This chapter was edited by Gladiusx.

“One of my finest creations to date, Mr Potter,” Olivander’s silver eyes gleamed with satisfaction. “Exactly thirteen inches, basilisk heartstring and… how did you call it again? Ah yes, *weirwood*. Basilisk heartstring and weirwood, unyielding and eternal. Try it out.”

The moment Harry’s fingers touched the wand, something hot and cold awakened deep within him, and the room was drowned with a shower of icy blue frost and fiery red sparks.

“It’s spectacular,” he muttered begrudgingly, as the pale wand felt pleasantly cool in his hand, yet also warmed when he tried a simple *Lumos.* Ollivander waved his wand to extinguish the flowerpots that had caught fire, and to vanish the frost on the counter. It still didn’t feel as right in his hand as his loyal holly wand did, but hopefully, in time, that would change. “So… what about a spare wand?”

The feather Fawkes had gifted to him was incompatible with the weirwood, but Harry was reluctant and was certain he could get another holly wand out of it.

“I’m afraid I’m not allowed to make or sell you a second one without a permit from the ministry, Mr Potter.” The denial was gentle yet firm.

Unwilling to spend any more of his political capital on a spare wand, Harry accepted the special bicorn wandholster with a mokeskin sleeve from the master wandmaker. As they agreed, Harry had left enough of the weirwood for Ollivander to study as payment. The holster was an ingenious design that looked like a leather bracelet yet the mokeskin allowed the long wand to easily fit in it.

Thankfully, his date did not look bored while waiting; Susan smiled the moment he stepped out of the shop but didn’t ask anything - wands were a matter of great privacy, and Ollivander had insisted the young witch wait outside until they were done. The next stop was Gringotts, and the goblins did not disappoint in managing to irritate him quickly.

“Excuse me, but you seem to have short-changed me.” Harry did his best to keep his voice even as he glared at the teller.

“I beg your pardon? I did no such thing - there are fees for exchange to muggle currency.” The rude creature did not even raise its eyes from counting the coin.

“I *know*, I can read, thank you very much, and it clearly states the current rate is forty-nine pounds to the galleon, and there's a twentieth exchange fee, which should be two pounds and forty-five pennies.” A gentle hand reached his clenched fist, reminding him of Susan's presence as he calmed

himself before gazing coldly at the goblin. “I gave you enough for ten thousand pounds, yet you only gave me nine thousand.”

“There's an additional *twentieth* service fee today for working on the solstice. I must have forgotten to place the sign.” The goblin’s thin lips pursed as he placed a plaque warning about the extra fee, yet he still did not deign to look him in the eyes.

For half a minute, Harry glared murderously at the teller, noticing how he was counting the same stack of coins in vain. He contemplated challenging the annoying goblin to a duel - even they could not refuse any challenges as long as magic was not used.

Yet such a thing would undoubtedly spoil half of his day. “It has been a *pleasure* dealing with Gringotts Bank.”

Harry stormed out towards the entrance, without waiting for a reply. The clinking of heels told him Susan was right behind him. The taller girl gently held his arm as they descended the marble steps.

“My, you looked ready to tear that goblin's head off, Harry.”

“That’s why I left.”

“My aunt tells me Goblins have ways of sensing magic. I am sure that the teller was glad you walked away, considering the malicious aura you were exuding.”

“I wasn't that bad.” He rubbed his brow as the girl giggled. “I could have challenged him to a duel, questioning his honour. Loudly. So all the wizards and tellers could hear.”

“Whatever you say, Harry. Now, did you need something else from the Alley, or should we head on to London?”

“Just one last thing,” Harry muttered as a certain store grabbed his attention. A few minutes later, he was thirty galleons lighter, and his backpack was stuffed into the new mokeskin pouch hanging on his belt. “Now we are ready.”

They turned back to the Leaky, where Harry paused for a moment, hearing quite a few people talk about Lucius Malfoy, of all people. Yet one look at Susan’s graceful form, as she continued towards the door leading to Muggle London, had him reconsider; rumour mongering could wait, and he had made his date wait long enough as it was.

