

Harry Potter and the Freak The Freak

Harry Potter was an angry young man.

The resentment of the injustice that defined his life welled up inside him so that he wanted to scream with fury.

If it hadn't been for him, nobody would even have known Voldemort was back! And what was his reward?

To be stuck in Little Whinging for four solid weeks, completely cut off from the magical world, reduced to squatting among dying begonias so that he could hear about water-skiing budgerigars on the evening news maybe?

Bingo!

How could Dumbledore have forgotten him so easily? Why had Ron and Hermione stopped writing him again? How much longer was he supposed to endure Sirius telling him to sit tight and be a good boy; or resist the temptation to write to the stupid Daily Prophet and point out that Voldemort had returned?

These furious thoughts whirled around in Harry's head, and his insides writhed with anger as a warm night fell around him, the air full of the smell of warm, dry grass, and the only sound that of the low grumble of traffic on the road beyond the park railings.

The only thing that kept him from screaming his rage to the heavens was the presence of another bespectacled boy sitting two swings away. This unknown stranger appeared to be approximately his own age, slight of build with light brown hair. The other boy sat on his swing and seemed to be focusing his entire being on staring at the soil between his feet.

Harry did not know how long he had sat on the swing before the sound of voices interrupted his musings and he looked up. From the corner of his eye he noticed the stranger did the same thing. The streetlamps from the surrounding roads were casting a misty glow strong enough to silhouette a group of people making their way across the park. One of them was singing a loud, crude song. The others were laughing.

"Oh, crap." The stranger said.

"I'd leave if I were you," Harry sighed. "That's my cousin's gang; they'll be wanting to abuse anyone near me."

"No point." The boy said in a slightly nasal voice. "My brother is with them, they'll just track me down."

The stranger's accent caught Harry's ear. "Yank?"

"Yeah," the boy said. "As weird as it might sound, my dad was transferred over here. I'm Dexter, Dexter Douglas."

"Harry Potter," Harry answered. "What's so weird about your dad being transferred to the UK? From what I hear that happens all the time."

"My dad," Dexter said with his own sigh, "is a used car salesman. Since when do used car salesmen end up transferred anywhere? If I didn't know better I'd think that this was all just a highly contrived plot to get us to England."

"Who's your friend Potter?" Dudley's voice rang out. "Is that your new *Boyfriend*?"

"Might be Big D," another voice answered this one with an American accent. "That's my brother; I always thought he was kinda fruity."

The other boys in the crowd seemed to find this to be the height of wit and their laughter filled the air.

"Duncan," Dexter said quietly, "if I'm the one that's fruity, why is it you're the one with stacks of magazines full of pictures of oily naked men?"

"Those are body builder magazines Spaz!" came the incensed reply.

"Go away Dudley." Harry said.

Dudley Dursley bent over until he was nose to nose with his much smaller cousin. "Why should I?"

"Three hundred and sixty four days," Harry replied softly so that only Dudley could hear. "Maybe I'll give you a nose to match the tail."

"You can't."

"In three hundred and sixty four days I will be of age," Harry said simply. "Not only will I be able to make your life a living hell, but no one who could do anything about it will care in the slightest 'Big D'. I suggest you go away."

Dudley stood up suddenly as if he had been struck. "This is boring," he announced attempting to cover the gut clenching fear he felt as he suddenly realized that there might come a point where Potter no longer took abuse, "let's go do something."

"What did Potter say?" Piers asked. "This is our turf; he should be the one leaving."

"I said, let's go do something," Dudley repeated pushing Piers so as to assert his dominance.

Without much more discussion the small gang left the play ground.

"Neat trick," the young man called Dexter said. "What did you tell him?"

"Nothing important," Harry said with a shake of his head. "Dudley may be an idiot, but he can learn things if you explain them to him slowly and use small words."

"Ah," Dexter nodded. "You've got something on him."

Harry shrugged.

“Ok, we’ve covered why I’m all bummed out, what’s your problem beyond a trog of a cousin?”

Harry frowned. “Let’s just say that sometimes it sucks to be me.”

The pair went quiet again, each silently bemoaning their lots in life when the silence was broken by a series of sharp cracks. Without looking to see what had made the noise Harry dove to the ground pulling Dexter along with him. Harry rolled to his feet holding his wand in a dueling grip while Dexter stared up at the now mangled swing set with a look of incredulity on his face. Four black cloaked individuals stood where no one had been only seconds before, each holding what appeared to be a polished stick.

