her companion.

Snape decided a talk with Lupin about his intentions toward a certain witch was in order.

Helping himself to his *third? fourth?* drink of the evening, he sat back and watched in terror as Molly Weasley, henceforth known as 'Nosy cow' made her way toward him.

~*~*~*~*~

Meanwhile in another corner of the room stood Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, and did what they did best: look extraordinarily beautiful and plot.

"I won't have it! This can't go on!"

"Yes, my dear. It has gone on long enough."

"I won't be *followed* by that French tart any longer!"

"I don't like Bill Weasley's presence any more than you do his wife's. So, what do we do?"

They thought long and hard, then a devious smile dawned on Narcissa's ethereally beautiful face, and she leaned in to whisper in her husband's ear.

As she outlined her plan, Lucius' face slowly grew a wicked grin. A grin that clearly didn't bode well for someone. "Oh, I love the way your mind works, my dear," he said and proceeded to kiss his way down her neck as he thought over her plan. It was devious as a plan by a Malfoy should be. And wicked, very wicked.

A/N: The chapter title is taken from the song 'It's My Party' by Lesley Gore.

Voldemort's new name *Regou-mai* is Mandarin, courtesy by lux_astraea, and means 'hotdog seller'. *evil grin* I bet he didn't know what it meant when his minions started calling him that.

Chapter 2: Maenner/Men

Chapter 3 of 4

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Trials of Matchmaking by shalimar1981

Chapter 2: Maenner/Men

I must be out of my mind, Hermione thought as she stood in front of the door to Severus Snape's rooms at number twelve, Grimmauld Place the next morning. Very early

the next morning.

The party had gone on quite a while longer, but Remus and she had made a pact to stay close for the rest of the evening, which hadn't been all that hard to maintain. They talked about all and nothing for hours on end usually, so this hadn't been much of a change for them. Although she had to admit that it was becoming somewhat bittersweet for her. For quite a few months now she'd been feeling much more than just friendship for Remus Lupin, but there had never been a hint of more between them, and so she was hesitant to risk *another* friendship because of her silly heart.

True, with Ron things were much better now that they had finally tried and failed at a relationship. Things could've turned out much worse than they had when they broke up after only three weeks. Still, they had both been far from mature and had sniped at each other constantly for a while until they finally sat down and talked things through.

Now things were much better between her and Ron, and while Remus was older and much more mature, she had to admit she wasn't. After all, she was only eighteen! She had the feeling that she'd end up behaving similarly with Remus if they began a relationship now, as much as it pained her to think it. She couldn't even hear him talk about his exes without having to fight the urge to hex him into next week!

But look at her! Here she was thinking about a relationship with Remus when he hadn't so much as looked at her inappropriately. And all this didn't even take into account her strange fixation with another one of her ex-professors. Which was nothing short of masochistic, if she were honest with herself. That the two of them were basically roommates and shared the attic floor at Grimmauld Place as hard as that was to believe didn't make things any easier.

You think too much, a part of her mind thought unhelpfully as she was standing in front of Snape's door. What was *that* supposed to mean anyway?!

"Thanks a lot," she muttered to herself under her breath and knocked two times.

True enough, the first sign of life from the inside the room was the sound of glass shattering against the door, followed by a growled, "Bugger off!"

She wasn't dissuaded that easily.

"Mr Snape, it's Hermione Granger." She took a few steps away from the door.

Thank! That sounded like it had been one of his boots. *Ouch*.

"Very funny, Lupin. I didn't know you could do voice imitations as well. **Go away!**"

What the...? Oh!

"Mr Snape, I beat your Transfiguration and Charms NEWTs, tied with your Potions and Herbology NEWTs and was behind your DADA NEWT by only 50 points."

The door whirled open so quickly she had to wonder if he had been standing behind the door and if he didn't have a hangover after last night's drinking orgy. As hard as that was to imagine, considering the amount of alcohol he'd consumed.

If he didn't have one she might as well leave right now.

But she wasn't to be disappointed. The door opened and revealed a ragged-looking Severus Snape. Having just thrown an old, black dressing gown of indeterminate texture over an old-fashioned nightshirt, his black hair stood on end, his skin was even paler than usual and his eyes were red-rimmed.

In short, he looked like Death warmed over.