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After a lot of wandering, they had managed to procure a map of muggle London and eventually made their way to a cinema. The choice of film was some over-the-top action flick from America. Half the words and slang flew over their heads, but it was an amusing watch if nothing else.

“This was a weird show, yet still fun,” Susan’s words made him nod, and the way she stretched her arms above her head, had his eyes glued to her supple figure.

Gods, she was younger than Ygritte but far taller and better endowed, with a strikingly beautiful face to boot.

He shook his head, and finally managed to peel his gaze away. “I'm glad you enjoyed it. I got lost when the hero met his doppelganger in the real world and somehow lost his powers.”

“Do you think muggles really have the power to lift cars and survive explosions?” Susan hooked her arm under his offered elbow as they left the cinema and walked down the bustling streets towards a park.

“… Most likely not.”

A few muggle teenage boys stared blankly at Susan as they walked down a square, one of them banging his head on a pole as they walked. They were quick to run, however, when the shrill whistle of a policeman had them scramble away. The man chased after them, shouting something about skiving off school and shoplifting, making Susan laugh in amusement. It was a pearly sound, pleasant to the ears.

They made a beeline towards the nearest park and found themselves in a clearing with a fountain. Many families had brought some blankets for a picnic while kids chased pigeons or played around.

“Let’s sit?” Harry nodded at the empty fountain ledge, the wooden benches were all taken.

“I suppose some more sitting won’t hurt after two hours inside that theatre,” Susan snarked but sat on the ledge, removed her socks and shoes, and unceremoniously swung her feet into the water. “Ah, this feels good. It's much hotter today than I thought.”

“Is it? I didn't really notice.” Harry sat beside her but refrained from losing his shoes, crossing his legs to keep them from getting wet. His gaze slid to the chortling water of the fountain that crossed in various shapes. “What electives did you pick for next year?”

“Oh, I'm taking Arithmancy and Divination. My mother told me they complement each other well.” Susan idly paddled the water with her feet as she glanced at him, half her face hidden behind her sun hat. “What about you, Harry?”

“Ancient Runes, Care of Magical Creatures, and Arithmancy. Looks like we will be seeing each other more next semester.” He grinned, earning himself a giggle and a playful elbow to the side. The blue-eyed witch took off her jacket and placed it beside her, causing Harry's eyes to trail down her exposed skin.

“I suppose I’ll have to suffer your face more often,” she mouthed with faux regret, making him chortle.

“A terrible sacrifice on your part, to be sure.”

His words made her burst out into giggles, and Susan bumped her shoulder into his before pointing up her chin in mock arrogance. “Just don’t come crying to me when you lose the Quidditch cup next year. I'll have you know Cedric Diggory was already scouted by the Wimbourne Wasps, and he is the finest seeker we had in the past ten years.”

“Oh? Oliver Wood told me he was invited to train with Puddlemere United and has been there for a week already. That's how highly they think of him.” Harry challenged back, “And do you honestly think Diggory is better than I at seeking?”

“… Probably not.” Susan huffed as she folded her arms over her knees as she retracted them from the water, “but he's definitely better than Chang or Malfoy!”

“Having a good seeker is not a basis for a good team, Susan.” Harry explained patiently, “Sadly, Hufflepuff does not have a well-rounded team.”

“True… a badger can dream, though.” Susan’s pout made him want to tear his hair out. According to his meagre knowledge of courting, which he suspected were jokes by Robb and Theon, now was probably the moment to comfort her or spoil her.

…But how?

Harry’s thoughts furiously churned, trying to figure out a way out of this conundrum, but nothing came to mind. Sweat began to run down his brow until Ghost nudged his mind, and Harry lifted his gaze to look at the food carts.

“Want to grab a bite?”

The moment he mentioned food, Susan's stomach growled, causing her to flush, and nod wordlessly.

Promising himself to play with Ghost extra hard next time he dreamed, Harry swung his feet away from the fountain, standing up and touching Susan's shoulder, “Here's an appetiser.”

He grinned when the girl’s blush deepened to match her hair and straightened her back in shock. Before Susan could do more than pout, Harry was already on the way to the food stalls. Her innate skill was interesting, and channelling magic directly without a wand was a nifty way to practise his control.