“Oh, look we found ickle Potter” a woman’s voice rang out.

“This isn’t time for your games Bellatrix!” a masked man holding a cane in his left hand barked. “We are to retrieve the boy for our Lord’s pleasure.”

“Run,” Harry said quietly to the boy lying at his feet. “They’re after me. Run and don’t look back.”

Dexter looked on in horror as the black haired boy began dodging incoming bursts of light that seemed to leap from polished sticks held by each of the four figures in black. Everywhere those lights touched insane things happened, from fires to explosions to even more inexplicable things.

There was only one thing for it when insane things started to happen. Dexter had learned from bitter experience that you had to fight fire with fire and insanity with insanity. Dexter sucked in a deep breath and then shouted, “Freakout!”

====oooOOOooo====

The sudden burst of light stunned all five of the magic users into shocked immobility. As the light dimmed it revealed a human figure. Perhaps six foot tall, wearing what appeared to be red long johns with white boots and gloves, a blue skinned man with hair that made Harry’s seem tame and restrained, suddenly took an elaborate bow.

“Hello you lucky people, I’m here!” he called bounding into the middle of the wand wavers. “Freakazoid is in the story now! It only took 1130 words for the hack to get around to bringing me, the star, into the story, but I’m here now! Now it’s time for the saving of the day and the fighting and the loud sound effects and the concussions and…” the crazy person seemed to spot Bellatrix LeStrange for the first time. “A Pretty Lady!”

The assembled magic users were stunned when the man in red was suddenly standing next to Bellatrix, plucking her wand from her right hand before tossing the magical tool over his shoulder and raising said hand to his lips for a gentlemanly kiss.

“My Darling!” he proclaimed his voice suddenly two octaves lower and thick with a very bad French accent, “of all of ze play grounds in all of ze world, you had to suddenly appear in mine.” Rubbing the witch’s hand against his cheek the loon continued “Has anyone ever told you how much you look like slightly deranged Helena Bonham Carter?”

“Bellatrix!” the Death Eater with the cane spat, “Just kill the fool and be done with it!”

Harry saw the woman’s left hand leave her robes clutching something and thrust toward the man in red’s chest. “NO!” he cried trying to warn the blue man.

Bellatrix seethed at having to use her treasured obsidian ceremonial blade on this lunatic, still, she told herself as her arm drove the ancient

weapon toward the man's chest; the Aztec blade hadn't tasted blood for almost five hundred years, not since Solaris Black returned from the New World with it in the fifteen hundreds. Perhaps it was time to remedy that. The fool was just standing there... until he wasn't. Suddenly the odd blue skinned man was limboing between Bellatrix's legs.

"Low bridge!" he sang atonally, "everybody down, low bridge..." he emerged behind the deranged witch standing up with an alarmed look on his blue face, "Bella's underwear is brown! Brown, brown, brown. With the hash marks and the little creepy crawly cooties!"

His cheeks puffed out and a white gloved hand appeared before his mouth. "Sorry..." he gasped. "Threw up in my mouth a little there. Brown... so much brown..."

"Must I do everything myself?" the Death Eater with the cane asked the world before raising his wand "Ava..."

"HEY YOU!" Lucius Malfoy unexpectedly found the lunatic standing within inches with a single white gloved finger pushed up against his mask. The veins in the blue skinned man's neck stood out in his fury. **"WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM? COULDN'T YOU SEE THAT THE PRETTY LADY AND I WERE TALKING? SHEESH!"** the lunatic screamed as he wiped his forehead with his right hand. The madman's display so discombobulated Malfoy he fell backwards onto the ground and began to crab walk away while the man called Freakazoid followed, continuing to scream. **"GO AWAY! WE WERE HAVING A GOOD TIME UNTIL YOU BUTTED INTO OUR BUSINESS BUDDY!"** the loon bellowed. **"GO HAVE SOME COFFEE WITH SOME CREAM OR SOMETHING! JEEZE WATTA CREEP! THIS WAS A HAPPY PLACE UNTIL YOU SPOILED IT WITH YOUR STICK AND YOUR STUPID LIGHTS! JUST GO, GO BEFORE I YELL SOME MORE!"**

While this was going on Bellatrix had spotted and retrieved her wand so she was a little shocked when she abruptly found herself in the blue skinned man's arms. "Bella, sweetie," Freakazoid said, somehow having manifested a pair of elbow length rubber gloves and a surgical mask. "Seriously, the whole hygiene thing... Ew."

