

The Widower Maker

“Hey, Herbert! How’s things?”

“Yep, back again. I swear I’m your best customer.”

“Number nine, believe it or not. If I get to ten, do I get a prize or something? A set of steak knives, perhaps?”

“Sure, take your time.”

“Hi, who are you?”

“Oh, I’m here to be assigned a bride.”

“Yes.”

“You really need me to tell you? I thought my scar was identification enough?”

“Where are you going? Oh, good afternoon gentlemen. Goodness, there are a lot of you. May I ask what is going on? I just wanted to find out who my next bride was going to be.”

“You’re arresting me? This is some sort of joke, right?”

“No? Oh very well. Here. Take care of it. It’s the wand that defeated Voldemort, after all.”

“Oh grow a pair would you? The bastard is dead. For good this time.”

“No I will not stop saying his name. Deal with it. You’re the big bad Auror. Supposedly you’re the best of the best. If you’re scared to the point of staining your trousers by a simple name, then perhaps you should reconsider your career of choice?”

“Shackles? Are they really necessary?”

“I see. And just who is going to be performing this interrogation?”

“You have got to be kidding.”

“You know, I honestly can’t say I’m surprised. After all, I was brought in front of the entire Wizengamot just to deal with my case of underage magic use. Why wouldn’t the entire legislative body of the country assemble simply to hear me deny whatever it is you’re accusing me of.”

“Murder? Oh, please, don’t be insulting. I didn’t murder Voldemort. It was purely self defence. Anyway, it was ages ago. If you were going to arrest me for that you probably should have done it a long time back.”

“It’s not? Well, he’s the only person I’ve ever killed. Well, except for Lucius Malfoy, that was satisfying.”

“Oh, and Bellatrix Lestrange. Her husband and brother-in-law too, what were their names? Rasta-something? Raba-something? One was called something that sounded like Rudolf, he probably had a red nose. But that was more along the lines of a public service.”

“Yeah, okay, Pettigrew too. Though he was in his rat form at the time, so you could almost consider that act to be some sort of pest control.”

“All right, Snape as well. Honestly, if you’re going to be pedantic about it, just about everyone with a tattoo on their arm died at my hands, but it was all in self defense.”

“Ha! No, her death was an accident.”

“So was her’s.”

“Him too.”

“She died of natural causes. Well, natural causes for someone who poisons people for a living.”

“Oh all right, I’ll tell them. How long until they can be called to session?”

“They’re waiting?”

“A portkey? My, something must have got into their pants. No, by all means. Let’s go.”

"Well, that was as unpleasant as always. Oh, I see. They're in courtroom ten, no less. I am impressed. The Minister has a sense of irony at least. Would you mind opening the door and announcing me? I would do it myself, except I have these shackles on, you see."

"Ah, hello, nice to see you all again. And under similar circumstances too. No, no, don't stand up on my account. Let me just have a seat here and we can get on with whatever it is you want to ask me."

"These shackles aren't necessary, you know."

"No, really, they aren't."

"No, really, they are not necessary."

"Oh do shut up, you babbling idiots. If you're going to hire someone who is so mentally unprotected, don't blame me for taking advantage."

"Oh very well, tie me to the chair. But I must state that I'm doing this under protest."

"Veritaserum? You *are* going all out, aren't you? Righty ho then, dose me up. Three drops, I believe."

"Yes, the veritaserum is working."

"Well, I assume it is. I've never been dosed with it before, so I'm not sure what to expect. It feels a bit like the Imperius Curse, doesn't it?"

"My name is Harry James Potter. I live at twelve Grimmauld Place."

"Yes, I killed Voldemort. Salazar's scabrous scrotum, people, he's dead! He has been for bloody ages now. You don't need to jump like that."

"Well, all right, but before we begin, I would like to lodge a protest."

"I don't care if I can or not. I'm going to. No, shut up. I am going to lodge a protest on the record."

"Thank you. Now, I was presenting myself at the Ministry, in accordance with the Wizarding Marriage Act of whatever year it was that Voldemort shuffled off this mortal coil. Well, was pushed off it."

"No, shut up, I'm not finished. As I said, I presented myself to find out who my new bride was to be, when these lovely gentlemen here put these shackles on and portkeyed me here to listen to a group of crusty old farts piss and moan about how unfair life is while they sit on their fat arses and drink expensive brandy."

"Well, no, that's pretty much it."

"Okay, go for it."

"May I interrupt? Just give me the names you want answers about. If we have to waffle on about charges of conspiracy to murder for each death of those close to me in recent years, we're going to be here forever."

"Pansy Parkinson? Yes, she was my first wife."

"They were her parents, right? Yeah, I never really got to know them well. I only ever had one conversation with them, and that was at the wedding. Her father was a nasty piece of work, he basically came over to me and gloated about what he was going to do with the Potter and Black fortunes."

