

# Er, No

By: Shivani/Grazhir

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**Pairings:** Gen

**Written:** 18 September 2008

**Edited:** 17 July 2010

**Spoilers:** Anything from canon, as necessary.

**Warnings:** Character death

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**Summary:** The cliché that wouldn't die. Friendship and loyalty to the rescue.

**Notes:** Something I *sometimes* hate to see, so I did it myself, my way. This one kind of ran away from me, though. I started rambling, sort of. Ends a bit abruptly, but I did include two extras. I'm not even sure I like this, but I wrote it, so up it finally goes.

Harry shifted in his squashy floral chair, mentally reviewed what he had been told, and said, “So let me get this straight. Malfoy’s a veela, and I’m his destined mate?”

“Yes, Potter,” Snape growled, one hand in a death grip on the aforementioned Malfoy’s arm.

“Isn’t it grand?” Dumbledore said. “You two boys will finally be able to get along.”

“So somebody out there with a seriously whacked sense of humor decided that Malfoy and I are just perfect for each other,” he muttered, then looked at Malfoy. “And what do you have to say about all this?”

Draco brightened at being spoken to directly. “It will be wonderful. And we can even have children. I know you’ll be a very strong, protective mate.”

At that point Harry decided that Malfoy had gone completely round the bend. “Uh huh. Anything else you’d like to say?”

The barest frown marred the blond’s forehead. “We could live anywhere you liked.”

Which wasn’t what he was looking for. “Yeah, well, I need to think about this.”

“Don’t think too long,” Snape said.

“Why not, professor?”

Snape sneered at him. “I see you still lack in even basic information about the wizarding world and its residents. Surely you’re aware that veela, once they have found their mate, must bond within a certain amount of time.”

Harry stared at him blankly.

“Well, my boy, let’s give you some time to think, shall we?” Dumbledore suggested quickly, averting what looked like a building tirade on Snape’s part.

“All right, professor. I’ll just be going, then.” Harry got up and left as quickly as his semi-shaky legs could take him. He met up with Ron and Hermione a short distance from the gargoyle and shook his head at their inquiries. “Not now, not here.” They were partway to the Room of Requirement when he heard his name shouted. Turning around revealed Malfoy headed his way.

“Harry! Wait up!”

“Why is he calling you Harry?” Ron muttered.

Er, No

Malfoy caught up, then seemed to realize just who was standing there and sneered. “Weasel. Mudblood. I need to talk to Harry, so piss off.”

Harry arched a brow, turned around and grabbed his friends’ arms, and led them away. When Malfoy persisted he said, quite calmly, “I’m thinking. I can’t do that around you. So leave me be.”

“Oh, but they’re okay?”

After a nice deep breath he said, “They’re my best friends.”

“A blood traitor and a mudblood? You must be joking.”

A second later Malfoy had been stunned, and Harry and his friends were making an escape. They retreated to Gryffindor, however, up into the boys’ dorm, and settled on Harry’s bed, curtains closed and anti-eavesdropping spells emplaced.

“What the hell is going on?” Ron demanded.

“It’s very simple. On the surface, anyway. Apparently Malfoy is a veela and I’m supposedly his mate.”

“What!? You can’t bloody be his mate! That’s ridiculous!” Ron ranted on for another five minutes before he went silent, red-faced and puffing.

“What are you going to do?” Hermione asked quietly. “If you really are his mate, he’ll die if you don’t bond with him.”

“Oh, so that’s what Snape meant,” he mused. “Well, I told them I needed to think about it.”

“Think about it!? There’s nothing to think about!” Ron insisted. “Tell him to bugger off! You saw the way he treated us.”

“I know, Ron, I know. And that’s part of why I wanted time to think about it. I mean, there’s the barest possibility that all this time Malfoy’s been acting. You know, to appease his git of a father.”

“But he’s dead,” Hermione pointed out.

Harry nodded. “Yes. So if he was acting all this time, don’t you think he’d be a bit nicer to my friends? Sounds to me like he truly believes that twaddle. How could I possibly bond with someone who thinks my friends are revolting? And hey, I’m a half-blood. By his thinking I’m just as revolting.”