Malfoy climbed to his feet. "Kill him! Kill him now!" he screamed in a high pitched voice while jumping up and down and pointing at the blue man in red.

"He's not exactly Caveguy is he?" Freakazoid asked Bellatrix while pulling the oversized rubber gloves off his arms with a loud snap.

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The four Death Eaters had been trying to hex, curse, bespell, or otherwise inconvenience the man called Freakazoid for fifteen minutes. The result of their efforts was varying degrees of damage done to themselves and their clothing, while the blue skinned man was still untouched. Spell fire that passed close to the lunatic seemed to somehow change its properties in mid flight, often veering wildly across the impromptu battlefield to impact on one of the dark magic users.

This partially explained why Lucius Malfoy was now dressed in a chromium yellow Hawaiian shirt and dingy grey Y-fronts with his famous platinum locks totally missing from his currently bald head. Bellatrix was wearing a pink sundress with a large yellow bow in her wild hair and her wand now appeared to be a large multicolored lollipop; one of the other Death Eaters was now an anamorphic yellow duck with a speech impediment that prevented consistent spell casting. The fourth Death Eater was frozen in place next to the ruined swing set while a conjured beaver was attempting to gnaw on his left leg which was now wooden for no adequately explained reason.

In short the dark magic users were rapidly approaching a state of magical exhaustion. For his part Harry Potter stood on the sidelines of this very one sided battle wondering just how he ended up on the outside looking in rather than being the center of the bad guy's attention as he usually was.

Then, deciding that he shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, the teen wizard began wondering if it might not be worth it to risk a new charge of underage use of magic if he were to conjure himself a chair and bucket of popcorn to better enjoy the abject humiliation of the Death Eaters at the hands of this blue skinned mad man in red.

That decision was taken out of Harry's hands when a new voice echoed out over the playground. A deep gravelly voice, a voice that spoke of

wisdom, of discipline, of an unwillingness to take guff off of anyone.

"Alright you guys," the voice said, "cut it out."

At that command Freakazoid froze in his tracks. The three active, if transformed, Death Eaters froze in their tracks. The petrified, partially wooden Death Eater remained frozen, but that didn't really have anything to do with the gravelly voice's command. Spell fire froze in midflight, and even the aforementioned conjured beaver stopped gnawing on the petrified Death Eater, though the rodent did continue to mentally calculate the square footage of the dam that the petrified magic user might provide, for truly beavers are the engineering geeks of the animal kingdom, and they never really stop in their plans to take over the world and impress the fem-beavers through dam building and the expansion of wetlands.

Every head (other than that of the petrified Death Eater) turned to face the speaker. They found a man who appeared to be in late middle age wearing the uniform of an American policeman leaning against a Washington DC Police cruiser.

"Cosgrove!" Freakazoid called joyfully.

"Hey kid," the man said gesturing toward the police cruiser with the large mug in his right hand. "Wanna go get a scone?"

"Would I?" the blue skinned freak asked rhetorically as he ran toward the waiting patrol cruiser.

Harry watched the exchange between the blue man and the American cop, and shuddered a bit as he felt the universe start to revert to its normal configuration with his pale behind firmly in fate's crosshairs. A quick glance in the direction of the Death Eaters who were starting to get themselves back together and glaring in his general direction made his decision for him.

"Uh Mr. Freakazoid?" Harry asked hesitantly.

"Yeah Harry?"

"I like scones."

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Harry followed the man called Freakazoid and his policeman friend named Cosgrove from the Caffe Nero, wondering not for the first time just why they had needed to travel all the way to Manchester to have a scone. Spending most of four hours on the road for something available in pretty much any tea room anywhere in the country struck him as being more than a little mad, but it didn't involve the Dursleys or Death Eaters, so it was still better than most of his summer nights.

"Good scone." Cosgrove said as he lifted his coffee mug to his lips. The man was constantly drinking from the mug, but never seemed to put anything into it.

"I'll say," Freakazoid agreed, patting his distended stomach. "Of all the scones I've ever had, that was the sconiest!"