"Motive? You think *that's* a motive? Ma'am, I already had a motive to kill them, they supported the bastard that killed my parents."

"Well, yes, but I was already investigated for their deaths. And choking to death on a martini olive is not implausible. Besides, at the time, Pansy and I were organising our finances in accordance with the law before heading off on our honeymoon on the other side of the world."

"Okay, I'm prepared to admit that having both of her parents choke to death on martini olives simultaneously is a bit of a stretch. But again, the goblins can vouch for my whereabouts as the elder Parkinsons were trying to inhale an oily fruit."

"Perhaps Auror Dawlish here could answer that? He was the investigating Auror, as I recall."

"You see? I was cleared of any wrong doing in their deaths."

"Pansy? She died on our wedding night too, about ten hours after her parents."

"Yes."

"Yes ."

"I'm serious. The cause of death was found to be exhaustion."

"Well, call me old fashioned, but I believe that satisfying a bride on her wedding night is the groom's duty."

"Forty-three."

"Oh yes, I kept count."

"Bragging rights, of course. Oliver boasted at the wedding that he gave his wife eight orgasms on his wedding night. I wanted to show him up."

"Oliver Wood."

"Yes. The Keeper."

"What can I say? Her corpse had a grin that couldn't be shifted. It would probably have given small children nightmares."

"Yep. I certainly did. I got the lot."

"Because while the law stated that Pansy gained control of my wealth, it didn't state how those finances were arranged. It made sense to us to move the vaults with fewer protections into a vault with much greater protections. Either way, as required by the law, she was in financial control of the Potter and Black fortunes."

"Oh, I guess around three hundred, maybe three hundred and fifty thousand galleons, all up. Sorry I don't remember the exact amount, but in my defense it was a while ago, and I was brought here without any prior warning. If you like, I could go and get the records from the goblins."

"Are you sure? It would be no trouble."

"Okay."

"Well, since her parents died before she did, the goblins automatically transferred their assets to her, in accordance with their wills. I guess it was about an hour after that that we organised the goblins to transfer her vault contents into the Potter vaults, and everything came over, not just Pansy's trust funds."

"Well, yes, the Parkinsons *were* wealthier than that. But Minister, as Pansy's husband, I gained access to her financial records, which I should point out, then included those of her parents. Are you sure you want me to explain why I inherited about a hundred thousand galleons less than their estimated wealth at the time?"

"My, what a racket. Minister, you really should control the Wizengamot better. Anyone would think that they were upset with you."

"Look, you lot, I can only answer one question at a time."

"Listen to the Minister, will you, he's convinced that there is no reason to pursue this line of inquiry any further. The Parkinsons' deaths were tragic terminal accidents. Well, in Pansy's case, it was terminal satisfaction."

"Melinda Bobbin? No, she was my third wife."

"Yes, I can explain why your records are wrong. You employ inbred, mouth-breathing, nose-picking, thumb-sucking morons and give them high level jobs because of who their parents are. The intelligent ones, those to whom genetic diversity is not an alien concept, are relegated to menial, mundane roles, which they leave as soon as they have enough experience under their belts to get jobs in the private sector. As a matter of fact, I myself employ nearly eighty ex-Ministry employees, and their work is exceptional. You are left with the dregs, so don't get all pissy with me when you can't even keep your own records straight. Daphne Greengrass was my second wife."

"Very well. After I dealt with the bodies of Pansy and her parents, I took the proscribed week of mourning before coming back to the Ministry to be allocated another wife—"

"Please don't interrupt."

"Well, no, I didn't have them buried in their family plot."

"Does it matter?"

"I donated them to science."

"You don't have to all shout about it like a bunch of children. My hearing is perfectly fine."

"I've got no idea. I suppose they were used by Muggle University students. Medical schools always have a pressing need for cadavers to cut up and study."

"No kidding? I did not know that."

"Well, you're probably going to be pissed when you find out what I did with the remains of some of my other in-laws."

"I'm sorry, who are you?"

"You're Daphne's grandfather? Nice to meet you. I suppose that would make you my ex-grandfather-in-law."

"She died in a car accident."

"Well, yes, her parents were with her. They died too."

"Well, apparently, seat belts do save lives."

"Mine, to be perfectly blunt."

"Well, duh, of course I was in the car with them. They bought it with my money."

"Well, yes, I did happen to suggest the same financial arrangements with them. Daphne's parents' vault contents were put into the Black vault. It seemed like the intelligent thing to do."

"Yes, they knew about the Parkinson money. Why do you think they paid the Minister an extra large bribe to have Daphne allocated as my wife?"

"Oops, did I say that out loud? Sorry Minister."

"Honestly Minister, it was an accident. I didn't mean to let slip that you have accepted bribes by those who wanted to have me married to their daughters."