Good, Hermione thought. She had nothing or at least not much against the man (quite to the contrary actually), but she had a purpose and she'd have no chance if he were at his best.

She smiled winningly at him, and instantly a frown scrunched up his face in suspicion.

"What the hell do *you* want here?"

"Good morning to you, too, Mr Snape. This is my best friend's house or did you forget?" she asked innocently.

"How could I? Since he had to be so bloody noble and invited me to live here 'saving me from a life of poverty and destitution'?" he growled back. "And don't give me that. You know what I meant. Why would *you* visit *me*, when all your friends are either downstairs or next door?"

"Patience."

"I'll give you..."

"Ah-ah-ah! Guess what I have with me?"

He stared at her. "What do you want?"

"Your help."

He uttered something that was probably supposed to be a laugh. "My help? With what?"

"An experimental potion that is not yielding results."

He laughed again. "I'm a Squib, what could I possibly help you with, even if I wanted to?"

"With a potion to increase magical energy in Squibs of course."

He stared at her for longer this time. "So far that's not possible."

She nodded. "So far."

"Well, as you tied with my own Potions NEWT, you can bloody well do it yourself," Snape said ill-temperedly and slammed the door in her face. Or would have if she hadn't expected that development and placed her foot (in quite comfy dragon-hide shoes) in the doorway.

She merely said two words: "Hangover Remedy."

Silence reigned for a few long moments, then a long-suffering sigh and slow steps back to the door were heard. It was opened much more slowly this time, to reveal the resigned expression of Severus Snape, holding out his hand expectantly.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Not for a Hangover Remedy."

"Pity," she said, not moving an inch and looking at him expectantly.

With an impatient and slightly disbelieving snort, which only he could pull off Hermione was convinced, and pinching the bridge of his nose with a pained expression, he opened the door wider with a mumbled, "Come in then." She complied with a huge smile on her face, looking around the cluttered room interestedly and began to rummage in her work-robos, finally withdrawing the vial in question.

Snape held out his hand again, but she moved it out of his reach. "Are you going to consider helping me or not?"

He stared at her incredulously. "You're trying to bribe me with a Hangover Potion?"

"Yes, although I'd rather call it an incentive."

"No doubt you would," he replied, looking at her strangely. "All right. What are you using as a base? A Strengthening Potion?"

"Of course not. Modifying that potion would incinerate Hogwarts," she replied and handed over the vial.

"From what I heard you're doing that anyway. In my lab!" He smirked and quickly downed the contents of the vial with a slight grimace.

"It's not your lab, but that of Professor Foster now. Besides, I'm using one of the storerooms on the second floor, very far from any inhabited areas."

The corner of his mouth twitched. "The second floor storerooms? They managed to foist one of those sardine cans on you? They try that with every new member of staff, especially those handling noxious or dangerous substances. I demanded the dungeons for the same logical reasons," he replied with a smirk.

She flushed in embarrassment because he knew of her botched experiment, about the abysmal working quarters the staff had 'recommended' she take and the fact that they hadn't duped *him*.

Hmph.

"Anyway..."

"So not a Strengthening Potion... An Invigorating Draught perhaps then?"

"No to both. Is the exam over now? I used a combination of PepperUp with an Invigorating Draught as a base and tried to replace the Mandrake root with Moonstone so far."

"The Mandrake root... One would think that a volatile substance such as a combination of those two Potions would explode immediately if you remove the stabiliser."

She nodded. "Indeed, but it doesn't."

He raised an eyebrow and she blushed. Of course he had to bring up the owl incident again. "Usually it doesn't, I should say. I was... distracted for a moment."

"Right. That poor owl..." he trailed off.

"If Molly didn't have to send her bloody invitations when she knows perfectly well that I can't be disturbed, it's her bloody fault and not mine that that owl got in when I had to open the bloody window for five bloody minutes!" she ranted, then slapped a hand to her mouth in mortification.

He nodded, the corner of his mouth twitching. "Have you tried substituting the Mimbulus Mimbletonia roots with daisy petals?" he asked, ignoring her outburst completely.

She gaped at him. "But you always told us in class..."

"And right I was to tell students that. One wouldn't want to create a poisonous gas by accident in a roomful of adolescents. Or rather one shouldn't according to Hogwarts regulations. But if you add the right amount of counter-stirs and some lavender as an additional stabiliser, it should keep the potion from exploding. If it is any good we'll have to see then."