Harry reflected that perhaps the oddest thing about the impromptu road trip was that no one seemed to be the slightest bit surprised to find an American Cop or a tall blue man in a red suit sitting in a tea room in Manchester... Though there had been a bit of a scene when a tall man in a blue body suit and cape wearing a Roman Legionnaire's helmet entered the establishment only to have Freakazoid address him as 'Nigel'. This started a bit of a tirade from the man who insisted on being called 'Lord Bravery' until he was ejected from the Tea Room by a fairly irate waitress, who also called him Nigel and threatened to call the man's wife.

“So what do you want to do now Cosgrove?” Freakazoid asked.

“Well Freakazoid,” the man said taking another pull on his coffee mug, “It seems to me that you still need to help the kid out with his Dark Lord problem before those weirdoes in the fancy bath robes and fright masks actually hurt somebody. That’s what I’d do anyway, but that’s just me.”

“You’re right Cosgrove!” Freakazoid said his voice suddenly deeper and seeming to echo a bit. “I must stand against E-Vil, for if I do not, who will?” The blue man in red struck a dramatic pose, “Come Harry! To the fray!” Then Freakazoid extended both of his arms over his head and started running down the street making whooshing noises with his mouth.

Harry looked to Cosgrove, who just shrugged. “He does that sometimes. Forgets he can’t fly, then he wanders around for a while.”

“Should I catch up with him and try to get him to focus sir?” Harry asked hesitantly.

“I would,” the cop admitted with a nod. “But, like I said, that’s just me.”

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Harry sprinted after the blue loon, catching up as the man continued to pretend to fly. “Freakazoid...”

“Yes old chum?” the nutter responded before making more whooshing noises.

“Uh... Cosgrove told me that I should remind you that you can’t fly.”

A look of confusion flashed on Freakazoid’s face as he skidded to a sudden halt. Harry, not able to stop as quickly and distracted by trying to speak to the madman while at a full run, collided with a pillar box, knocking the air from his lungs and ending up laying on the pavement looking up.

His arms still extended above his head, the madman strained to lift his body from the ground, grunting with effort, he paused for a moment, and then tried again. “You know,” Freakazoid said in an amazed tone, “I think you’re right. I can’t fly.”

The man pulled Harry to his feet, and then got very close peering at Harry’s scar. “Nice lightning bolt,” Freakazoid said running his thumbs over Harry’s scar. “Of course all the cool kids have them in their hair,” he said running his right hand through his own unruly locks. Suddenly Freakazoid’s expression brightened into a look of manic joy and he snapped the fingers of his left hand. “I know, you can be my new sidekick! We can call you Freaka-Boy!”

“We’re more or less the same age, and I get called ‘boy’ enough at home,” Harry noted wanting desperately to nip this ‘sidekick’ idea in the bud.

“True,” Freakazoid said nodding. “Well you could be the new Expendable Lad...”

“The ‘new’ Expendable Lad?” Harry asked, dreading the answer to the question he just had to ask. “What happened to the old Expendable Lad?”

“Oh, he was Milked,” Freakazoid said shaking his head. “It was very sad.”

"Milked?" Harry asked imagining the worst. "I don't think I'd appreciate being called or considered 'expendable' either."

"But Harry," the blue loon said in a pleading tone, "the angst the hero feels at the loss or crippling pain of his faithful sidekick is a basic character building experience of every major hero." Freakazoid paused and began counting on his fingers. "Expendable Lad, Foamy the Freakadog, Fan Boy, Hand Man, Dweezle Zappa, I've lost more sidekicks than any other major hero." The insane hero brightened, "By now I've got to have more character built than any other Hero working today... Except Wonder Woman of course, Steve Trevor keeps getting killed while my sidekicks just end up horribly crippled, so she wins."

Harry swallowed. "Look," he suggested. "Why don't we see if we can deal with Voldemort and his Death Eaters before we start fitting me for a costume?"

"Good idea," Freakazoid agreed. "So, have you got any ideas for finding the guy?"

"No, Not really. I pretty much never come up with the ideas. Usually Hermione comes up with our plans."

"Hermione?" the blue loon asked. "Well, let's go see her. Do you know where she is?"

"Uh no, not really..." Harry admitted.

"Well, that's great." Freakazoid said excitedly. "Neither do I..." The hero gathered Harry into his arms lifting the shorter teen from the ground.

