

In Defense of Small Wonders

by *WriterMerrin*

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(SS/HG as a side pairing.)

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I took one last glimpse at myself in the mirror and made a face as my eye caught the tacky nametag that proclaimed me "Pansy Parkinson, Muggle Liaison Office (intern)."

At least it doesn't say "Hello, my name is Pansy!" anymore. At least this mirror doesn't tell me my face is "going to freeze like that." At least I have my own flat, and I only have to see that cheeky mirror when I visit my parents.

Not that they were very happy with me, but it had been at least four months since I'd heard the lecture on how I almost ruined the rouse of neutrality that they had carefully maintained for all of those years. They should have been happy about my job. *Not only is my boss a Muggle-born, but we actually help Muggles.*

In a routine long made habit, I warded my flat, cast a timed Bubble-Head Charm, and made the trip to work. Two steps out of the Ministry's Floo, the charm dissipated, leaving my hair and face spotless. My robes were soot-resistant. Even at the height of Mum's displeasure, she would never consider letting me go about in anything less than the best. It stung my pride to let her buy clothes for me, but on an intern's wage that was little more than legalized slavery, I'd rather look good to the public than to my mother.

After all, I may not have been the politically expedient Malfoy bride, but I still had an image to maintain.

Entering the Muggle Liaison Office, I greeted Millie, who also bore the title of intern. At least her boss was a few years older than us. My desk sat outside of Hermione Granger's office.

"Good morning, Pansy!" she called through the open door.

I grabbed my dict-o-quill before entering, as I did every Monday morning, and sat in a comfy chair. "Good morning. What's on the agenda?"

Releasing the quill above the Muggle-style "pad" of paper, I was relieved of the necessity of listening carefully. Hermione had become one of my best friends over the last three years, but she's always had a thing for the sound of her own voice. I considered her nametag for a moment: "Hermione Granger, Muggle Liaison Office, Muggle-born Contact Coordinator."

For our parts in the war, I had gotten a five-year sentence of community service through the Ministry with no possibility of promotion, and she had become the leader of one of the Ministry's favorite new projects: Muggle-borns.

Hermione finished her monolog with, "We'll be following up with the Taylor family this afternoon. Fancy lunch out?"

And on the Ministry's Galleon, all I could say was, "Of course."

Situating myself behind my desk, I reviewed the list now before me. *This department is such a drain on Ministry resources. From the name badges--Hermione charmed them to display the phrase, "Hello, my name is..." with the tap of her wand--to the glossy brochures and lunches out, this whole thing is much more expensive than when the Headmaster would make one trip to each Muggle-born. But I can't picture Headmaster Snape having the patience to deal with Muggles.*

Our office worked closely with Hogwarts. Actually, Hermione worked closely with "Severus," necessitating regular three-day weekends at Hogwarts.

Who's to tell the most eligible witch in Britain who she can date? Not me.

I spent the morning doing rather menial work, answering post and updating files. If Hermione'd had her way, we'd have had a Muggle office somewhere with computers to do my filing or some such nonsense. It wasn't the highlight of my week, but it beat a stay in Azkaban. Besides, she needed me to curb her enthusiasm.

I had Emily Taylor's file on my desk when Hermione emerged for lunch.

"Ready to go?" she asked, adjusting her robe and purse.

"More than," I answered, handing her the file. One ride on the lift and one trip through the Floo later, we were strolling down Diagon Alley.

After we ordered, Hermione asked about my weekend.

"I was at my parents' by invitation--and speaking of invitations, I'm to attend Astoria's baby shower next month. I don't know if mother begged for an invitation for me or if Mrs. Malfoy sent it just for spite."

Hermione winced sympathetically. Lavender had recently given birth to Ron Weasley's firstborn. I continued. "Still, I need my place in society, and all of the right mothers will be there."

"Doesn't the whole thing make you crazy?"

She still has no idea. "Hey, I may be a reformed sympathizer, but I'll always be who I am. I can wait out two more years in your shadow, or I can get married. I'd rather return to the life style to which I am accustomed." I knew it made me sound like a snob, but that had never stopped me before. I took a deep breath. "And how was your weekend?"

"Hogwarts is lovely and peaceful in the summer. It's always so hard to leave."

"I'm sure it's the verdant grounds that you find so hard to leave," I said, by turns happy for my friend, jealous of her happiness, and mildly disgusted.

"Well, Severus is no small matter."