She started to smile. "We?"

"I need two strong cups of coffee before I can even think about starting work in the mornings, so I suggest you arrive here early before we leave."

"I'm going to pick you up?"

"If you recall I can't Apparate, and I refuse to use that infernal Knight Bus."

"Yes! Yes, of course. Is eight all right?" she asked excitedly.

"That is acceptable. Till tomorrow, Miss Granger," he replied and looked at her pointedly.

She gave him a quizzical look at the abrupt dismissal.

"Good day, Miss Granger. I just woke up, and I need to go to the bathroom now before your friend, the Beast, uses up all the hot water."

She blushed bright red, not from embarrassment this time but rather from the unwanted conjured images of first Snape and then Remus naked and wet in a shower. She choked and coughed and made vague waving motions with her hand and left quickly, leaving a frowning Snape behind.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Around the same time downstairs in the kitchen Molly Weasley was preparing breakfast and trying to grill her son, Ron, on his love life. She was really good at multi-tasking. It was going well, too, after two minutes of subtle questioning he was already squirming in his seat.

"What about that nice young girl, Susan?" Molly suggested. He wasn't taking the subtle hints so she'd decided to up the interrogation a little.

"Her? I think she's seeing someone," Ron answered, looking distinctly uncomfortable.

"Really, I hadn't heard. That's nice for her, isn't it?" She turned from the stove, looking at him where he sat at the breakfast table, juice in hand.

"Yeah, I suppose," he replied, looking as his juice intently.

She rolled her eyes and turned back to her cooking. *It's like trying to get blood out of a stone with him lately* she thought.

"Are there any girls you like at the moment?" she asked. *There, straight to the point*, she thought. *Avoid that.*

"Not really," he replied.

Molly paused before replying, *Hmm, I wonder...*

"Oh, not really?" she repeated back to him, glancing over her shoulder.

"That's right," he nodded.

"So there's *no one* you like?" she said, emphasising the 'no one' a little.

He shook his head rather quickly in reply and Molly turned back to the cooking to hide her thoughtful smile. If she knew her son, and she'd be willing to bet all her signed Gilderoy Lockhart memorabilia that she did, it seemed Ronald might possibly be playing for the other team. *Better not let him think I know just yet,* she thought. *Wait until I'm sure.*

She put the tomatoes onto the hob and waved her wand to get the toast prepared quickly; breakfast was nearly done *I could see if Remus will talk to him!* she realised. *He seems to be a player for that team on occasion, too, after all that happened with... Yes, that's what I'll do, talk to Remus.*

Smiling to herself, pleased she'd thought up a plan, she turned her thoughts back to the conversation she was still having with Ron.

"Honestly, Ronald, I don't know," she said, turning the sausages over with one hand and stirring the beans in the saucepan with the other. "When are you going to settle down and find a nice young girl?"

"Muuu-uum," Ron whined, putting his glass of pumpkin juice down onto the table. "I'm... well, I'm just taking it easy, you know."

"No, I don't know actually," she replied.

She heard him sigh and a *'thunk'* told her that his head was now on the table, next to his glass.

~*~*~*~*~

Soon enough, Remus made his way down to breakfast with a disgruntled Snape. Tonks and Neville, who had stayed overnight after the party, Ron, Harry and Ginny were already sitting around the kitchen table. They joined them at one end of the long table while Molly was bustling around the kitchen in last-minute preparations of the meal. It was never wise to disturb her until all was finished.

What puzzled Remus was that Molly kept shooting him and Ron of all people pointed looks. It started to make Remus very uncomfortable. Who knew what scheme she was concocting now? Whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

So Remus tried to act oblivious, his only weapon against Molly's machinations. Not very effective, it was true, but it was handy sometimes and often managed to delay the inevitable a little at least.

But when he looked in the round of the assembled all but one pair of eyes were on him. Snape was frowning at him, which in itself wasn't unusual, Tonks and Ginny were grinning at him, Molly had a speculative glint in her eyes, which made him very nervous, and Neville looked at him with something akin to pity in his eyes. Only Ron was looking off into space with a kind of dazed smile on his face.

Oh, no. It can't be. Not yet! Remus thought with a panicked glance at Molly. It couldn't be his turn yet to be paired up!