"But, you can't fly!" Harry said quickly.

"I think you're right," the Lunatic said, "but I can to this..."

The sudden acceleration shocked Harry beyond the capability of speech. Before his vision grayed out, he was positive that everything in front of them seemed to turn red.

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"You let Potter go?" Voldemort thundered from his ornate throne. "You had him out numbered four to one and you let him go? Crucio!" the dark lord spat bathing all four of his Death Eaters with the cruciatus curse concentrating a bit more on the one with the gnawed leg.

"My Lord, forgive us," Lucius Malfoy sobbed from where he lay twitching on the floor. "He was assisted by a blue mad man!"

"By a 'blue mad man?'" Voldemort asked momentarily distracted by the idea. "What do you mean by that?"

"A mad man with blue skin appeared in a flash of light when we were about to capture Potter," Bellatrix explained. "He did something, and our magic couldn't touch him! And he made disparaging comments about my hygiene."

"Even after that, when we were finally making progress in separating Potter from his protector, another one showed up," Lucius added.

"Another blue mad man?"

"No My Lord, though he was dressed in blue," the nameless Death Eater with the gnawed leg answered. "He told us to 'cut it out'."

"And then he took the blue man and Potter to get some scones," Lucius concluded.

Voldemort felt a familiar pain form behind his eyes. It was times like this when he wished he had remained a buyer for Borgin and Burkes instead of venturing into the 'exciting' field of Dark Lording. He really wished he could make his minions understand just how frustrated he sometimes became with them. Then it came to him, in an instant of epiphany the Dark Lord knew just how he could make his minions understand.

"Crucio!" he explained.

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Hermione Granger was sitting in her back garden, outlining her sixth year Charms textbook in preparation for her first (of three) round of low intensity note taking while getting a little sun because her mother had made comment about how pale she was.

Hermione was a firm believer in multitasking. Still, she was a bit upset at herself for not being further along in her studies.

To say that she was shocked when Harry was suddenly in front of her in the arms of a tall blue skinned man dressed all in red would be an understatement. She hid her shock at their sudden appearance by shrieking loud enough to set all the dogs within a three block radius to barking hysterically.

"Hi Hermione," Harry said.

"Harry? You're in my back garden?" She asked faintly.

"A firm command of the obvious," the blue skinned man said approvingly. "No wonder you depend on her for your planning."

"Uh... Yeah," Harry said while climbing out of the lunatic's embrace, while feeling vaguely insulted. "Hermione, this is um... Freakazoid, Freakazoid, this is Hermione Granger"

"Charmed," Freakazoid said, before freezing in place. "Wait. Hermione Granger? THE Hermione Granger? Hacker Granger?"

"Well..." the girl blushed prettily, "I dabble. I have to keep busy when school isn't in session..."

"It's such an honor," the man in red said, seizing her hand and shaking it vigorously. "I can't believe it, Hermione Granger."

"Uh," Harry said, trying to get into the conversation.

"I mean, I mean, your critique of Torvalds' plans for his operating system, it was just... poetry!"

"Oh, Linus was sweet, but his plans to try and compete against the corporate giants? That was madness. I just suggested that he try and stick to an open source environment, allowing Users to modify the OS to fit their needs, and of course the association with GNU was just common

sense."

"You know," Harry said trying to interrupt again.

"Torvalds is still a bit upset that you didn't let him name the OS Hermix," Freakazoid pointed out.

"Oh, pish," Hermione said with a dismissive wave of her hand. "All I did was make a few suggestions and point out a problem or two. Like I said Linus is sweet, but so prone to dramatic gestures."

"Wow!" Freakazoid gushed yet again. "Hermione Granger, I've actually met Hacker Granger." A sly look came upon the blue skinned loon's face. "There's one thing I've always wanted to know... **"@[-g3,8d]\&fbb=-q]/hk ..."**

Hermione blinked. **"%fg"** delete" she said, before she started to laugh. "ah, Good times."

"I knew it!" the freak exulted. "I knew I wasn't the first one. Why did you give it up?"

"The transformation did horrible things to my hair," Hermione explained running her hand through her tangled locks. "The whole blue skin thing creeped me out a little, and red really isn't my color. I reported the flaw in the Pinnacle chip to Apex Microchips and thought that was the end of it. Mr. Guitierrez seemed so interested."