"Well, yes, I suppose I shouldn't have said that either. My apologies."

"Look, I don't really want to sit here all day if all you're going to do is yell at the Minister. Come on, have a little respect."

"Hey, that's not very nice."

"Honestly you people; you go to pieces at any old slip of the tongue. I'm sorry if I said something I shouldn't have, but give me a little slack here, half an hour ago I was getting ready to find out which pureblood stranger I was going to be entering into indentured slavery with."

"Yes Mr. Greengrass? You wanted to ask me something?"

"Well, a car caught Daphne's eye, and she wanted it as a wedding present. As if my taking her and her parents to the South Pacific for a month long luxury holiday wasn't enough of a present. Who am I to deny my wife's desires? Especially since that legally I couldn't."

"No, she didn't know how to drive. Well, to be more accurate, she knew enough to make the car go forward, she just didn't know how to make it stop."

"Actually, it's a bit like apparition. You need a licence to do it. Daph didn't know that."

"Of course I knew that."

"No, I couldn't. Remember, we had been married for three days at that point. As a half-blood married to a pure-blood, under the Wizarding Marriage Act, I was bound to obey my wife. Telling her not to drive was against the law."

"Yeah, I agree, it is poorly written. Anyone would think that it was drafted in haste and presented for vote in front of a Wizengamot whose more moderate members were absent, celebrating the death of Voldemort."

"Don't blame me for the law's shortcomings. I follow the law to the letter. As was made clear to me the last time I was interrogated in this very room, the spirit of the law means nothing."

"I suppose I could have said something. 'Please slow down', or something to that effect. But I was rigid with fear at the time. I didn't even have a chance to scream before Daph hit an oil slick, smashed through the barrier and rammed the car into the pylon."

"Because I had the seemingly arcane knowledge of manipulating a device designed to restrain the body in case of an accident."

"No, I'd say that Daph and her parents didn't."

"Because if they did, they would have put them on, and they'd be alive today."

"Well, maybe they wouldn't be alive today; I do seem to have the most extraordinary bad luck at love. But they would have survived the accident."

"Yes, I got their money; it was already in my vaults, after all."

"A little more than the Parkinsons, as I recall. A smidge under half a million galleons."

"No, I did not donate them to a Muggle University. That would have been in extremely poor taste."

"Because medical students need healthy cadavers, that's why. The Muggle emergency services first on the scene had to use the equivalent of a can opener to extract Daph and her parents from the wreck. The remains of the car and the remains of the Greengrasses were sort of merged together. If the car wasn't a write off they'd have had to have hosed it down before repairing it. I could only identify them by the clothes they wore. That reminds me, I really should send a note of thanks to their tailor. The strengthening charms kept me from being covered in anything other than blood."

"Sorry, that was in bad taste too."

"I had them cremated. It seemed to me at the time that it was for the best."

"Look, I told you before that I didn't know that. Shouting at me is not going to change the past. If someone had bothered to tell me that little tidbit of

information at some point in my life, I would have had them sent home and buried in their family plot.”

“Take it up with Dumbledore. He was the one who decided that I shouldn’t be raised in the Wizarding world. If I had been, I probably would have known about things like that.”

“I know he’s dead, you idiot. It was rhetorical.”

“Well, I’m sorry Mr. Greengrass. I didn’t have time to learn about my wife’s family. We were literally married the day she was assigned by the Ministry to be my wife.”

“Of course I satisfied her on our wedding night. But she had more stamina than Pansy. After all, Pansy had only been with Draco before me, so it’s not like she was used to receiving pleasure. Daphne on the other hand was rather promiscuous at school. I remember a time when—”

“I disagree, it is important. Not to mention interesting.”

“Well, okay, I suppose you are correct in that respect. It’s not *relevant*.”

“Are you really sure you want to do that, Mr. Greengrass?”

“Look, I know you’re grieving, but blaming me is not going to bring them back. As a matter of fact, you are more to blame for their deaths than I am.”

“You voted in favour of the Wizarding Marriage Act, didn’t you?”

“So exactly what could I legally do to prevent my wife from buying a stupidly overpowered car and drive it at top speed down a slippery road?”

“No, as I said, that would be illegal.”

“That too.”

“And that. Are we seeing a pattern here?”

“That law specifically states the punishment for breaking it. Dementors really don’t agree with me, so I will never do anything that has a chance of leaving me in Azkaban. Not even to save the lives of my wife and her parents. Sorry.”

“Challenging me to a duel won’t bring them back either.”

“I suppose it would make you feel better. If by feeling better you mean not being able to feel at all. Because I guarantee that you’ll be dead in under ten seconds.”

“No, that’s not a threat.”

“Or a prediction.”

“No, it’s a promise.”

“Hey, I’m the one being threatened. You Aurors should be pointing your wands at him.”