That it allowed him to tease her and enjoy her cute reactions was a bonus.

The queue before the food stall was big, and Harry’s mind wandered. Susan had mentioned his magic power more than tripled after the day in the Chamber of Secrets. Indeed, he could cast far more, and his spells were slightly more powerful, but a niggling question simply did not leave his mind. Magical exhaustion was a thing, yet after killing Quirrell, he never felt it again.

Were magical reserves like stamina? A hidden muscle? Something to do with the mind, or even the soul? A blessing from the gods or Magic? A mix of many other things? The truth alluded him, and his mind wandered over the possibilities.

As Harry approached the stall, his attention was grabbed by the telly near the owner inside. The sound was too low even for him to hear, but he could read the lips of the reporter if he focused enough. Something about strange lights erupting in Birmingham last night, a sudden cold front coming from the North Sea that even the weather forecast had failed to foresee, and an old Scotsman asking about his missing black sheepdog.

His turn finally came and Harry barely grabbed his order, the muggle vendor’s hand strangely shaking as he handed him his fish and chips when a distant shout echoed.

“I said no! Leave me alone already, you scum.”

Susan was beset by two older men, one tall and gaunt, the other short and thick. Before Harry’s mind could even register what was happening, his legs were already rushing to his date, food order completely forgotten.

“Stupid slut, playing hard to get now?” The stout man grabbed Susan’s arm with a lusty smile. Harry’s heart thundered like a war drum. “After flaunting your tits like a whore. Come on, we got a customer waiting, and we’ll pay you enough to–”

Even though his blood burned with fury, the martial lessons taught by Eddard Stark and Rodrik Cassel had him controlling his emotions and turning his mind into a block of ice. No mercy in a fight, and always give your all.

Before the gaunt man could raise his hand to slap Susan away from her jacket, Harry's fist collided with his chin, dropping him to the ground like a sack of turnips. His mind registered the sound of bone snapping but quickly dismissed it - it was probably the fool's jaw or chin.

Just as the short one dragging Susie was about to turn with a scowl, Harry was already there, slamming his heel onto the man's shoe, putting all of his weight and strength into it.

The nasty crack was akin to music in Harry's ears, and he grinned savagely. The man squealed like a pig at a slaughterhouse, letting go of the girl, allowing her to grab her dark jacket. But Harry did not let up, while his foe was heaving over in pain, his fist met the man's nose with a wet *crunch*. He would have slammed onto the ground hard if Harry had not grabbed his hand. The man was knocked out at this point, but the boy did not care and, with all his beastly strength, gripped tightly and *squeezed* as he crushed the hand and fingers that had grabbed Susan. Once his wrist, forearm, and elbow were also shattered, Harry decided it was enough and threw the unconscious fool on top of his friend.

Only a handful of seconds had passed, and the boy gazed one more time at the two men, making sure they were unconscious, not dead, before looking around warily for more foes, fists balled up. The surrounding families were staring at him in fear. Yet, none of the cravens made a move to help Susan, nor would they dare to move against him now.

"Harry, wai–" Realizing he would be slowed down by the girl, the shorter boy picked her up in his arms and dashed away from the fountain, quickly leaving the park, just as a familiar shrill whistle sounded behind them. The girl yelped and held his neck for support in an uncomfortable grip that he endured. Once outside, he didn't stop until they were a few streets away when Susan's grip finally slacked, and he looked down at her.

"Are you alright, Susie?"

The girl's face was burning red, her mouth open in a daze, and her eyes were glazed as she gazed at him with undisguised hunger. It took everything in Harry's power not to lean down and kiss those full lips.

"I-I'm fine!" She averted her eyes, and Harry followed her gaze and stilled. Susan's eyes were on his hand, which was… squeezing one of her breasts. A deep flush travelled up her neck, but no protest left her mouth.

"I'm glad to hear that," Harry coughed, reluctantly moving his hand away to a more appropriate place. "Would you like me to put you down?"

“No, you left my shoes by the fountain, and I would rather not dirty my feet.”

Harry frowned as he noticed her bare, wet feet and her missing hat. If it wouldn’t make trouble with the muggles, he would’ve gelded those two rapers himself. It was probably why Susan didn't use her wand to repel them. “Any idea what those two wanted with you?”

