

On Emerald Pond Untitled Chapter

Harry sat on the veranda and watched the gentle rain. The dampness made his joints ache, but he couldn't resist the emerald green garden in springtime. From time to time, he turned his attention to the book that rested on his lap. John Weasley often chided him for his attachment to books. Harry smiled at the thought – John was pushing ninety and would have been roundly scolded by his grandparents for his conservative views on Muggles, but even he begrudgingly used a pad.

Harry gave up on the Com when it was still called the World Wide Web; he thought it was like drinking from a fire hose, and he valued time to think. If he needed something that couldn't be found in a book, Ginny would always find it on the Com and render it for him. He had to put up with mock complaints about the cost of parchment, of course. She would wail plaintively, 'Sweet Merlin, Potter, do you think we're made of Galleons? It's bad enough that I have to arrange for a printed copy of the *Prophet*!' If she were in a particularly feisty mood, she'd tell him that their royalty income would rise if he'd revise his textbooks once in a while. If she made him answer posts, he knew that it was time to call John for help, or perhaps Al Longbottom – he could be counted on in a pinch, when Neville was well enough to be left alone.

We're nearly all gone now, he thought. Poor Neville was good on some days, and on others wouldn't know his son from a flowering *Mimulus mimbletonia*. All the turn-of-the-century fuss only heightened Harry's sense of being out of place – out of time, really. He was drifting into the twenty-second century with Ginny, Lavender Jennings and Daphne Malfoy. *The '90s certainly thinned the herd*, it occurred to him: Hermione, Hannah Macmillan, Terry Boot, Fleur Weasley... all gone. John had said something once about knowing you're old when you can't tell the difference between a family reunion and a wake.

Even old Draco was gone now, a loss that had been deeply and unexpectedly troubling for Harry. He had given up his seat in the Wizengamot that same year; it just wasn't worth the travel without Draco to spar with anymore. Ginny had grown even closer to Daphne since then, which Harry knew was good for Ginny. *I can be such a pain in the arse*, he knew. He found himself reflecting on how many of their friends and mentors hadn't even seen the twenty-first century... the list was so terribly long. He tried to avoid entertaining thoughts like that, but as he grew older the long-gone friends of his youth seemed so much nearer. *Just beyond the veil*, he thought.

Ginny ambled out onto the veranda. "How are you faring, Potter?" she asked brightly.

"Why are you so cheerful? You're old," he grouched.

“You’re older,” she shot back.

“I’m older than dirt, my love. What does that make you?” he smirked.

“Tired of your aching and crabbing, I’d say,” she answered cattily.

“You know you love it. Give us a kiss, then,” he said with a grin.

“After you answer some posts,” she ordered, and waved a stack of paper. “I don’t know why we keep a Com number for you, for all the good it does. All this parchment, and I have to hound you to read a fraction of it.”

“You have to send all the responses. I’m just saving you the trouble,” he offered.

She crossed her arms. “Nice try, Potter. It’s all from schoolchildren today. I know you’ll try to wait out anyone over eighteen.”

“What did I ever do to deserve you?” Harry asked.

“Who knows?” Ginny shrugged. “I’ve been trying to figure that out for a very long time – it must not have been much.”

She stopped at the door, and added, “That writer from the *Times* is coming this afternoon. Make an effort, would you?”

“Remind me what that’s about?” Harry asked.

“She’s editing their ‘century in review’ bit, remember?” Ginny answered. “She’s expecting Harry Potter, the man who brought together the Muggle and wizarding worlds. If she gets Harry Potter, the curmudgeon who gave up on the whole lot after the fact, I assure that you shall pay... and pay... and pay...”

Harry held up his hands. “I surrender in the face of superior forces, madam. Are you leaving me to these posts, then?”

Ginny shook her head, and went into the house. Harry really *didn’t* know what he’d done to deserve her. She had outlived one husband and he had stumbled first through a long relationship and then a sudden and ill-advised marriage, before they rediscovered one another in their early fifties. Sixty-seven years later, his only regret was that they had no children. He had known that would be the case entering the relationship, and it was a middling regret at best.

He wasn’t looking forward to meeting with the writer from the *Times*. Muggles always wanted to dramatize everything all out of proportion; they invariably chose the most prurient parts of a story. *I don’t know how I let Ginny talk me into these things*, he fumed. *That bloody writer will walk in under the pretense of talking about the Great War and the Concordance and how everything changed. One look at me, and all she’ll ask me about is Voldemort and the damn scar.*