“Now that’s just rude.”

“Oh dear, that was unfortunate.”

“What? I’m unarmed and tied to a bloody chair. I haven’t done anything that would make his wand explode. Or his chair, for that matter. And examination of my wand will prove that I had nothing to do with his sudden reversal of gravity. You know, you really should get him some medical attention, rather than try and blame me.”

“Oh, believe it; this sort of thing happens around me all the time.”

“Look, if you want to babble relentlessly, you can do that without my presence. I have things to do you know. Like get a new wife assigned.”

“Yes, as I said, I’m here for another wife.”

“Well, if you need to go through the list, then so be it. However, I must insist that I not be punished for the delay. The law states that as an unmarried, non-pureblood wizard over the age of seventeen, I must have a new wife assigned to me within a week of becoming single. If this farce goes on for much longer, that deadline will pass and I’ll technically be in violation of the law.”

“Thank you, Director Shacklebolt. Please, continue.”

“Melinda Bobbin was, as I said before, my third wife, not my second.”

“Yes, I knew her before we married. A little, at least. She was in the Slug Club too. We met at the meetings Professor Slughorn organised during my sixth year at Hogwarts.”

“No, as a matter of fact, her vaults were not merged with mine.”

Probably because she was technically penniless.”

“Well, she had no cash in her name. Her parents kept everything controlled tightly. Cash, investments, the deeds to six out of every ten apothecaries in Europe, everything. Since Mel didn’t have a vault of her own, as her husband, their vaults were merged with mine on their deaths.”

“Yes, that was the past tense.”

“I suppose they probably shouldn’t have tried to change the lights at Grimmauld Place to run on magic rather than electricity.”

“Because electricity is dangerous. Every Muggle knows that.”

“Yes, Muggle Studies touches on the subject. Melinda got an E on her Muggle Studies OWL, so her parents obviously took her word at face value.”

“Yes. She told her parents, and I quote, ‘*there are two types of electricity, the straight kind and the wiggly kind. The straight kind is safe but the wiggly stuff isn’t*’. Who am I to correct my wife? I presume that Mel’s dad thought that since the wires were straight, that it was safe to cut them with scissors while standing on a metal ladder that his wife was holding steady.”

“I presume that because I was in no position to get answers from him afterwards.”

“Well that happened while we were on our honeymoon. Watty didn’t feel that she should interrupt us.”

“One of my elves.”

“Okay, she was Daphne’s elf until her death. But she’s mine now. I do seem to be developing a collection of them though.”

“Because, she hadn’t bonded to Mel or her parents. She hadn’t had the chance.”

“No one could get in to find them. Grimmauld Place has some of the best security in the country. I upgraded the charms myself.”

“Yes, she died when we got back home.”

“I have no medical training, but I’d have to say that seeing the rotting corpses of her parents lying in the hallway was probably the catalyst for her cardiac arrest. Her heart had been under some considerable stress for the previous two weeks.”

“On our wedding night? Or over the entire honeymoon?”

“Thirty-four and one hundred and sixty-eight, respectively.”

“Of course I kept count.”

“Well, don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to.”

“As I said, I’m no doctor, so I was not in any position to diagnose a heart attack. I thought she had just fainted. She’d done that a bit during our brief marriage. But she always seemed happy about it.”

“Heh, no. Look at the wording of the law. I couldn’t take her anywhere without her permission.”

“Seriously, clause five, sub section b.”

“Take your time.”

“Well?”

“I agree; it is very poorly worded. I mentioned that before.”

“That’s true, but not against the wording.”

“Yes, but not against the *wording* .”

“Look, we’re beginning to sound like a scratched record. Had I taken my wife to St. Mungo’s without her permission, I could be charged and sentenced to Azkaban for three to six months.”

“Well, yes, I suppose so.”

“No, I haven’t changed my mind. Until the wording of the law is changed, I refuse to break it in any way.”

“That’s not my problem.”

“Seriously, it’s not my problem. You got together and passed a badly written bill, and now that it’s a law you don’t have the two-thirds majority to change it. People like Neville over there who want it scrapped don’t have the simple majority to do *that* . Deal with it.”

“Look, I know it looks bad, but each investigation concluded that I had an iron-clad alibi for the time of each of my wives’ deaths.”

“And their families too.”

Yes, even the subsequent ones.”

“All right then, let’s go through them in order.”

“Narcissa Malfoy was my next wife. Number four, to be precise.”

“Yeah, having me as a step-father really pissed Draco off. I mean, he was apoplectic during the actual service. No matter how many times I told him that as his new daddy, I loved him very much, he just wouldn’t meet me halfway.”

“Well, yes, I suppose my tone of voice may have led him to believe that I was insincere. Damn this veritaserum.”

“Maybe. I honestly thought he was going to kill me on the spot. Well, assuming he had a gun or something.”

