

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

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... He's not worth it. It's not that Argus Filch deserves to live, but rather that he's simply not worth dirtying Harry's hands at this point in time. The sniveling coward had certainly played a minor part in the Creevey Brothers' fates, but he hadn't been the one to wield the wand, in the end. Not that he could wield a wand, being a squib.

Letting out a huff, Harry shakes his head and raises his wand. Filch's eyes widen as the tip of it glows green, his face turning into a rictus of terror that Harry takes more pleasure than he should in, really. Then, he promptly casts a surgical Obliviate on the man, not just wiping his memories of this conversation, but also carefully replacing them with Argus tripping and falling and bumping his head on the corner of a table to explain the time discrepancy.

Then, while Argus' eyes are blank and glazed over, still under the effects of the obliviate, Harry goes ahead and makes that happen, having him bash his skull in just enough to draw blood but not enough to kill the bastard.

He leaves Argus like that, laid out on the floor unconscious, likely to come to in just a few minutes with no idea what had happened to him. If the woman behind all of this does come back to check on her little joke against the magical world, she shouldn't find any signs of Harry's interference.

Admittedly, while he understands why Filch is still alive, having been rendered impotent and sterile, Harry can't help but question why Hagrid was left alone. That bit is strange, but Harry ultimately sets it aside for the time being, heading out of the castle under his Invisibility Cloak once more, this time to visit the Forbidden Forest.

There, he uses the same magic that he used at the Parkinson Estate to confirm that Filch's memories of that day hadn't been modified so well that even Harry himself couldn't tell. The rewind eventually shows him the truth though... events between Filch and Colin Creevey had taken place exactly as the Hogwarts Caretaker remembered them happening, complete with the short feminine figure in the dark cloak who had saved Filch from the elder Creevey Brother.

Going further back than that to find the exact timing of Dennis Creevey's death takes him a bit longer, but Harry eventually locates the younger wizard's last moments alive as well. He watches as Filch and Dennis stand at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, and as Filch points into the dark and foreboding woods, demanding that Dennis go in and retrieve some ingredients by himself as his detention.

Then, he watches as Dennis enters the woods, looking more than a little nervous as he goes. The deaths would probably have started by this point, right? This wasn't further than eight years ago, but it might have been before everyone realized that being a wizard was a massive threat to one's health.

Either way... it's not some unaccountable, ephemeral curse that randomly does Dennis in. Nor is it anything dangerous that resides in the Forbidden Forest either. Instead... it's the short woman in a cloak again, walking right up behind him and casting a spell that quite literally steals his breath away.

Dennis Creevey dies asphyxiating from a lack of air, his eyes bulging and his hands going to his throat as he gasps futilely. Eventually, he falls to his knees and then flat on his face... and goes absolutely still. The woman in the cloak doesn't even bother to linger... she just turns and goes back the way she came, her job done.

Well... Harry had thought that Argus Filch might give him a lead of some sort. It seemed a little ridiculous though. This was the source of Magical Britain's mysterious wizard-killing 'curse'? He'd known for some time now that it wasn't what they all thought it was, admittedly.

The rest of the Magical World seemed to treat the deaths of all their wizards like it was the curse on the DADA position at Hogwarts. But it obviously wasn't that. Still, even Harry hadn't guessed that it was just someone going around and murdering people randomly like this.

His own death had been quite brutal and swift... the killer hadn't really tried very hard to cover their tracks with him. And yet... and yet, Harry had still expected at least a bit more subtlety with everyone that came before him. If he went around rewinding time and watching the deaths of every wizard in Great Britain, how many would he see perish to the cloaked witch who had spared Filch's life? All of them, perhaps?

Shaking his head, he ponders who that cloaked witch could be for a long moment... before sighing and heading back to the office. He wasn't going to solve this mystery today... not without lifting a number of self-imposed restrictions he didn't want to lift. But he had to admit, this was quite the conundrum...

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Harry is no less confused about things a few days later when he approaches the Ministry of Magic for his Wizengamot Meeting. In the end, he sets aside the mystery for the time being to focus on the matter at hand though... after all, this Wizengamot Session promised to be interesting at the very least.

He half-expects to be confronted by one Lady Narcissa Malfoy outside of the chambers, but when he arrives she's nowhere to be seen. Instead, the first person to approach him is Lady Griselda Marchbanks, the ancient witch who had presided over his Masteries and promised him her support going forward.

"Well met again, Lord Hallows. I see you took my advice to heart."

Harry chuckles. Yes, frankly the Wizengamot hadn't even been on Harry's radar before Griselda's advice. If it wasn't for her, this meeting wouldn't be happening... or rather, it wouldn't be happening on *his* say-so anyways.

“Your advice was greatly appreciated, Madam Marchbanks. It seemed best for me to get out in front of everything and put my best foot forward, so to speak.”

Griselda snorts derisively... before looking around the room and sighing.

“... The Wizengamot has certainly seen better days. Don't get your hopes up or your expectations high. That's all I'll say.”

Harry arches his brow at that but before he can ask her to clarify, the old witch is already moving away. He doesn't bother chasing after her... he'll see what she means shortly, he figures. Besides, the moment that Griselda steps away, another steps up to take her place.

“Greetings, Lord Hallows.”

Harry's eyes can't help but roam across the extremely beautiful dark-skinned witch that approaches him next. To be fair to him, her robes are clearly meant to be form-fitting by design, so it can't be his fault that his gaze is drawn to all of her curves.

Indeed, she certainly doesn't seem to be displeased with the attention, even as she holds out her hand. Harry takes it and kisses the back of it.