"What?" he finally asked weakly into the round. *Better to face this head on. Maybe I'm wrong...*

Ginny's and Tonks' grins widened. "You were getting along really well with Hermione last night, Remus," said Ginny.

"We're friends. So one would hope we would get along well," he said, carefully keeping his voice neutral. If Molly got wind of his feelings, it could botch everything up before it even had a chance to start!

"You two sat quite close to each other, laughing and whispering."

"Well, I never comment when you and Hermione sit quite close together, laughing and whispering either, Ginny," Remus replied pointedly.

"True, but when *we* do that I never have my hand on her knee, stroking it all night," Ginny closed with a chuckle.

Remus felt heat flare up in his face as he looked from one to the other in the round. Had he really? But the expressions on everyone's faces were all the confirmation he needed. Why was Snape looking at him as if he wanted to kill him? Well, this time in any case?

Considering the topic... Nah, he can't be jealous... can he?

"Well, I...."

"Don't deny it, Remus. Everyone saw it. Everyone's been speculating about you two since Mum drag...I mean, brought her over to sit next to you last night," Ginny said.

"Come on, Remus, you did always get overly physical when interested in someone," Dora added in a no-nonsense manner.

Remus looked at her, genuinely puzzled and wondered what that 'always' had implied. Tonks could only know how he had behaved toward herself, and he couldn't deny that he had been somewhat touchy-feely toward her. But wasn't everyone when they were interested in someone? Also there had been no one before that save... Did someone know of him and Rosmerta's niece, Rebecca, during his tenure at Hogwarts? Nah, they couldn't...

Great, he thought. Now Neville was glaring at him, his expression like a thundercloud. What did the young man expect? That they'd just gazed at each other star-struck while they had been together?

He dearly hoped that Dora wouldn't reveal one of his more... extravagant sexual preferences. Then Neville would surely either try to kill him or ask Remus to teach him as well. Remus did not look forward to *either*.

Tonks was just opening her mouth again to say heaven knew what next, when...

"That is very interesting to know, Nymphadora. I wonder what 'overly' physical means to you considering the weird noises I could hear up in my room last night. Wailing, yelling, squealing and the odd 'Oi, spank me, Nevie-kins!' echoing up to the attic from the first floor," Snape said with a smirk at Tonks' now beet-red face. "I wonder though how you two even managed to get that far, considering the awful racket two hours prior, consisting of furniture tossed about, yells of pain and a long merciful silence which I can only assume to be a period of necessary recuperation, prior to the actual act which lasted about ten minutes."

Snape stood up from his place at the table. "Do everyone the favour of never procreating. The combination of such immense clumsiness on both sides would surely result in a child so clumsy it would be a hazard to itself and to everyone around it. Oh, you might want to consider putting Silencing Charms on the ceiling as well, next time you're here. Good day."

With that Snape left, having had no breakfast, and leaving two people embarrassed and red-faced, one person very intrigued and the others trying hard not to laugh. Remus himself was very confused. Had Snape just saved him from further embarrassment? What the hell was going on?!

* * *

A/N: The chapter title is taken from the song 'Maenner/Men' by Herbert Groenemeyer, a German singer/composer.

Chapter 3: House of Love

Chapter 4 of 4

After the war Molly Weasley decides that Severe Matchmaking Tactics have to be employed so everyone will be paired up happily. What does that mean for Hermione and the two men interested in her? Of course, this is Molly Weasley's version of 'happy' we're talking about. Warning: wacky pairings, misunderstandings, machinations and general silliness ahead. Not DH compliant of course. A gift to evie_eros in the Summer Round of the SSHG exchange 2007. **Nominated for Best Multiple Partner Story at the Quill to Parchment awards! Nominated at the OWL awards 2008!**

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* * *

Trials of Matchmaking by shalimar1981

Chapter 3: House of Love

The question how Remus Lupin and Severus Snape managed to get along sharing the attic rooms at number twelve, Grimmauld Place was a legitimate one and easy enough to answer.

In the beginning they hadn't got along at all. There was too much joint history and inequality there for it to be otherwise, though both their new situations (Remus had a nice job as a part-time teacher at a Muggle school, while Snape didn't have anything to do, job-wise or not) had added considerably to the strained atmosphere.

Now they got along quite well, however. Thanks in no small measure to Molly Weasley. Although it might not be for the reasons she'd suspect.