“Because the little fart didn’t have the raw strength to cast the Killing Curse, and most of his other offensive spells were so offensively underpowered, my underwear would have stopped them.”

“No, my underwear was not charmed. Just normal, Marks and Spencer one hundred percent cotton y-fronts.”

“I stand by my claim. They would have stopped anything Draco tried to throw at me.”

“Of course he wanted to kill me. I killed his biological father for crying out loud.”

“Oh yeah, afterwards I also sent him a bottle containing my memory of doing so.”

“Yeah. I got a chuckle out of imagining him watching it. The next time I saw him he could hardly speak, and he turned a sort of purple. Um, Auror Tonks? Would you make your face purple please? A little darker. A bit more. A little redder. Right, now put in a hint of green. There! That’s the colour he went.”

“No, I agree, it’s not healthy. My little gift really didn’t sit well with my Cissy’s little Drakey-poo.”

“What? You can’t blame the little snot’s death on me!”

“He was found dead in a secret passageway in Malfoy Manor, a week or so after he was declared missing. Which, I admit, was quite a while after his actual death.”

“Of course not.”

“Not many people were really interested in spending time with my old step-son.”

“Really. He was the most offensive little turd you could imagine. Always going on about purity of blood and whatnot, sounding like a broken record. Honestly, he cried like a first year Hufflepuff after Hermione pasted him during our third year.”

“I suppose I have to agree.”

“I believe the investigating Aurors determined the time of death to be around two o’clock in the morning, the day *after* I married Narcissa.”

“My alibi? I was busy introducing my new wife to the concept of an orgasm not achieved through masturbation.”

“Yes, apparently Lucius was a, how shall I say this, *less than adequate* lover.”

“Oh come on, are you surprised? The long silky hair, the polished cane? The way he was always kicking his elf? He was obviously compensating.”

“Um, would someone mind getting Auror Tonks over there a glass of water?”

“No seriously, she’s choking. Something she suddenly thought about, no doubt.”

“Lucius was her uncle, after all.”

“Oh, right. There was a spy hole to the master bedroom in the wall above where Draco was found. The members of the Malfoy family obviously had less than wholesome sexual perversions.”

“Oh you’re Lucius’ uncle? So nice to meet you.”

“Well that’s not very nice. I haven’t said anything bad about you.”

“Oh, well I suppose that I have said something about you, if you are a Malfoy.”

“No I’m not going to apologise. I’ve been given veritaserum, I can’t lie.”

“Then you shouldn’t have asked a question you didn’t want the answer to. I’m not the one offending people here.”

“Okay, technically I am. But I have to answer any question put to me truthfully. And it was you lot who both gave me the potion and asked the questions, so for what it’s worth, you’re responsible for being offended.”

"Yeah, we're going to be here forever if you keep interrupting."

"My personal theory is that the little pervert was watching me turn Narcissa into a slave to her arousal and he couldn't believe his eyes. His blood pressure probably spiked from listening to his mother's constant screams of pleasure. He had an aneurism, I believe."

"Yes, I must admit, I did know he was spying on us. I just didn't know from where. I thought he probably had a divination mirror or something."

"Because debauching his mother in front of him was fun."

"Oh please, I had the woman panting after just five minutes. It was hardly a chore. Besides, I discovered that day that the older, more sophisticated woman has some more... intriguing tastes. I learned a lot from Cissy during our brief marriage."

"No, actually, we hadn't got around to merging our finances before her death. She decided that she wanted to get me into bed before we saw to that. Daph and Mel had sent some saucy letters to their friends between the wedding night and their deaths. Cissy wanted to see if the rumours were true. Once I started exploring her body, she had other things on her mind than taking control of my money."

"No, in the end, it turned out I didn't need to."

"Because on Draco's death, Narcissa inherited all his assets, which included the Malfoy fortune. But she was no longer considered a Malfoy; after all, she had married me. She technically became a Black again. Since I am the Head of the Black family, her assets became mine on her death."

"Yes. That is correct. The goblins can confirm that that as Draco's next of kin, all his assets went to her."

"No I'm not making this up. You gave me veritaserum, remember? Merlin, get your memory checked."

"Well, yes, I suppose I did do well out of her death. Quite well, actually. I'd have tripled my total wealth the moment she asphyxiated if she had been my first wife. As it was, what with the Parkinson, Bobbin and Greengrass inheritances, the Malfoy money was just icing on the cake. Malfoy Manor is a very nice place though, if you don't mind the whole gothic motif. I'm thinking of turning it into a museum. Getting planning permission for what I have in mind would be easier if it were located in Amsterdam, though."

"I... ah... don't really want to say."

"No, really, there are elderly people present, who may find what happened shocking. Terminally so, if you get my drift."