“Except you’re his mate, so that makes you an exception,” Hermione said quietly.

“In his mind,” Harry agreed. “I don’t like it, not one bit. I can see it now, him being a complete bastard to you two, the rest of the Weasleys, to pretty much anyone I care about.” After a pause he said, “How much time do I have, anyway?”

“To make a decision? Well, now that he’s made his determination you have about six months.”

“Wonderful. And if I refuse him he dies.”

“So let him die!”

Hermione glanced at Ron and sighed. “I don’t like this any better than you, Ron, but there is a life at stake.”

“Then what do you suggest?” Harry asked, quite curious as to her thoughts.

“Give it a while first, see if he changes his attitudes. If what we see really is who Malfoy is, then. . . .”

“Then?”

“Harry, it would kill you to live in that situation. After everything you’ve been through, all that we’ve managed, to give up the happiness you deserve. . . . Well, I don’t like the idea of anyone else dying, but you’d die, just in a different way, you know? And what’s Malfoy ever done to deserve you? It shouldn’t be your responsibility to remold his character, like it’s another horrific obstacle in life. So give him a while, tell him exactly why you’re against the idea, and see what he does. And if he fails, then . . . then I’ll help hide you so you can’t be forced into it,” she said fiercely.

He felt his eyes sting. “You’d do that for me?”

“We both would, mate,” Ron said firmly.

Hermione smiled at him and nodded. “Look, I’ve got some questions of my own about this. Like, how long has he known he’s a veela? Did this come out of nowhere because his father thought it would make them look impure, or has he known all along? If he has that’s a huge black mark against him. You might have to be the one asking the questions, but we can all think of ways to properly assess him.”

“Can he use allure against me? Like those veela at the World Cup?” he asked nervously.

“Um, yes,” she said with a frown. “Oh, but there’s a way around that. I’ll take care of it. For all three of us.”

“How quickly?”

Er, No

She looked a bit shifty. “There’s potions we can take, but we’d need the ingredients, or buy them already made. We may need to sneak out, actually.”

Harry shook his head. “I’ll ask Dobby to get them. I have enough money, I’m sure. And once he finds out that Malfoy is after me, well. . . .”

She hesitated, then nodded. “The sooner the better.”

“I wonder if there’s a way to pawn him off on someone else,” he mused, “someone who’d want him.”

Hermione shrugged.

“Oh well. Dobby!”

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Harry sighed and wished the holiday would arrive sooner. Malfoy, even after having been told quite bluntly about his objections, had not changed in the least. Oh, he attempted to pretend, but he could not manage to control the sneers or the condescending attitude. And more than once they had eavesdropped on his conversations with others, which showed that his thinking was firmly entrenched. Malfoy also seemed to be peeved over his allure not working to get him his way.

Snape was even nastier than usual, though Harry got the impression it had as much to do with Malfoy being a Slytherin as anything else. There always had been rumors of him being Malfoy’s godfather. He was getting tired of being called arrogant, that he obviously was so full of himself that even this honor was beneath him. He was just as tired of other people seeking his company, or rather, the company of He Who Defeated Voldemort.

Of course, if Dumbledore would let him go he could finish up his packing.

“Have you given any thought to inviting Mr Malfoy to go with you?”

“No, sir,” he said firmly. “I have every intention of going home for the holiday to get away from everything. The only place I have any measure of peace in the school is when I’m in Gryffindor tower, as Malfoy persists in pursuing me at every opportunity, along with half the rest of the school.”

Dumbledore nodded and said, “And yet, you would have the opportunity to get to know him better if you did, away from the school and all the other students.”

“With all due respect, sir, I own that house, and it’s my choice who to invite within. I want some peace, and I won’t be getting that if he’s there. Aside from that, I refuse to do that to Ron and Hermione. And I’ll probably be ambushed just trying to do my Christmas shopping.”

Dumbledore merely twinkled at him. "I'm sure you'll have plenty of time after you've bonded. A lifetime, in fact."

Ruthlessly repressing the desire to scream, Harry made a noncommittal noise, then said, "May I go, sir?" Back in his dorm he paced like a madman, only stopping when his friends joined him.