“I'm afraid you have me at a loss, madam. But it is a pleasure to meet you all the same.”

Letting out a tittering giggle, the dark-skinned woman's eyes flash.

“Ah, I suppose my reputation doesn't precede me for once. I am Lady Lucrecia Zabini, Lord Hallows. The pleasure is all mine~”

Ah. Now that was a name Harry recognized, even if this was the first time across several lifetimes that he'd met the woman in the flesh. Blaise Zabini's mother, famously a black widow who had married multiple wizards only for them all to die in mysterious circumstances.

Admittedly, Harry had never had much cause to cross paths with the woman before... after all, while the Zabini Family were Purebloods, they weren't British Purebloods. They weren't even a Noble British House last he checked. In fact, if he recalled correctly, Blaise's mother was not a noble lady at all... she was a 'Mrs.'

He's not about to call her out here and now though, especially when it's entirely possible things are simply different in this world. In fact, it's likely all things considered. Though it's certainly interesting to see an opportunist like Lucrecia Zabini tying herself to a sinking ship like the British Magical World. She was said to be much more opportunistic and fair weather than that. What did she hope to gain from sticking around when she could have easily taken her fortune over to the mainland?

... Her son was probably dead, he realizes. Harry wondered how that might have affected a woman like Lucrecia Zabini. Would she have even cared? Would Blaise's death have moved her blackened heart?

Outwardly, Harry lets none of his inner thoughts show on his face. Instead, he graces the Lady Zabini with his best smile, chuckling and nodding along.

"Well met then, Lady Zabini. I suppose I shall see you in the upcoming session, given your presence here today?"

Smirking slightly, the gorgeous witch simply nods.

"You suppose correctly, yes. And I am very interested to see what you have brought before us all, Lord Hallows. A consolidation of two Houses with such a storied history... bold. Very bold."

Harry arches a brow in response to that.

"Oh? I hadn't considered it that bold. Merely good business."

Lady Zabini lets out a tittering laugh at that.

“Good business! I like that... I might use that myself some time. Yes, good business indeed. Alas, there are members of the Wizengamot who concern themselves with things like ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ above good business. I fear you are treading into dangerous waters. If you’d like a helping hand...”

Her leading words make it clear she’s offering to be that helping hand. Harry, of course, knows exactly how that would end for him. Though it might be entertaining to let the woman kill him a couple times just to see how she reacted when he kept getting back up again and again. Not to mention... well, there was a reason that Lucrecia Zabini had had so many husbands.

She really was drop dead gorgeous. In fact, words like ‘gorgeous’ and ‘beautiful’ barely even seemed to do her justice. Harry certainly wouldn’t mind a roll in the sheets with her. But... he probably shouldn’t. Maybe... ah... fuck it.

“That would be most appreciated, Lady Zabini. I won’t lie, I might just be in over my head here.”

Lucrecia’s eyes light up and it’s clear she’s pleased. However, before she can reply... her gaze flicks past him for a moment and the eagerness diminishes slightly.

“We shall have to meet soon then, Lord Hallows. As soon as possible~”

She reaches out then, trailing her fingers along his arm before winking at him and stepping away. Harry watches her go a little bemused, only for a voice to call out behind him.

“Lord Hallows.”

Turning, he lays eyes on Lady Narcissa Malfoy for the first time in this world. She must have been what scared off Zabini. Amused, Harry tilts his head in acknowledgment.

“Lady Malfoy. We meet at last.”

She doesn't offer him her hand and Harry isn't surprised by that. Instead, Narcissa's eyes narrow, her lips thinning out. She looks... well, she looks like she's seen better days. In fact, if Harry didn't know any better... he'd say that the Lady Malfoy looks rather harrowed.

"We could have met earlier if you had not ignored my initial letter, Lord Hallows."

Heh, he hadn't been sure whether she was going to bring that up. Letting a smirk spread across his face, Harry just shrugs.

"I've never responded well to threats I'm afraid. Ask anyone who knows me and they'll tell you... I've always been the type to fight fire with fire."

Narcissa's icy demeanor only becomes more frigid at that as she all but looks down her nose at him.

"Funny you should mention those who know you... because from what I can tell you, such people don't exist. None of my contacts over on the mainland could tell me anything about you, Lord Hallows. One has to wonder exactly where you came from... and how you managed to trick the goblins into opening the Potter and Black Vaults to you."

Amusing. He just told her he doesn't respond well to threats and her reaction was... to threaten him more? Harry sighs and shakes his head, smiling ruefully now.

"Admitting just how lacking your sources are... is this what passes for banter in the highest realm of magical politics these days, Lady Malfoy?"

Narcissa's eyes widen, her outrage plain as day. In fact, she really needs to work on her poker face. However, before she can respond... a hush falls over the foyer outside of the Wizengamot Chambers and Harry can't help but be drawn to the source of the sudden quiet. His eyes fall upon a new arrival at the same time so many other pairs of eyes seem to... a woman dressed in extremely fine attire, wearing a wide brimmed witch's hat and a shrouded veil that completely hides her features.

Harry furrows his brow at the woman's extremely blatant colors, that being green, silver, and black, alongside the snake motif she had going on. There are moving fabric snakes embroidered into her witch's hat and all along her robes as well.

Without thinking, he speaks aloud.

"Now who could that be?"

He doesn't mean to say it out loud but Narcissa certainly doesn't hesitate to answer him with a smug tone.

"Oh? You don't know the most prominent member of the Wizengamot? Perhaps you haven't done your research, Lord Hallows. That... is Lady Slytherin of House Slytherin. The first to occupy a Founder's Seat in hundreds of years."

... What.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!