"Well, okay, if you don't want to be circumspect about it. I was lying down, flat on my back, having just been ordered by my new wife not to move. Narcissa straddled my face and, well, I suppose you should just look up the Muggle term, 'deep throat'."

"Oh dear, I'd say the person behind you understood my meaning, Minister. And don't worry; a simple cleaning charm will get the stains out."

"No, I'm sure no one would ever think of bottling and selling the memory of you dripping brandy."

"Well, yes, they might think of it now I've suggested it."

"That's not my problem, is it?"

"Come on, you've cleaned yourself up. Can we get back on track?"

"Thank you. Now, since I was married and had to obey my wife, I wasn't permitted to move. Despite how enthusiastic she was, I could tell she wasn't used to, well, what she was doing. So I tried something different. I wandlessly cast the most powerful tickling charm I could, straight at her G-spot."

"What?"

"Of course it exists, you misogynist."

"Look, it's perfectly simple to find. It's not like you need an anatomical map, a wetsuit and a diver's helmet."

"I pity your wife then."

"Well, if it doesn't, then I hit some sort of pleasure point, because she had a climax so powerful she passed out."

"That's right, still in her previous position."

"Well, I wasn't allowed to move, was I? At least, not until she was no longer my wife."

"Azkaban, remember?"

"To recap, I was left a widower again after Narcissa bit off more than she could chew, so to speak. Oh dear, are you all right Madam? Do you need some assistance?"

"For goodness sake, somebody help her. She's hyperventilating."

"No, she probably just suddenly understood what I was talking about."

Look, I'm not going to sit here and let you all fling insults my way. I did warn you that the answers would upset you."

"All right, I suppose I do have to sit here and listen to you all, at least until someone undoes these shackles."

"I don't care how hard you find it to believe. I've been cleared in every investigation."

"No, not all the women assigned to be my wives have died. Oh, and not all deaths occurred after I was married either, so you can't get me there."

"Well, the seventh woman assigned as my bride passed on before the wedding, and my fifth assigned bride is still alive."

"Madam Umbridge, was the seventh, yes. And yes, she was once my teacher at Hogwarts."

"Dunno. She just suddenly disappeared. As far as I know, she hasn't been found. I must say I was rather happy about that. The power of imagination is only so strong. I probably would have failed to do my duty for the first time on our wedding night."

"Well, I assume she's dead. There was a bit of a kaffuffle at the wedding ceremony as I recall. I wasn't permitted to leave until I was married, so I was stuck there for three days until the Ministry hastily assigned another bride."

"Yes, we are getting off schedule. After Narcissa's untimely, though oddly arousing death, Millicent Bulstrode was assigned as my bride to be."

"No I never married her. Let's just say she decided that she wasn't ready to tempt fate, er, that is, she wasn't ready to get married. She went against her father's wishes and asked the Ministry to reassign her. Thus, she was both the fifth person assigned to be my wife, and the only one still alive."

"Yes, I still think of her as a friend. She was rather apologetic as she explained to me why she didn't want to get hitched. Actually, I was best man at her wedding to Theodore."

"She told him to, obviously. It's not like I knew the guy."

"Because she wanted to keep an eye on me to make sure we weren't 'accidentally' married by a vengeful Ministry until she kissed Teddy. As far as I know, the new Mrs. Nott is happy and content."

"I'm not really sure. After the first bribing... sorry, bidding war, I sort of expected that I was a prize catch. After going through four or five wives in less than three months, suddenly no one was interested in fronting quite as much cash for me as they had been. To the Minister's disappointment, I suspect."

"Yes, that's why I said, 'I suspect'. It's not defamation if I present it as an opinion, rather than a fact."

"You know, yelling and screaming about it only makes people think it's true."

"Yes, really."

"Am I right, everyone?"

"See, Minister?"

"Anyway, after Millie turned me down in favour of Nott, my next assigned bride was Ophelia Zabini."

"Yes, the Black Widow."

"That's right."

"Oh yeah, but believe you me, they all died happy. Very, very happy."

"How would I know? It's not like us poor half-bloods get any say in the process. I don't even get told why a certain woman was picked. In Ophelia's case, if I had to guess, I suspect that someone at the Ministry was hoping that we'd somehow both die."

"Of course not, I ran to the altar."

"Are you kidding? Have you actually seen the woman? She was a goddess!"

"Of course I was delighted to be marrying her. I suspect she was too."

"Because by that point, I was probably one of the top five wealthiest people in Europe. She wanted to get her hands on my rapidly expanding wealth, of course. Why else?"

"You're an idiot. I knew she didn't love me. And she knew I was only in love with her body. Our short marriage was perfectly honest."

"No. Despite the façade she wore in public, she had burned through most of the money she took from her other husbands. There was no significant reason for her to put what was left in my vaults. Besides, she was far too crafty for that."