"You raced in here like the devil was on your heels," Hermione observed. "What happened?"

He snorted. "Dumbledore wanted me to invite Malfoy home for the holiday. I can't take much more of this, guys."

Hermione nodded and began to finish up his packing for him. She had a strange gleam in her eyes he wasn't sure he wanted to ask about just yet.

The next morning they had breakfast quickly and scampered off to take a carriage down to the station, then barricaded themselves into one of the compartments on the train, as they did not know if Malfoy was staying at the castle or not. Sadly, he wasn't. He attempted to visit and was thwarted by the protections they had emplaced. Even so, he had a smile for Harry and sneers for his friends before disappearing.

"Soon, Harry," Hermione said. "And I suggest we apparate off the train when we arrive."

The house looked much the same, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief once they were inside. The wards had been heavily updated and were under Harry's control.

Hermione dumped her trunk in the hall and said, "Right. Harry, close off the wards to anyone but us three. And call Dobby?"

He gave her a funny look as he did so, Dobby popping in a few seconds after.

"What is Master Harry wanting?"

Harry rolled his eyes and sighed; Dobby was incredibly stubborn.

"Dobby," said Hermione, "is it possible to make it so that the only house-elf that can enter this house is you?"

"Yes, Miss Hermione. I can be doing so."

"Please do," she requested. "It's for our safety."

Dobby glanced at Harry, who nodded. "I be doing so right away," he said, then disappeared.

Er, No

“Now we check to see if anyone left behind any surprises, like monitoring spells,” she said, then produced her wand. “It’s like so. . . .”

At dinner (which Harry prepared, fending off Dobby) Hermione looked at them gravely. “Let’s start with whatever it was that upset you so much yesterday, Harry. I know it wasn’t as simple as you explained.”

“No. Dumbledore brushed off what I was saying, and then capped things by assuming I would bond with Malfoy, and that we’d have a lifetime together to get to know each other. His thing for giving people second chances is suspect when it’s not his life in question.”

“We gave the ferret plenty of second chances,” Ron muttered around a mouthful of food.

Hermione huffed. “Don’t speak with your mouth full. Okay, so we’ve got no help coming from that quarter, and Snape will make your life even more hellish than he has been. Well, I have a plan. I’ve been working on parts of it for a while now, just in case. We’ll need to go to Gringotts tomorrow, to start.”

“What do you have in mind?”

She smiled crookedly. “We’re going to flee the country, of course. I wouldn’t put it past Dumbledore to guilt you into bonding, or Snape to tie you up and force you to do it. I already have a passport, but I checked and we can get you two passports with the help of Gringotts. Did you know, they have muggle-borns and certain half-bloods employed that work the muggle side of things? Well, they have the knowledge to fix a few things, like identification papers. All very hush hush and hideously expensive, but. . . .”

Ron gaped, a rather unattractive sight given that he still had food in his mouth.

“Gringotts should also have waiting a list of properties you can snatch up quickly, so we’ll have a place to live,” she continued. “Yes, Ron, I know, you’re wondering how I could possibly propose this when it means we’d not be able to take our NEWTs. We can hire a tutor or something and take them in some other country, not the one we end up in. That way it’d be harder to find us, assuming anybody even thought to check. And so long as there’s a Gringotts decently nearby, it isn’t as though Harry would be cut off from his accounts. We can prevent owls from finding us, and Dobby might know of a way to prevent any house-elves but him from finding us.”

Dobby nodded violently.

“What about Fawkes? You know he can transport people,” Harry pointed out.

She shook her head. “Depends on the wards in place. After all, if Fawkes could go anywhere, he could have dropped half the Order inside Malfoy Manor so they could duke it out, or straight into Voldemort’s hideout.”

Harry smiled faintly, feeling a lot more confident. “You’re amazing, Hermione. I am so lucky to have you as a friend, and very appreciative.”

“You can repay me by displaying better study habits,” she replied with a grin.

Ron, sensibly, merely smiled and kept eating.

“You only have two months left, so I think we should disappear during this holiday. That’s why I packed everything. We’ll have to work on a letter, as well. The least we could do is explain why, and in no uncertain terms. I doubt it’ll have any effect, but it’s only polite.”