Susan’s face twisted into an ugly scowl, “The filthy scumbags thought I was a lady of the night. I mean, what could give them such an idea?”

Harry gazed at her generous cleavage again. Her breasts were white, full, and round in a way that just made his eyes unwilling to look away, and his mind went blank as he recalled how soft yet firm they were. He blinked when a pair of arms crossed over, regretfully covering the view.

“D-Don’t look at me like that. From what I've seen, this is what muggle girls dress like anyway.”

“Right,” Harry coughed, realising how brazen he had been. “I’m sure they do. I suppose your hair must be what grabbed their attention. I don’t think any of them will be molesting young maidens anymore.”

“Ah, my gallant hero,” The crimson minx hugged his neck as she leered at him with a familiar smouldering look before turning serious. “Are you sure you’re alright? I barely saw a thing, but it sounded painful.”

“Don’t worry about it. That’s what brigands get for assaulting people in broad daylight.” Harry’s voice grew cold at the memory of it. “They dared to attack one of mine, they should be glad they still retained their hands.”

If Susan’s earlier blush was burning, it had now exploded. Her skin had become redder than her hair, and the girl just buried her face in his chest when realisation sank in.

Gods, when did he become so corny? It might have sounded impressive back in Westeros when speaking to a highborn maiden, but this was England.

“I need new shoes.” It was barely a whisper, but Harry caught it nonetheless.

“Well then, my lady,” he spoke with pompous righteousness as he adjusted his grip on Susan’s body and walked out of the alley. “It appears that the fortunes are smiling upon your noble quest!”

That earned him a throaty chuckle, yet her hands only gripped his neck tighter, still not daring to look at him. “Thank you for saving me.”

“Anytime,” Harry replied simply, his previous pomp discarded. “I think I saw a shoe shop.”

Susan finally lifted her head and graced him with a warm smile that just melted his insides. “I think I shall need more than just shoes, my good sir.”

Ignoring the strange looks of the passersby, Harry marched onwards to the boutique nearby.
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“Well, that was strange.”

Harry nodded idly as they walked away after he paid the jumpy clerk who refused to look him in the eye. This had not been the first instance of people suddenly growing jittery around him today. They had spent the rest of their day exploring a nearby mall after he bought a pair of shoes for Susan, which naturally led to a shopping spree.

Strangely, nearly every muggle they met, who hadn't been distracted by Susan's blood-red hair, either glared at him or shied away from his gaze. It reminded him of how Hermione’s parents acted when he met them on platform nine and three quarters; they seemed overly polite to him for some reason.

“Did you come here before and cause trouble?”

“Not that I'm aware of. I've never been to London by myself.” Harry shrugged as he adjusted his grip on the nine shopping bags in his left hand before leading her out of the mall. He was surprised no one had accosted him and Susan for being young enough to be in school yet out and about with no adult chaperone.

“Hmm,” Susan held onto his right arm. “There were instances in the past of muggles sniffing out wizards somehow even when no magic was used around them. You are certainly powerful enough to cause them to be wary of you, even if they have no clue why.”

“Huh. That's the first I've heard of this.”

Harry led his date to an abandoned alley, checking to make sure no one was watching, and stuffed all of their purchases into his mokeskin pouch. Susan’s blue eyes and wide smile pushed the whole thing to the back of his mind, as they made their way down Charing Cross Road.

“Well,” Susan’s voice was quiet enough so only he could hear. “Muggles have a history of kidnapping magical children to be *purified* in their churches, or betraying their wizarding neighbours at any sign of witchcraft.”

The sudden disdain caught Harry off-guard, Susan had been completely amiable throughout the day, even after the meeting with the two daring rapers.

“Muggles, wizards, it’s all the same to me,” he shrugged. “Some bad, some decent, and all only human in the end.”

“I suppose you are right,” Susan grudgingly acknowledged as she leaned onto his shoulder. “They are not all bad, especially these days. Yet, you will still find lowlifes everywhere.” Her lips twisted into a sneer as she glared at a group of drunks stumbling out of a pub ahead of them and leered at her unashamedly.