"Blaise felt a bit threatened, yes. He was very cold to me in the days leading up to the wedding, and he stormed off during the ceremony. I haven't seen him since."

"Really? No one has seen him since? Huh. How 'bout that."

"No idea. I told you, I haven't seen him."

"What am I, his father?"

"Oh, well, yes, I guess you're right. I suppose for a while there I was. But he's an adult now."

"Well, actually, I do know how Ophelia died. I'm surprised you don't know."

"Oh, I didn't know that. I suppose that makes sense though. We were in Rome when she died, so it would have been investigated by Italian Aurors. Haven't they released the results of their investigations?"

"Yes, the prevailing theory is that she was poisoned."

"Not by me. Don't be absurd."

"Well, I suppose you could argue her death was my fault."

"Because I took the wrong cup."

"That's right, on the last morning of our honeymoon she whipped up two steaming cups of tea. She gave me one and took one for herself. I distracted her and swapped them when she wasn't looking."

"Of course I swapped them over. What kind of moron do you think I am?"

"Well duh, she was a black widow. I wasn't about to accept any food or drink she made for me."

"Yeah, the last I heard, the Aurors hadn't identified the poison in the cup either. For all intents and purposes, she died a natural death. Just like her other husbands."

"Because we didn't leave the hotel room for five days straight. I was spending enough money that all the best restaurants were happy to deliver to the hotel. She didn't touch a cooking implement until that last morning."

"Yeah, I remember it very well. She was bowlegged when she fixed the tea. From her satisfied smiles as she slept, I'd say she was delaying the inevitable poisoning for as long as possible."

"Hey, don't try and blame that one on me, all I did was pick up the wrong cup. If she hadn't poisoned it, she'd have been all right. Anyway, I'm only assuming she poisoned the tea. As of when I came back to ol' Blighty, there was no evidence of it."

"I suppose so. I believe one of the investigating Aurors was related to one of Ophelia's previous husbands. He actually treated me as though I was not guilty of the crime for the entire investigation. It was remarkably strange. I'm far more used to having to protest my innocence to people who'd prefer to arrest first, jail last, and never ask questions in between. You know, the standard operating procedure for British Magical Law Enforcement personnel."

"Um, yes. I must admit he did."

"A bottle of twenty-year old Ogden's firewhiskey. Emerald Label."

"Of course not. That would be inappropriate."

"I suggested he filter it."

"Through his kidneys."

"Do I have to draw you a picture?"

"Apparently so. She was creamated on an open bonfire. Auror Diluca got pissed on the firewhiskey and Ophelia got pissed on by Auror Diluca."

"Look, you asked. I suggest you leave the chip on your shoulder out of the rest of this conversation."

"Because if we have to go on like this, you're all going to have heart attacks by the end."

"Right, after I sampled the heavenly delights offered by Ophelia, I was given the unenviable task of marrying a toad."

"No."

"Oh come on, she obviously had some amphibian ancestry. Haven't you all read the fairytale about the princess who kissed a frog? It's got to be based on some truth. Just looking at her proved that it had happened before just a few generations ago."

"The length of his tongue, I assume."

"Seriously, Auror Tonks, you need to leave if that sort of talk makes you gag like that."

"The Minister himself demanded it. We were to be married just three hours after being 'betrothed'."

"Of course I had to wait until Dolores was ready. I was literally in Auror custody the whole time. I was frogmarched from the Ministry to a celebrant, and told to wait until Dolores was ready. Three days later, after a great deal of scurrying about Cho Chang appeared in a white gown at the door."

"No."

"Maybe."

"All right, I admit that I had an inkling that Umbridge would be assigned as my wife before it happened."

"Because the Minister hates me. Ever since I refused to prop up his, er, ever since I refused to give him my public support."

"Yes, he does. I am always on guard around Ministry personnel, ever since I foiled an assassination attempt."

"Yes, that time with the Dementors."

"Actually, it was my seventh assigned wife who sent them."

"Oh yes, I have her memory of admitting it bottled and in a secure, non-monetary vault in Gringotts."

"Because blackmail only works when you do it at the right time."

"Hey, you gave me veritaserum, I can't lie, remember? You are literally forcing me to incriminate myself."

"No kidding?"

"Well, the ceremony with Cho went off without a hitch. Well, with a hitch, if you want to be completely accurate."

"Yes, for some reason, she was under the impression that she needed to go to China as soon as possible."

"Hong Kong."

"To get away from me, of course."

"Because I'd been directly related to a half dozen deaths or disappearances of prominent, pureblood women, each of whom were either married to me or were due to do so, and another eight or so deaths or disappearances of people related to my new wives. She didn't want to be added to the rapidly growing list."

"It was in vain, as a matter of fact."

"Well, she should have stuck around to at least consummate our marriage."

"Dunno. I had rather hoped to have had a go with the girl. She was the first person I ever kissed."