There had been fighting, hexing, hitting, yelling, pieces of furniture flying around, blood and broken bones. All that just because Molly couldn't get the two of them to say a word to each other, and her seemingly infinite patience reached its limit.

When Molly had finally managed to get them to sit down for a talk, they'd exchanged two tight-lipped 'Sorry's and then proceeded to compare their Patronuses both for vividness and longevity, studying the type of Patronus critically (Remus: a sparrow, Snape: a squirrel). As is typical, one had more to show while the other possessed more endurance. The time-honoured male bonding ritual complete, they decided to get along. For now.

And curiously enough they did - after a fashion.

Snape complained that Remus always played his Swing records when he worked, which was basically all the time he was home. They were too bloody cheerful and swingy.

Remus made pointed remarks about the chaos Snape lived in. It looked like a pigsty.

Remus told Snape to stuff it and try to dance to the music instead of complain about it for a change, and Snape told Remus that he thought best if everything around him was in a form of chaotic order and if he didn't like it, he didn't have to look at it.

So Snape brought some of his own sixties music records, and Remus went through Snape's rooms twice a week to collect dirty dishes and the laundry, careful not to disturb anything else. It was the perfect compromise.

This was male friendship at its best, culminating in a weekly let's-get-absolutely-shitfaced-and-listen-to-Quidditch-on-the-wireless ritual.

A typical conversation between the two could be anything from full blown discussions on the latest article in *Dark Arts Monthly* (a periodical they bought between them surprisingly enough) or a series of grunts, 'hmm's' and monosyllabic comments. Of course, the latter was usually only on the mornings after the night they had been getting pissed off their arses.

Today's conversation was a little more involved than the general greetings they usually offered one another at this time of day.

"Lupin."

"Severus."

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like? I'm marking papers as usual."

"Hmm."

"Yeah."

"Need a hand?"

Lupin looked up. "Not especially. I'm not so keen on making my students cry, you see."

Snape smirked. "Now you exaggerate. I never made a student cry by my comments in the margins of a paper alone."

"I beg to differ. I remember a young Gryffindor first year come crying to me when I had the DADA post that year."

"Ah, it was a pitiful bunch that year. It wouldn't surprise me. Now that years' third years were much more resilient."

Remus laughed, "Yes, they sure were."

"Especially those three particular Gryffindors of course."

"Yes..." Remus looked up. "Those three. Harry, Ron and... Hermione."

"Ah, Miss Granger, yes. I've been meaning to talk to you about her."

"You... have?"

"I think she'll be next on Molly's list."

Both men shuddered at the thought that they, too, were on that list somewhere.

Remus frowned. "But with whom? Hermione hasn't really shown a particular interest in anyone."

"When has that ever stopped *Molly Weasley*?"

"True, I feel bad for Ginny to tell the truth"

"The second to youngest Weasley is not much better off right now. Molly seems to be particularly frustrated with those three at the moment."

"What do you mean?"

"You heard them at breakfast. They think she likes *you*, though I can't imagine why and Molly will undoubtedly try to pair you two off."

"Why are we talking about this, Severus?"

Snape mumbled something Remus couldn't quite understand.

"Pardon? I didn't catch that."

"I want to know what your intentions are."

"My intentions... toward Hermione?" Remus asked disbelievingly.

"Yes, Lupin. I've seen the two of you as well. I've seen how you look at her and your hand on her knee. So what are your intentions towards her?"

"What is that to you? I could imagine Molly, Ron or Harry to come hounding after me, but you?"

"Let's say I have a vested interest in the matter," Snape said curtly and turned away.

"You fancy her yourself!" Remus couldn't believe it: there was actually a slight rosy tinge on Snape's usually pale cheeks.

"I do no such thing. I simply don't want her to be too lovesick to properly finish the Potions project we're working on."

"Bullshit! I can see you like her a lot by the looks of it."

A moment passed and Snape finally inclined his head slightly in agreement.

"Well, I like her as well. A lot actually."

Snape nodded thoughtfully. "That is what I wanted to know." He turned away and walked out of the room.

"Wait! What now? What are we going to do?" Remus yelled after him, but Snape was gone by the time he reached the door.

~*~*~*~*~

A bit later in the day, Molly approached Remus and managed to convince him (coerce would be a better word in Remus' opinion) to talk with Ron.