One of them opened his mouth, clearly about to say something vulgar until Harry stepped forth. The moment their gaze fell on him, the three men’s eyes widened and quickly stumbled aside to let them through. “I believe you just proved my point.”

Harry groaned in defeat as the girl simply chuckled, but her hand snaked down, and her fingers inched towards his palm. With some amusement, Harry let her hold his hand, and squeezed gently in a sign of acknowledgement, earning himself a bashful smile.

Each smile, each blush from the pretty girl felt like a small win for him, making his heart soar far more than winning any spars ever could.

They chatted idly until the Leaky Cauldron was within their sights. The foyer was empty, yet it had a table, the perfect place for a moment of privacy both from the muggles and wizards, as the front door was enchanted against muggles and rarely did wizards actually use it. Harry’s mind churned furiously while his hands separated all of their purchases from his mokeskin pouch. By the time he was done, he did not feel any more confident.

Yet if he would not spin lies, what could Harry say but the truth itself? He turned to the beautiful girl and held her hands in his own.

“I have enjoyed my day immensely with you, Susan, and I find myself wanting more,” he took a deep breath. “I would love to meet you again on a similar outing and maybe explore what the future may hold for us.”

Not for the first time today, the crimson haired witch’s face turned as red as her hair. “I-I have also enjoyed my day and would love to meet again, and…”

His mind just went blank as she bit her lips for a moment and then leaned over. Their lips met. It was a chaste kiss, but it turned his mind into mush.

It felt like an eternity, yet eventually, they pulled apart. He wanted more, much *more*.

There were no vows of celibacy here in this world holding him back. Yet, Harry pushed down his primal urges; dishonouring a lady would not do. Instead, he took a deep breath and basked in the smell of cinnamon while letting the flames of passion fizzle out. He opened his eyes, only to be met with the flushed witch, breathing heavily as if she had run for an hour.

Harry threw her a teasing smile. “Did I taste good?”

“The best!” There was no pretending about what she meant, and Susan leaned for another kiss. But they were interrupted by the distant clang of bells, and her face paled as she eyed her wristwatch.

“Time to return home?”

“Indeed,” Susan pouted reluctantly. “My family expected me home half an hour ago.”

“You go on ahead, then.” Harry begrudgingly let go of her hands, only for Susan to pull him into a tight embrace.

“I really had a lot of fun, Harry. You were a complete gentleman and an excellent date.” She tightened the hug, but it was her hot breath on his ear that almost crumbled Harry’s control. “I’ll send you an owl for our next date.”

All Harry could do was nod back stiffly while Susan curtsied before disappearing into the main room of the pub. His trousers had become uncomfortably tight, and it took him a few painfully long heartbeats to get his excitement under control.

Grabbing his bag from the ground, Harry also stepped into the Leaky. The wave of chatter almost dazed him, yet his eyes failed to find Susan’s crimson locks in the crowded pub. A goofy smile spread across his face, as the feeling of her lips was still fresh in his mind. It made him look like a fool, but right now, Harry did not care one bit.

He even ignored the patrons talking about someone dying and made his way directly to the fireplace, eager to try out his wand.

A*L*S*M

Thursday morning, 24th of June.
Ministry Atrium.

A flash of green and a dark-clad figure stumbled out of the floo, moving aside for a taller, similarly dressed figure to follow.

Draco Malfoy held his mother's arm as they walked down the atrium towards the security booth. The place no longer looked half as gaudy as it did during the balls. Now, his gaze was drawn to the polished dark wood lining the floor. He could no longer stand proud and meet other people's gazes.

After all, anyone who had read the Daily Prophet knew Lucius Malfoy was killed by a muggle father, after trying to sacrifice three girls in some dark ritual. Rita Skeeter had not held back in destroying his father's name. Even though Draco had nothing to do with it, the Malfoy name had been dragged through the dirt.

"How dare they show their faces here?" Draco didn't want to lift his gaze only to see the disgust and disdain. Why did mere words hurt him so?

"Like father, like son. Imperius defence, my foot!"

"Someone should check their arms for the dark mark!"

If it wasn't for his mother's firm hand on his shoulder, Draco would have probably tried to run away, or just cry.

