

Unlikely Allies

Unlikely Allies

By

JBern

Draco swirled the brandy and sniffed the aroma. It had a nice full body to it. He regarded his hostess, who also had a body worth appreciating. "It's very good; your selection or your husband's?"

Ginny Potter smiled knowing full well the mutual respect Draco Malfoy and Harry shared would never be mistaken for friendship. She motioned for him to sit, "Harry's. I prefer wines. How is your family?"

"Astoria is visiting her ailing mother with my son in Greece. Daphne and her family are there as well. Given my personal history with the crone, all concerned parties reached the mutual decision that my business here was more important."

The wizard sat on the leather couch and took another sip of his drink. Perhaps he had been a trifle harsh with the dancing on his mother-in-law's grave comment? Conjuring a pair of Muggle tap shoes dancing of their own accord to reinforce the point may have been too much.

Ginny interrupted his musings, "Having quarreled with her on the Board of Governors on several occasions, I was pleased when she turned over her seat to your wife and by extension you, but please convey my best hopes for a recovery the next time you speak with Astoria." It had greatly surprised both Ginny and Harry that Draco had become her unlikeliest of allies on the Board, vigorously trying to improve the quality of the education there. Naturally, Ron was convinced Draco was still demon-spawn. The Malfoy family fortune and name had been left in ruins after the war. The energy he had expended to restore both over the past decade was nothing short of admirable.

"I'll do that," he said. "I suspect sincere words from you will be received better than a patent lie on my part. She opposed our marriage from the start and has been a thorn in my side ever since. I figured if I could make peace with your husband that anything would be possible. Apparently, the universe does have limits. So, where is the mighty Auror this evening – keeping the wizarding world safe?"

The red headed woman laughed. "In a manner of speaking, he's protecting my children from their grandmother. I'll be joining them as soon as our business is concluded. He may require ... reinforcements. Unfortunately, I believe we have a significant problem...."

"You'll have to be more specific. I sent the list of creatures requested by Hagrid over to your sister-in-law and her first question was whether if she could expedite the permits to bring a Hydra into the country, were we willing to sacrifice that much of the budget to feed all eleven heads. Besides, think of it this way, even if it were simply restricted to the N.E.W.T. classes, how many other students would go looking for the hydra the moment they learn one was on the school grounds? Every year, someone ends up in the Forbidden Forest. All too often the violators have Weasley or Potter as a last name. Wasn't it your niece and the Lupin boy last year?"

Her reply was slightly scolding. "You know very well there was a good reason behind Teddy and Victoire, but I concede your point. As for Hagrid, that would've never happened anyway. Still, we'll throw him a bone. No Hydra, but Hermione is aware of a baby Chimera seized by customs and in need of a home. It will cost much less in upkeep and be less likely to maim a student. I suppose the thing will be cuddly for a few years, yet dangerous enough to keep him happy. Conversely, you could always reverse your stance on Hippogriffs? They're reasonably inexpensive and generally friendly provided one knows how to behave around them."

He ignored her needling considering it fair play for his crack about the forest. "If it's not Hagrid, what has you concerned enough for a meeting before the Board convenes?"

Ginny looked serious, "Minerva's talking about retiring as Headmistress."

Draco mulled it over. "How good is your source?"

"Indirectly, it's Neville. He had tea with her last week and she mentioned a villa on the Mediterranean where she would like to pen her memoirs. He mentioned this to Hannah, Hannah to Susan, Susan to ... I forget the exact path, but the information ended up with me."

"Your so-called 'Girl's night out' sounds more and more like a sophisticated intelligence gathering network, Ginevra. I may have to try harder to encourage my wife to join your little coven."

She tilted her head and sipped her wine. "I try."

"Of course, I came to the same conclusion four weeks ago." The smug look on his face taunted her.

"Really? How?"

"I invited Minerva for lunch and simply asked her, an odd turn of events with you being the clandestine one and me the straightforward one."

"And you planned to let me know when?" There was a hint of annoyance in her tone.