When they sat in the parlour a quarter of an hour later, Remus watched the younger man fidget for a while before deciding to get to the bottom of this. "Ron? Was there something you wanted? Molly sounded... She said you'd need my 'particular advice'."

Ron started, paling a little. "Well, I... Not really. You see... Bloody hell!" Ron muttered, running a hand through his hair.

Remus leaned forward and laid a hand on the younger man's shoulder, ignoring the other flinching away from his touch. Young men who were still insecure with their own sexuality could be difficult that way. "You know that if there is something you need to talk about, you can come to me, right?"

Ron was looking fixedly at Remus' hand on his shoulder till Remus took it away.

"Ron, you seem to be very tense."

"I'm not, all right?" Ron snapped and took a few steps away from him.

"Ron, what's going on?"

"It's complicated."

"It always is."

A pause.

"Ron?"

"Okay. Well, I'm... There is someone already."

"But that's great, Ron!"

"It's not. No one would understand. This person I like... makes me feel like I have with no one else before. This person is my one, my own. I... I don't want to lose that person." Ron came closer and hesitatingly grasped Remus' hand with a meaningful look. Remus began to feel slightly uneasy.

"I love that person more than anything in the world. But no one would understand. Never! That's why this has to stay between you and me for now," Ron said, grasping his hand more tightly with a desperate look into his eyes.

Now Remus was getting worried. This couldn't mean what it sounded like...

"Of course, Ron. It's going to stay between us for now. Don't worry," Remus said, slowly extricating his hand from Ron's grip and patting the younger man awkwardly on the back. Ron smiled at him and left the room.

Remus slumped into an armchair by the fireplace and stared off into space. Shortly after Molly bustled into the room.

"Well, Remus? What is going on with my boy?"

"Well, I'm not sure what to say. He certainly seems to be interested in someone... I think... He's confused, Molly, and what's more, so am I," he said, shaking his head to clear it unsuccessfully

Remus wandered off replaying the conversation and hoping that, as it seemed, Ron didn't suddenly have a crush on him.

~*~*~*~*~*~

Meanwhile in one of the fancier parlours of Grimmauld Place, which didn't say much...

Lucius and Narcissa walked towards Bill and Fleur who were standing over in one corner of the room, engaged in light conversation with Gabrielle, Fleur's younger sister, about something to do with their son... or so it appeared. Lucius ignored that for the moment, he'd find out later. Right now, they had a task to carry out.

"Bill," Narcissa said softly, "I was wondering, would it be possible to have a word?"

Bill looked up from his conversation and nodded. "I suppose." Kissing Fleur on the cheek he continued, "Shall we go to the library?"

Narcissa glanced at Lucius, who blinked slowly once, not looking directly at her. That meant 'yes', in terms of his body language. "Yes, that would be fine," she told Bill.

Lucius watched them leave the room and turned to Fleur. "I was also wondering if we could have a little tête-à-tête," he asked, inclining his head towards the door.

Fleur looked at him for a moment, as if considering, and Lucius wondered if she had a little inkling as to what was going on.

"If you like," she replied, smiling softly and walking towards the door.

Lucius followed, looking at the nape of her neck as she walked ahead of him. *Well*, he thought, *if she does know, she doesn't seem inclined to stop it.* He smirked one of his infamous I'm-a-bad-guy-but-you-love-it smirks.

Fleur lead them to a room further down the corridor and entered, leaving the door open for him. He followed her in and shut the door behind them, leaning on the door, a smirk still on his face.

"What is it, Mr Malfoy?" Fleur asked politely, standing near the desk and looking at the various sheets of parchment littering its surface.

~*~*~*~*~*~

"Yes, Mrs Malfoy, what is it you wanted to talk about?" Bill asked, shutting the door to the library behind them, which he'd held open for her.

"Well, I was hoping that we'd be able to come to an arrangement," she said, rather cryptically, looking out of the only window in the library.

"Arrangement?" One of Bill's eyebrows rose.

"Yes, concerning this 'custody agreement' that I'm under."

Bill walked to the table in the centre of the room and leant against the edge of it, his hands grasping the table's edge either side of his thighs. "Oh? What was it you... had in mind?"