"Look up, my son," her voice was but a whisper but he heard it. "Never show weakness or shame for who you are."

The words were but a reminder, an echo of what his mother had told him earlier.

Draco bit his lips but tried to push down his anger, fear, and apprehension and looked up. Thankfully, they had reached the lift, which was thankfully empty except for an ancient wizard who looked half asleep and didn't even spare them a glance.

"Level two, Department of Magical Law Enforcement, including the Improper Use of Magic Office, Auror Headquarters, and Wizengamot Administration Services."

By the time they reached the Office of Records, Draco had finally managed to school his face. They had discussed this earlier; if the world was out to get them, then they shall face it head-on with dignity and strength. His father would have…

Draco stifled a sob as they made their way to their destination, where a young witch his height with brown hair waited for them outside the doors.

“Mrs Malfoy. I wished we had met in better circumstances.”

“I wished that too, Eleanor.” Draco jerked back, looking at his mother in slight shock. Since when did Narcissa Malfoy rub shoulders with the chaff?

“Madame Bones is waiting inside along with the rest,” Eleanor sighed as she opened the door. “The Will Reading shall start once everyone is settled.”

And that brought him back to earth. His father’s will. Mother warned him about what to expect, but he refused to believe it. Lucius Malfoy would never set aside his wife because of a petty quarrel. It didn’t take much for the circular room to be filled with people. Yet, Draco could only recognise the head of the DMLE - Amelia Bones, a stormy looking witch with a monocle.

“Let us start,” her voice was cold and utterly devoid of feeling. “Present is myself, Amelia Susan Bones, acting as a witness and signee to the will of Lucius Abraxas Malfoy. Eleanor Fawley is present as a witness to the forming of the will and so is Pius Thicknesse. Without further ado, let the reading begin.”

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“How did it go?”

Draco jerked from his melancholy at Merula’s question. They had just returned home, and his mind felt like a quagmire. It was true. It was all true.

His mother was no longer Lady Malfoy, and Draco could do nothing about it other than symbolically insist she be called as such, at least until he was of age. At least the ministry did not fight about keeping her as his guardian, for even if she was no longer a Malfoy, there was no denying the fact he was her blood. Their real issue lay with the goblins; He still couldn’t access his Gringotts account until he was of age, and Mother refused to even ponder on the idea of them seeking help on the matter. They needed to remain strong, but more importantly, they needed to *appear* strong.

“As expected, my dear.” Narcissa Malfoy stepped beside him and gently held his shoulder as Merula came over. His mother’s ward was no longer dressed in rags, but a proper dark green robe, rimmed and threaded with silver. Merula was a talented pureblood witch, and he appreciated the loyalty she showed to his mother.

“I…see.” The young woman looked lost for a moment, before shaking her head and throwing the two of them a wide grin. “Well, I did make lunch, so how about we get something in our bellies before we start our day? I’m sure you will need all the help you can get training Draco here to be a proper wizard, right?”

A cold chill ran up his back as he looked at her wicked grin. For some reason, Narcissa chuckled fondly, but then both of them yelped as his mother pulled them into a hug.

Draco froze. It had been years since his mother had hugged him. It would have felt nice, if not for Merula’s sharp elbow in his ribs.

“We three have no one aside from ourselves,” his mother’s voice echoed over his head, and Merula stopped her weak protests. “We will need to stand together to weather the coming storm.”

Draco could do nothing but nod. It was a relief that his mother knew what she was doing and had a plan. All he had to do was follow along. Merula’s chest that was squished against his face was also strangely pleasant.

New wand, and Harry just made Ollivander's week. The Goblins manage to annoy Harry once more, but I doubt our vengeful hero would allow such rudeness to pass.

Kudos to anyone who guessed what movie the two watched in the cinema.

Jon would have killed those fools. Harry acted as restraint.

Harry and Susan have it hard for each other. Aside from extreme beauty and potent magic, they are both beginning to discover more about each other.

Draco has hit rock bottom. Now, he has no way to go but up. With a supportive mother and a fun older sister figure, who knows what the future has in store for him?

If you would like to support me, or read five chapters ahead, feel free to join me in Patr(eo)n under the same penname.