"Well, it wasn't too pleasant. And I must admit I probably didn't do a sterling job either. But I've put in the effort to ensure that no woman who ever gets intimate with me will be disappointed again."

"Yeah, she died rather abruptly. Just as her father and grandfather were going to Gringotts to claim my money. Bad timing, that."

"Hey, I didn't make her take a faulty portkey."

"No, as far as I'm aware, no one knows how the portkey was damaged. But she ended up half in Hong Kong, half at Heathrow."

"The bottom half."

"Don't look at me; I didn't get a chance to examine it. There was no way I could identify the bum, sorry, body."

"Well, your law wasn't exactly working as you'd hoped, was it?"

"Hey, you wrote it so that the purebloods would get control of a lot of independently minded people, who had enough public backing to topple your corrupt government."

"Yes, yes, yes, the stated aim of the Act was to ensure that the pureblooded families did not rot from inbreeding. Mandating obedience of Muggle-born and half-bloods and gaining financial control of large sums of money were just icing on the cake, weren't they?"

"Well, let's see, Mr. Davies, Tracey is still single, isn't she?"

"Oh dear, you seem to have gone pale."

"Well, who else voted for the Act?"

"Is something wrong with your chairs? You all seem to be shuffling uncomfortably."

"What about you, Mrs. Edgecombe? Is Marrietta available?"

"To whom?"

"Bollocks. He got engaged last week to a French bird he met during the Triwizard Tournament."

"Right, so there are at least two valid girls available. Oh, yes, Madam Yaxley, you have a young granddaughter who is just finishing Hogwarts, yes? That's at least three."

"Hm, Minister, for some reason, a large number of people here seem to be refusing to do their duty."

"Well, what do you know? Hey Neville, without Greengrass present, and with three more votes, it looks like you now have a simple majority to overturn the Act."

"Really? I didn't think this was the forum."

"A vote? Now?"

"No, go ahead. Don't mind me. I'll just sit here while you go through the motions."

"Are we done?"

"Yes, it was very suspicious that so many deaths happened. But as I've said, there is nothing you can charge me with."

"Thanks Nev."

"Sure, let me just rub some life back into my wrists. Those shackles were very tight."

"My wand, if you would be so kind? Thank you."

"Right, well, I'm off home. Where's the nearest apparition point?"

"Thanks. Cheerio. No, no hard feelings. Well, except for Mr. Greengrass."

"Nah, if he wants to take it up further, let him. Once he wakes up, of course."

"Bye for now."

"Ahh, it's good to be home."

"Why hello my d— Oof!! Careful woman!"

"Nah, they finally decided that having the Act on the books was doing more harm than good when it comes to pureblood longevity."

"Yeah, Greengrass had an accident, and Davies, Yaxley and Edgecombe crossed the floor. The Act is dead."

"I see you've been shopping. I didn't realise that there was that much latex in the country."

"Does that vibrate?"

"What about that?"

"And how does that work? Oh, wait, I've figured it out. Interesting. Tell me, did you buy the entire shop?"

"Well, did you leave him anything left to sell?"

"I see. Um, your robes seem to have fallen off. How careless of you."

"No, I do like it, very much in fact, but I can categorically say that you are not dressed."

"It's guaranteed to raise the heart rate of any male, alive or dead, but again, you are in no way 'dressed'."

"I seriously doubt anyone with a phallus would find fault with your current appearance, but I must restate that three kilograms of gold jewellery is not in any way 'attired'. And I didn't know we had that much chocolate sauce in the fridge."

"Because I can tell that it was cold when you poured it on. That is rather evident."

"I mean it! I had lunch an hour or so ago. How am I supposed to lick all that chocolate sauce off you? It's going to take me all afternoon."

"Well, no, that's not a complaint. Definitely not."

"It's just that I need to use the Widower Maker one last time. How am I supposed to concentrate on the task at hand when I know you are waiting for me looking like that?"

"Oh, I need to give it about three spins, and organise for Mr. Greengrass's wand and Wizengamot chair to explode, and for him to fall to the ceiling. Honestly, I make this so hard sometimes. You wouldn't happen to know of a charm that reverses gravity would you?"

"Oh, you are such a Ravenclaw."

"I tell you what, let me just swish my wand here... and tie you up a bit... and a little... add a gag... There! Now, I just need to turn this on. Hm, how fast is too fast, that is the question. Let's try level six."

"Too much? How's four?"

"Excellent. Now Sweetheart, I know you can't do anything but moan, but honestly, this sybian will keep you interested until I get back, okay? I'd charm a feather as well, but that would be overkill."

"Hey, it was you who introduced me to the Magical Karma Sutra. Of course I know what I'm doing."

"Padma, my sweet, the instant I get back, I'll take care of all of your needs."

"Completely. And forever."