Narcissa smiled and turned away from the window to face him. "I was hoping that you and I could come to an understanding." She took a few small steps towards him, so they were now only about two metres apart.

"Yes, Mrs Malfoy, what I would like to know is what type of understanding you meant," Bill repeated, a smile on his face.

~*~*~*~*~*~

"Please call me Lucius... if I can call you Fleur that is?" Lucius said.

"Of course... Lucius," Fleur replied. "Now, what was it you needed to talk about?"

Lucius smiled and moved away from the door towards where she stood by the desk. "Well, first of all I would like to, ah, express my gratitude towards you and your husband about taking on me and my wife under the 'custody agreement'."

Fleur turned to face him, "No thanks necessary, Mr...Lucius," she said. "It was something we felt we should do."

"Hmm, however I still feel that I need to express my thanks," he said, approaching her a little more.

"As I said," she replied, "It's not necessary."

Lucius stopped in his approach towards her, and waved a hand towards the small sofa in the room. "Shall we sit?" He suggested.

Fleur nodded and they both took seats at either end of the small sofa. "Well?" she asked again.

Lucius turned to her, "Fleur, I shall be blunt. I wish to come to an arrangement with you, in terms of this custody agreement." He paused, looking her in the eyes. "An agreement that I hope you will find to be mutually beneficial."

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Narcissa took another step towards Bill. "You know, I've been wondering as to why you decided to take me on. I mean, we'd never spoken before you and your wife came to pick me and Lucius up from the Ministry, had we?"

Bill laughed. "No, we hadn't, Mrs Mafloy. Not at all. And to answer your question, I chose you because I thought you were least likely to cause problems. As for Fleur choosing your husband, well, you'd have to ask her that."

Narcissa laughed, a light sound to Bill's ears. "Yes, I shall... sometime."

Bill smiled and looked at her, a little uncertain. "And this agreement?"

Narcissa took another step toward him, they were less than a metre apart now. "I was hoping that we could come to some sort of arrangement. That with a little... incentive, you could be persuaded to give me a little more free reign, so to speak."

"Free reign?" Bill asked.

"To be able to go out when I wish, on my own perhaps... things like that."

"Oh," Bill said. "What do you mean 'incentive'?"

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"Mutually beneficial." Fleur repeated.

"Yes," Lucius confirmed, leaning back in the seat. "I assume you know what I mean."

It was quiet for a few moments and Lucius never wavered in his observation of Fleur's face. If he had known her even a tiny bit better, he would have known that the slight frown wrinkled her brow for a fraction of a minute was not a sign of thought, but that of triumph. But he did not, and so the moment passed by.

"I do, Lucius," Fleur finally replied. "But I have to ask, what of your wife?"

Lucius smiled, and moving closer to her, he leant and whispered into her ear, "And what of your husband?"

Fleur shuddered ever so slightly as he pulled back slightly, something he didn't miss. She didn't answer and Lucius took this as a sign and kissed her neck once, ever so gently, before pulling back to his previous position.

"They needn't know," he whispered into her ear again, hearing her breath quicken slightly.

"But," Fleur said, "I love... Bill."

"And I love my wife," Lucius replied, "But that doesn't mean this cannot happen."

Fleur pulled back a little to look him in the eyes. "I suppose..."

She didn't finish the sentence as he chose that moment to kiss her.

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Narcissa quickly closed the remaining distance between them and allowed her breath to tickle his neck as she whispered, "Well, I did have one thing in mind..."

She placed both hands on his chest, trailing one down to the top of his trousers and slid the tips of her fingers under the waistband before pausing and looking at his face.

Bill had closed his eyes as soon as Narcissa touched him, his breathing quickening. After a minute, he'd still not moved, and Narcissa considered moving away; perhaps it was a bad idea after all... as soon as that thought crossed her mind, he took action.

Narcissa gasped as he pulled her even closer to him, one hand going around her waist. Her hands flying to his shoulders to steady herself. His other hand went to her head, burying itself in her hair and pulling her closer.

Narcissa smiled and moved a hand from his shoulders, putting her arm around his waist and settling her hand on his arse. "Don't forget the Silencing Charm," she whispered, her breath hot on his ear.

He made a noise, deep in his throat that was almost a growl and, after adding the charm, pulled her towards the chaise-longue in the corner.

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A/N: The chapter title is taken from the song 'House of Love' by Amy Grant.