"Please, no more. You'll put me off my lunch."

Hermione laughed and took a sip of ice water.

In the aftermath of the war, Snape had made no statements to the press, no public record outside of his trial; but he had visited small gatherings of his friends and former students. He'd candidly answered many questions and had encouraged us to go along with the new establishment. As the exonerated and reinstated Headmaster of Hogwarts, he wanted to see his Slytherin students rise from Voldemort's shadow, and he said that would only happen if their families followed his lead.

Many other sympathizers had been assigned service such as mine. I sometimes thought that Severus was doing some time of his own and that when the last of us was given a proper place, he would disappear from public life. Would he take his Muggle-born lover with him when he no longer needed the public approval? As odd as it appeared, I hoped for both of their sakes that it would last.

As we lingered over coffee, Hermione cast a light privacy spell and opened the Taylor file. Emily was eight years old, and she had just gotten a little brother. I never liked the look of still pictures; they reminded me of someone who'd had their soul removed. I'd seen that once, and the memory made me shiver.

Satisfied that we were ready, Hermione left a Ministry voucher in payment, and we left. Once outside the restaurant, she tapped her badge, changing it to the cheery, "Hello, my name is Hermione!" Then we Apparated to the Taylors' back yard.

Since we had an appointment, I was no more surprised to see Mr. Taylor than he was to see us. He glanced at Hermione's nametag, but the smile he gave us didn't quite reach his eyes.

Follow-up home visits had a familiar routine. Hermione talked a lot, and I observed. Though my sentence specified that I could get no promotions for five years, the department was one I had chosen. I had always been interested in the development of young magical children. I'd spent most of my summers tutoring pure-blooded ten- and eleven-year-olds on their way to Hogwarts.

Even with my wand innocuously in a pocket, I began to get a feel of the place, of the imprint of emotion I knew the child had left throughout her home. She had been repressed. She was afraid, not of my stern expression, not of Hermione's smile, which she had not returned, but of her parents, who had obviously told her to sit still and not speak unless spoken to. She seemed to fairly hum with energy wanting to get out, but she resisted.

The rooms I'd seen had been "baby proofed." *Does the mother think she has to protect her baby from Emily, too?*

While Hermione asked polite questions, I attempted a smile in Emily's direction. Her face relaxed into a shy smile, and the room warmed.

Back in her office, I told Hermione of my suspicions.

She tried to reassure me. "They want what's best for both of their children."

"She admitted that they waited so long out of fear that their next child would be like us."

"Fear is natural in a case like that."

"Fear is natural to adults, but Emily is afraid of her parents."

"It's normal for her to feel jealous of the new baby and for her parents to be protective."

"No witch should be jealous of a Muggle, afraid of a Muggle. No witch should have to live like that!"

"Pansy!"

I stopped, saying in my head what I dared not to say aloud. After a few breaths, I tried again. "They don't have her best interests at heart. You should trust my instincts by now."

"I trust your instincts but not your motives. I know that you would remove every Muggle-born from their families if you could."

"Most of them would be better off."

Hermione didn't try to stop me as I left her office.

My report would be included with Hermione's. It didn't carry as much weight, but every time an Auror had followed up on my intuition, my concerns had been founded.

So many Wizarding families had been broken up by Umbridge's short-sighted actions that the Ministry was still dealing with the consequences four years later. Traumatized children exhibiting untamed magic with only one parent around were a much bigger concern to those in charge than those in seemingly happy Muggle families.

My parents wouldn't support my activism, but I kept on hoping for a wizard who would.

The afternoon was about to end quietly when Harry Potter arrived with a file in his hand. My hopes rose for a moment.

Has he rushed down here after reading my report?

"Parkinson, is Hermione still in?"

Or not.

"Yeah, go ahead and knock."

He didn't bother to close the door all the way, and I heard the file land on her desk. "Hermione, did you know about this?"

"What?" There was silence for a moment. "Severus gave me the new file, but I haven't looked too deeply yet. The name doesn't ring a bell. Who is he?"

"My cousin Dudley's son."

A/N: Thanks to Hubby for patching up my plot-holes and to **rdholmantx** for questioning me when I stop making sense! Thanks to Soul Bound for reminding me how to use my commas.

This was originally an answer to a drabble challenge during a Potter Place chat. I was also influenced by one of the "Anything Goes" prompts, but too many people already knew I was writing it to enter it anonymously.

This is my first WiP on TPP. Thanks for your support!