"Oh."

"Well, it works for you of course," Hermione said trying to recover from her gaffe.

"We need" Harry interjected, " to come up with some way to deal with Voldemort!"

Hermione blushed prettily. "Sorry Harry, I got distracted. I have thought of at least one way to deal with You Know Who, but it's really horrible." She handed her notes over to her best friend.

"Oh," Harry said self consciously. "This is kind of nasty."

"Absolutely cruel and unusual," Freakazoid agreed.

Harry and the blue skinned man exchanged a look. "We'll do it!" they chorused.

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During the latest meeting of his so called 'inner circle', the Dark Lord Voldemort sat on his ornate throne pondering his career choices and silently bemoaning the fact that you just couldn't get good help these days when a nondescript owl flew into the room. Rather than land like a normal mail owl, this particular bird dropped its burden into the Dark Lord's lap and then got out of the room as fast as it's little wings could carry it.

An exceptionally intelligent bird.

"What is this?" the Dark Lord asked the room rhetorically. He unrolled the newly delivered scroll and found a single sentence.

"NO!" the Dark Lord all but screamed as he stood from his throne.

The shout brought his faithful inner circle running.

"What is it My Lord?" Lucius Malfoy gasped, out of breath from his short run from the next room.

"Who must we kill for you?" Bellatrix demanded.

"I have received horrible news," Voldemort intoned, regarding the roll of parchment as if he expected it to attack him.

"What is it My Lord?" Peter Pettigrew asked hoping against hope that the ability to change into a rat would be an adequate defense against anything that could so upset the Dark Lord.

"Jackee Harry is getting another television series!"

The vast chamber went silent at the thought of that unspeakable horror. Then Bellatrix fell to the floor tearing at her hair.

"NO!!!" she screamed to all the gods of men and magic. "The entertainment industry is supposed to have safeguards in place to prevent these things!"

It was into this madness that Hedwig flew into the room and dropped a single scroll into the Dark Lord's hands before making a hasty exit much like the previous owl.

"That was Potter's owl My Lord," Peter explained unnecessarily.

"I know that fool," Voldemort said as he opened the message from Harry Potter, only to stare open mouthed at the one word message.

"Candlejack?" he asked the room incredulously.

"I don't understand My Lord," Lucius said in his normal toadyish manner.

"The note from Potter, it just says 'Candlejack'. What does that even mean?"

"Candlejack?" Pettigrew asked.

"Candlejack?" Bella echoed, within seconds the words 'Candlejack' had echoed from every Death Eater in the vast room.

"Perhaps Potter meant 'Crackerjack' My Lord," Pettigrew suggested.

"Crackerjack? What in the world might that be?" Lucius asked.

"It's a Muggle confection, candy coated popcorn, peanuts and a prize, that's what you get in Crackerjack," Peter explained while wondering just when he became responsible for product placements in these stories.

Voldemort examined the parchment from Potter again. "No, as atrocious as his handwriting is, it clearly says 'Candlejack'."

"My Lord," Augustus Rookwood spoke up from his place in his master's ranks. "This 'Candlejack' may well be the demon spoken of in certain Muggle legends. He is supposed to respond to the mention of his name and upon appearing, he spirits off his victims to some unknown place never to be seen again."

"Why would this Candlejack do such a thing?" Voldemort wondered.

"Well, he is reportedly somewhat... mental."

"Are this Candlejack's victims selected randomly, or is there a reason for their capture?" Lucius asked.

"The Muggle legends say that saying his name seals your fate." Rookwood responded.

There was silence in the Dark Lord's throne room for several seconds before Bella broke it by voicing the thought that they were all sharing.

"We've all spoken his name..."

Again silence for several seconds, and then Lucius posited a theory. "Perhaps he didn't hear us."

There were smiles throughout the room, and the Dark Lord was about to start handing out punishments for believing in this Muggle 'Candlejack' nonsense when he noticed his Death Eaters staring at him in horror. No, the Dark Lord amended, not at him, behind him.

Turning Voldemort found a man floating in mid air directly behind him. The man was dressed in robes of dark grey with a lighter grey material making up a pointed hood, gloves and boots. In the floating man's left hand was a lighted candle.

"Hello boys and girls," the apparition looked about the room, the stitched 'mouth' of his pointed hood taking on the appearance of a smile, "there are just so many of you! I'm going to have to hire a bus."