"After the next meeting, she's not announcing until the winter Holidays. We have time to position our candidate. I assume you are about to tell me who our candidate is. I hope you're not seriously considering Longbottom. He's too young and doesn't have enough support. It takes more than an Order of Merlin Second Class to impress those working against us."

"I was thinking of Hermione."

"Bold choice considering she's not currently teaching there and has only done an occasional class at Minerva's request. Is she willing to give up her creature's rights crusade?"

Ginny drummed her fingernails on her armrest. "I might have neglected to discuss this with her, but I figure that she might enjoy the opportunity to instill her beliefs on the next generation rather than fighting an uphill battle with those set in their ways."

That prompted a hearty laugh. "Please focus on her face when you inform Mrs. Granger-Weasley of her role in your new order. I'll need the Pensieve memory preserved for the long days when I am in need of a laugh.

"She's famous and obviously qualified, though the age argument I just mentioned about Longbottom stands. Ignoring the fact she would be the first Muggleborn Headmistress in history, she's the perfect selection. Including that fact, she is likely to face stiff opposition. Minerva hinted that she would endorse her present Deputy."

"Ian Fredrickson is too old guard for my taste and cut from the same cloth as Minerva. I love Headmistress McGonagall dearly, but have no desire to do battle with her chosen successor for the next several decades. At least not while we have an ally committed to our agenda available right now. Perhaps the extra effort on our part now will make things much easier down the road?"

Draco scratched his chin thoughtfully, "This won't be like revamping the History of Magic and Muggle Studies programs. We can't simply argue like usual and force the rest of the Board to choose sides only to later realize that its different sides of the same argument. Also, your husband's endorsement won't carry much weight given their close friendship."

"We'll keep Harry in reserve, but he might be able to swing the Minister's public endorsement. Still, the two of us are not without our resources. I like the challenge of winning this one without dragging others into it. Suppose the monies to feed Hagrid's wee beastie were to come out of the Transfiguration budget? It might be a reasonable opening salvo and prompt another harsh letter from Mr. Fredrickson. That wouldn't endear him to the rest of the board and would be ample reminder of his temper. I've got some markers on the budget committee. What forces can you muster Draco?"

"Well now that you mention it, the texts used by the NEWT Levels are still the same ones we used in our days. Surely, there have been advances? Did you know that Claire Dayton has recently penned several very impressive volumes? As the chairman of the standards committee, I've been thinking that a change is in order."

The witch across from him leaned forward, "Dayton ... the name is not familiar to me, but I know that you're going somewhere with this, Draco. Since you've had more time to prepare I expect this to be impressive. Go ahead, dazzle me."

"Ms. Dayton is an American of considerable renown. What is not widely known is Mr. Fredrickson and she were colleagues a little over a decade ago. I believe there was an affair that ended in a rather messy fashion. In fact, Astoria's law firm might have filed papers on his behalf contending that several theories in the texts were in fact derivative from the time the two spent together and demanding both credit and compensation. There was a settlement and money exchanged hands, but I do believe the terms of the settlement prohibit Mr. Fredrickson from claiming any hand in these theories."

Ginny was clearly amused. "Consider me dazzled. I do recall hearing that you recently purchased a large stake in an American publishing firm. That's rather self-serving of you."

"I prefer the word 'opportunistic.' It has a nicer ring to it."

She rolled her eyes at him and returned to the matter at hand. "Though forcing a wizard to teach theories he may or may not have created, but cannot claim, may cost us a competent Transfiguration Professor."

"If that is the case, it will give your sister-in-law her first challenge. I do recall Minerva's predecessor having to cope with the annual search for a Defense Professor. Surely, she can find someone willing to teach the art of Transfiguration."

Ginny Potter chortled, "Be careful, I might give Hermione your name, Draco, but only if I can view the Pensieve memory of the interview."

"It would be amusing, but the conflict of interest would force me to decline." He raised her glass to her, "A toast Mrs. Potter, to change."

She answered in kind and touched their glasses together, "To progress, Mr. Malfoy."