“Certain people are still going to be horribly disappointed in us, or start making plans to hunt us down with a mind toward torture and death.”

Hermione nodded at him.

“Don’t care,” Ron said. “There’s no way you’re going to bond with the ferret. You gave up way too much already to sacrifice yourself again, and for a person who can’t even be bothered to make an effort. He doesn’t even love you. He just wants what he thinks ought to be his. He’s the same spoiled brat he’s always been.” He paused. “Are you even gay, Harry?”

He flushed and shifted in his seat. “Er, maybe?”

Ron waved a hand dismissively. “Just curious. So, disguises tomorrow, hit the bank, get any shopping done if there’s time. . . . Maybe some in the muggle shops?”

“It’d be easier to find something for your dad there,” Harry said agreeably.

“So muggle money, too. And when everything’s set, we disappear. Though, I think we should make an appearance at the Burrow for Christmas day.”

Harry nodded, then furrowed his brow. “If passports are being arranged, does that mean you were planning on muggle transportation?”

“Yes. I was told that the passports are enhanced, so we can change the information as necessary. Mine can be updated. The, er, base would be our real information, though. We can make the trip in several legs, using different identities each time. Portkeys can be traced so we want to avoid those. And since we’re all of age in the magical world, the magic we do when we settle into whatever house we get won’t be noticed. But we need to keep our heads down until Harry turns eighteen.”

“Why eighteen?” Ron asked.

“Because that’s the general legal age in the muggle world. You can get a job and your own place here in England at sixteen, but your guardians still have say over other things. We’ll

Er, No

have to double-check depending on which country we end up in. By the way, Harry, this food is delicious. You're a fantastic cook."

He flushed again. "Thanks. We won't starve, that's for sure."

Dobby huffed. "Dobby cooks fine, too."

"You do," he hastened to assure his little friend. "But I like to cook. It's relaxing. We can set up a schedule or something, okay? And whoever cooks doesn't have to do the cleaning up." Having mollified the house-elf he added, "Who wants dessert?"

The next day was half spent at Gringotts; they would have to return to finalize things. The rest was spent shopping in the comfort of anonymity. Two days later they returned to Gringotts and walked away feeling quite pleased, and meandered by a travel agency.

Bright and early on Christmas day they arrived at the Burrow, laden down with packages, and were ushered in by a fussing Mrs Weasley, who was by then certain they must have been starving to death by themselves. Harry tuned most of it out, knowing it wasn't worth the effort to protest. The day went well enough, despite Harry feeling a bit exposed. He kept checking through the windows to make sure Malfoy hadn't popped up seeking his company, though he was still a topic of conversation. Even Arthur and Molly seemed to think Harry would bond, and Harry wondered privately if they were holding delusional romantic notions about the whole thing.

They left early morning on the twenty-ninth, eventually arriving at their destination on the thirty-first. The house was completely lacking in furniture, or even character, but that could be fixed easily enough with temporary transfiguration of odds and ends. It was more important to get the place warded, despite how tired they were. It should not be until the fourth that anyone noticed they were missing, which should be barely enough time. Hermione could be seen crawling around at all hours etching runes, Ron trailing behind her with a book so he could double-check them, and Harry casting all sorts of more simplistic spell-based wards.

When finally complete Hermione looked around in smug satisfaction, then grimaced. "You do realize we're all going to feel like we're dying after that abuse of energizing potions."

"It's worth it," Ron said. "Can always hire a goblin warder to come in and add some more, too. And it means Harry is safe from the ferret."

"And Snape."

The letter had already been taken care of, so they crashed into their beds, not to wake up for a good twenty-four hours, and with splitting headaches. But life went on.

Word filtered back to them in March of Malfoy's demise. Predictably, Snape was on the warpath, raging about the senseless death of his favored student, and placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of Harry.

Harry, however, was happily soaking up knowledge from their tutor, a man in his mid-twenties that caused him to have rather naughty dreams at night. Not that he would admit to them. No, he would enjoy for once feeling . . . normal.