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Screams and the sound of furious spell fire erupted from the Dark Lord's throne room. Draco Malfoy and his two henchmen, Crabbe and Goyle, stood guard on the door, none may enter without permission from the Dark Lord himself.

It slowly dawned on the trio that there might be just a bit more screaming and spell fire than was to be expected from a normal meeting of the inner circle, and indeed, it almost seemed like they could hear the Dark Lord himself among the screaming voices.

That probably wasn't good, but it was also something that none of the Slitherins on guard wanted anything to do with. Each had been subjected to the Cruciatus curse at least once and never wanted to do so again. Until they were invited, they would never open that door.

They were evil, not stupid. Well, not THAT stupid.

The whole question of opening the door became moot as the door was blasted open and a panicked Lucius Malfoy bolted from the darkened room. Spotting his son, the Head of House Malfoy grabbed Draco by his robes.

"Run!" Lucius screamed, "Run and don't say his name!"

"Father," Draco said, trying to remove his father's clutching hands from his robes, more than a little concerned by the elder man's utter lack of concern for his hair. "I would never speak the Dark Lord's name." It was only then that Draco realized that he didn't actually know the Dark Lord's name. Something to research later. One never knew when such information might be valuable.

"NOT HIM!" Lucius screamed shaking his son. "The other."

"Who?" Draco demanded.

"Candlejack." Lucius whispered.

"Candlejack?" Draco asked incredulously, before looking over to Goyle. "Candlejack?"

Goyle shrugged. "Ain't never heard of no Candlejack, Draco. Hey Vinnie, you ever hear of Candlejack?"

Crabbe just shrugged.

A cloaked figure drifted through the doorway, a length of rope trailing off behind him. After a few moments the Dark Lord also floated through the door, seemingly entangled in the rope. Behind him was Draco's aunt Bellatrix, then MacNair, Rookwood, the Lestranges and the rest of the Dark Lord's inner circle, all struggling against the rope that bound them.

Draco found himself unable to move as the hooded spectre wrapped Goyle, Lucius and finally himself in the rope. "What are you going to do with us?" he squeaked.

That question seemed to give the spectre pause. "You know, I don't really know. I've never caught so many at one time before." Turning to Voldemort he continued, "you don't run the brightest organization in the world do you?"

Candlejack hovered directly in front of Vinnie Crabbe. "Gonna say it?"

Crabbe just shrugged.

"So that's how it is? Fine. I'll be watching you Vincent Crabbe. I won't be satisfied unless I get the whole set."

As the specter and his captives drifted toward the exit, Candlejack stopped and looked back at the sole remaining Death Eater. "Believe it," he rasped, "or not!"

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Outside #9 Privet Drive, Harry and Hermione stood watching the chaos of an international move coming down to its last seconds.

Douglas Douglas was finishing packing the last of the luggage into the huge American Estate Car that he had inexplicably imported as part of his transfer.

Hermione shook her head. "You're telling me he's a 'used car salesman' and that he was transferred here for a month and a half? That sounds like a highly contrived plot to get Dexter to England."

"That's what I said," Dexter interjected. "Freakazoid said that the hack writing this couldn't come up with a better idea."

"Yeah," Harry laughed, "Freakazoid was always going on about how this was all fiction. What a nut."

Hermione and Dexter exchanged uncomfortable glances, but didn't say anything.

"Dexter!" Debbie Douglas called. "We've got to go! The traffic is going to be horrible!"

"Coming Mom!" the bespectacled youth called before turning back to his newest friends. "Well, it's been fun, and I'm glad Freakazoid and I could help you out with your Dark Lord problem."

"I wish you were staying Dexter," Harry smiled. "Without you I never would have learned all those interesting things about Hermione."

"We'll miss you Dexter," Hermione said as she punched Harry in the arm. "Don't forget to email me, or write to the technophobe here."

"Well, I think we all know the email is the one most likely to happen. After all, I am Dexter Douglas, nerd computer ace!" he struck a dramatic pose.

"Come on Spaz!" Duncan called. "We're leaving with or without you."

"Ok, I guess this is good bye," Dexter pulled Hermione into a tight hug, and gave Harry a thumbs up. Upon releasing the bushy haired witch he turned and sprinted to his family's car.

Watching the Douglas family drive away Harry shook his head. "This has to be the weirdest summer of my life."

---oooOOOooo---

Three weeks later:

"It's hard to believe this is the same place," Hermione said as she looked around the newly refurbished #12 Grimmauld Place.

"Sirius is pleased," Harry said as he looked around. "The ink on his pardon wasn't dry before he hired Dobby and Winky to take care of the place."

"Hired?"

"Yeah, he tells me that compared to my Mum, you are a hidebound traditionalist on the subject of House Elf rights. She evidently terrified the whole idea of owning a House Elf right out of Dad, Sirius and Remus."

"Good," she said with a decisive nod.

"So," Harry said opening the door in front of them, "this is my room."

"Very nice," Hermione said taking in the decor. "Not a bit of Chudley Orange anywhere."

"Yeah, Ron is a bit miffed about that, so Sirius set aside his own room for when Ron stays over. Sirius really cracks me up. He doesn't know if he wants to be a happy go lucky godfather, corrupting me at every turn, or a responsible father showing me the error of my ways. I think that's why he's not here, after giving me a stern warning to respect you, he winked at me and said he wouldn't be back until after 10pm."

Hermione's left eyebrow rose toward her hairline. "Oh, really? And what does he think is going to happen?"

"He thinks we're dating and that I've invited you over so as to seduce you."

"And," Hermione asked innocently as she closed the door behind her, "what do you think is going to happen?"

"Why did you close the door?"

"Harry," the brunette whispered as she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down until their lips were almost touching. "I love you, but god, you are an idiot."

---oooOOOooo---

Epilogue: 19 Days Later

All was ready. Setting this up had taken her almost three weeks, but it needed to be done.

She finished inscribing the protective rune sets into her shield circle, and checked her work three times. A summoning such as this always came at a price, and she made very sure that she was able to pay that price. Failure to do so would be catastrophic.

The blond stripped naked, and raised her arms to the heavens. She tilted her head back, closed her eyes and chanted the summoning charm.

"Candlejack, Candlejack, Candlejack!"

Waiting for a sign that the summoning had worked, she remained in that position for several minutes until she heard someone clearing his

throat. She opened her eyes and spotted the major demon of silliness. "Welcome oh great Candlejack."

The spectre seemed to regard her dubiously. "You know," the demon's voice rasped, "there was no reason to remove your clothing to call me."

"Mr. Jack, do I tell you how to do a summoning?" She stood tall and continued, "my family have been performing summonings since before recorded history, and we've always done it skyclad."

"Mr. Jack? That's not.... Alright, fine," the spectre sighed. "Let's get this over with, it's time for you to come with me."

"Allow me to introduce myself," she produced a fedora with a card labeled 'PRESS' stuck in the band and placed it upon her head at a jaunty angle. "Luna Lovegood, crusading girl reporter for the Quibbler. With all the recent conjecture as to what happened to the Dark Lord and his inner circle, I've come to get your side of the story."

The demon in the hood blinked. Quite literally, the hood over the demon's head blinked. It was very odd. "There is no 'my side of the story' girl. You are coming with me."

"Oh, how silly of me. The tribute, I'd forgotten all about it in my excitement of meeting you. Here!"

The blond offered Candlejack a gift wrapped box. Curiosity got the better of him and he tore the wrapping from the box. "F Troop, the complete series? How dare you?" the demon raged suddenly angry beyond all reason. "Did you really think that you could placate me with such an insulting gift? Others have tried that in the past and they failed as well!" The box fell from his trembling fingers as rage filled his demonic soul.

"Ah," Luna interrupted, "Did those others make the offering in the crystal clear Betamax format?"

"Beta? It's in Beta?" Candlejack exclaimed as his rage vanished and he dove upon the package, scooping it up and cradling it protectively in his arms. "My precious, how I have searched for you, and now I have you at last!" The demon turned back to the girl with tears leaking from the eyeholes of his hood. "Anything, ask me anything."

Luna smiled. This was quite possibly the most important interview of her entire career, and as such it needed to be insightful and hard hitting. It was probably best to abandon her plans of offering softball questions for the first half hour and go straight for the jugular with the important questions that the Quibbler readership expected.

From nowhere a quill and sheet of parchment appeared in her hands. Luna locked eyes with the demon and asked her question.

"If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?"

~ FIN ~