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### The Dream

He woke up sodden with sweat and with a grimace on his face, though the former was taken care of courtesy of a shower. At breakfast he was fidgety enough that Hermione finally stared at him in that certain way and began tapping her nails on the table.

"I had a really strange dream," he admitted.

Ron raised his brows and continued to shovel eggs into his mouth.

"Really strange. In it, Snape had taken, er, samples from Malfoy." He licked his lips and grimaced again. "He found some pure-blood girl to. . ."

Hermione sighed. "To bear Malfoy's posthumous children?"

"Yeah."

"Okay," she said slowly. "But what was so weird about the dream? I mean, that was strange, but considering how pure-bloods tend to be about carrying on the family line. . . ." She waved a hand around vaguely.

"Well, it changed then, to like seventeen or eighteen years later. One of those children inherited veela traits as well, and he tracked me down, saying I was his mate. What really freaked me out, though, was that the kid told me he was happy that I let his father die, because that meant I was his. The look on his face when he said it was just frightening."

"It's just a dream, Harry. You're still unsettled by everything."

He shrugged. "I guess."

Ron scowled. "Last thing we need is more bloody Malfoys running around." He glanced at Hermione. "Can they do that?"

"What, take samples and get children after the fact? Muggles can, so I wouldn't be surprised if magicals could, too. I'll have to check."

Er, No

“I wish you hadn’t asked that,” Harry whined. “I’ve gone right off my food.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Should anything strange like that actually happen, I’m sure we’ll get news that there are, mysteriously, Malfoy heirs, and we’ll know to be on guard. Okay?”

He smiled faintly. “Yeah.”

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## The Letter

Professor Dumbledore,

By now you probably realize that I’ve left. Well, let me explain why. There are a couple of things you’ve said to me that have always stuck with me, and those things helped to form a basis for my decision.

First, you told me that our choices make us who we are. I believe that came up when I was upset because the sorting hat told me it still thought I would have done well in Slytherin. The thing is, you continued to keep trying to make my choices for me after my ‘duty’ to the magical community had been accomplished. When I was informed about this whole being a mate to a veela thing you were at least kind enough to agree that I needed time to think. However, later on, you began to meddle. You tried to get me to accept. You made assumptions that I would accept. You made it sound like there was no choice at all, and we both know that’s incorrect. You made a choice to assume I would blithely go along with this farce. I made a choice not to be guilted into it or even forced into it by Malfoy or Snape.

And let’s talk about Malfoy’s choices, shall we? I told him in no uncertain terms what my objections were to bonding with him. He chose to ignore my words. He played his little games. He chose to pretend to change his attitude, as though it was something his father had forced him into previously, but I know from his own lips it was an act. He chose to try to use his allure against me to get his way. He chose to continue to be nasty to my best friends, as though they didn’t matter, as though I would simply abandon them, as though I ought to discard them in favor of him.

And he knew there was a 50/50 chance he could inherit the veela traits. He knew this, and yet did not adopt a policy of aloofness rather than what we all saw for years. He chose to be a bastard, knowing that a person he loathed had the potential to become his ‘destined’ mate, however unlikely that would be.

I weigh my choices against his, and he comes up wanting.

Second, you told me it’s about doing what’s right over doing what’s easy. No doubt you would tell me it is ‘right’ to not let Malfoy die. I think it’s not right for me to sacrifice the rest of my life to a person who has no intention of changing, doesn’t want to change, and would no doubt

do his damndest to make me change to suit him. And I'm supposed to do this for a young man who has never done anything to deserve this sacrifice on his behalf? No. I refuse to die inside just because it would make someone else happy.

The easy path would be to just give up, to give in, and allow the assumptions—his, yours, Snape's—to become reality. Even Molly and Arthur thought I would just roll over and accept this so-called fate. Only two people stood by me. Only two people knew it would kill me. And they're with me.

Try to find us if you like. Don't be too disappointed if you fail.

HJP

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**Notice:** I got a request from someone who wished to write a 'sequel' to this oneshot, and I gave permission. **Duochan** has written one called *Tough*, located at [FFN](#) or [HPF](#).

Er, No

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Storytext

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Outside