

The Feathered Serpent: Chapter 29

"So you're telling me you beat everyone without breaking a sweat?" Calum leaned back in his chair, eyebrows raised skeptically. "Sounds like proper bollocks to me."

Harry rolled his eyes, reaching for another biscuit from the tea tray. "I didn't say it was that easy. Just said we won."

"Right, but according to Mum, you demolished the competition." Calum's grin widened. "Even took down some much older students like they were nothing. That's got to feel good."

"It felt surreal more than anything," Harry admitted. "One moment we're first years trying to figure out basic dueling stances, next we're representing Britain at the European Championships."

They were all gathered in the Greengrass Manor's sitting room, the late afternoon sun streaming through the tall windows. The space was elegant without being ostentatious, much like the family that owned it.

Rose beamed from her spot on the settee next to Stuart. "We're incredibly proud of you both."

Daphne smiled, sitting close to Harry on the loveseat. She was wearing a simple blue summer dress that, in Harry's humble opinion, looked like the sexiest piece of clothing ever, which was basically everything she wore. She looked perfectly relaxed and comfortable beside him.

"It's been overwhelming. The attention, the expectations, all of it."

"But you're handling it brilliantly," Evelyn said warmly. She sat beside her husband Gareth, who'd been quieter than usual since everyone had arrived. "Both of you are."

Astoria, perched on the arm of her parents' sofa, stared at Harry with undisguised curiosity. "So what's it like? Dueling at that level, I mean. Is it scary?"

"Sometimes," Harry replied honestly. "But the training helps. You learn to trust your instincts, adapt quickly."

"And having a partner you trust completely makes all the difference," Daphne added, her hand finding Harry's.

Calum made a gagging sound. "Christ, you two are sickeningly sweet together. How long have you been dating now?"

"Almost a year," Daphne said primly.

"Almost a year and still making googly eyes at each other. Tragic, really." Calum said teasingly, although his eyes held genuine warmth as he gazed at them. "But then

I guess if you're going to be stuck with someone at a fancy French estate for three weeks, might as well be someone you can stand."

"The Flamels' estate," Andromeda interjected from where she sat with Ted near the fireplace. "I still can't quite believe Nicolas Flamel personally invited you both to study with him. Do you understand how extraordinary that is?"

"We're starting to," Harry said. "Professor Dumbledore mentioned Flamel doesn't take students often. Actually, he said Dumbledore himself was one of the last people Flamel agreed to teach."

Stuart whistled low. "That would've been what, over a century ago? Flamel's standards for accepting students must be incredibly high."

"Which makes your invitation all the more impressive," Gareth spoke up, his voice measured. "Nicolas Flamel isn't just the world's foremost alchemist. He's one of the most accomplished wizards in history. If he's interested in teaching you both, it means he sees potential worth cultivating."

"No pressure though," Calum deadpanned. "Just the greatest magical mind in existence deciding you're worth his time. Totally casual."

"What will you be studying?" Evelyn asked, leaning forward with interest. "I know alchemy is his specialty, but surely there's more to it than that?"

"According to his letter, we'll be covering advanced magical theory, wandless magic, and yes, some introductory alchemy," Daphne explained. "But he also mentioned something about understanding magic at its most fundamental level. How it interacts with the world, with living things, with reality itself."

"Heavy stuff," Stuart observed. "Sounds more like philosophy than spellcasting."

"The best magic often is," Andromeda said softly. "True mastery comes from understanding not just how to cast a spell, but why it works. What makes magic possible in the first place."

Astoria's eyes had gone wide. "That sounds absolutely brilliant. I wish I could learn things like that."

"You will," Daphne assured her sister. "Once you're at Hogwarts, you'll have plenty of opportunities to explore advanced magic."

"Not the same as studying with Nicolas Flamel though, is it?" Astoria's tone held a hint of envy. "You two get all the exciting opportunities."

"We also get all the terrifying responsibilities," Harry pointed out. "The Championships aren't exactly a holiday. We'll be competing against the best young duelists in Europe."

"You'll be fine," Calum said confidently. "From what Mum's told me about your training with that Moody bloke, you've been preparing for months. Plus, you've got each other." He paused, then added with a wicked grin, "Though if you do lose horribly, at least you'll have each other to recover your wounded pride."

"Calum," Rose chided fondly.

"What? I'm being supportive!"

The afternoon drifted into early evening as they talked and laughed, the conversation flowing easily between tournament speculation, summer plans, and some good-natured teasing. Calum proved especially skillful at needling both Harry and Daphne, and Astoria also gave as good as she got when it came to embarrassing her older sister.

"Remember when Daphne tried to brew a beautification potion in her room a few summers ago?" Astoria said innocently. "And it exploded all over her?"

Daphne's cheeks flushed. "That was one time, and the instructions were unclear."

"You had purple spots for three days," Astoria continued mercilessly. "Mum had to call in a specialist to fix it."

"At least I didn't accidentally transfigure my homework into a flock of origami birds that attacked the poor cat," Daphne shot back.

"That was an accident!"

"Oh, it was, was it?" Daphne's smile was wicked. "Because you seemed pretty pleased with yourself when Mum praised you for *creative spell application*."

Harry and Calum exchanged amused glances as the sisters bickered playfully.

"They always like this?" Calum asked.

"Looks like it," Harry replied. "Daphne tells me she usually wins."

"Oi!" Astoria protested. "I win plenty of our arguments."

"Name one," Daphne challenged.

"That time I convinced you to let me borrow your blue dress for—" Astoria stopped abruptly. "Never mind."

Daphne's smile turned sly, but she said nothing.

Andromeda cleared her throat gently.

"Perhaps we should discuss the other matter while we have everyone together?" she suggested, her tone becoming more businesslike.

The mood in the room changed subtly. Rose and Stuart sat up straighter, and Gareth's expression grew more serious. Evelyn glanced over to where Harry and Daphne sat together.

"Right," Ted said, reaching for his briefcase. "The betrothal contract."

"So this is really happening, huh?" Calum looked between Harry and Daphne with a small smile.

"It's important," Gareth said quietly. "Given the circumstances."

Andromeda pulled out several documents, spreading them on the low table between the seats. "We've drafted a standard betrothal contract with several specific provisions to protect both parties. The primary purpose, as we discussed previously, is to establish the Potter-Greengrass union as the primary marriage should Harry be unable to nullify the Black family contract."

"And if he can nullify it?" Rose asked.

"Then the betrothal stands as a formal agreement between the families, to be fulfilled when both parties complete their education," Ted explained. "Either way, it protects their relationship and ensures Daphne's position."

Stuart leaned forward, studying the documents. "These provisions about property and inheritance seem standard enough. What about the timeline? When would the actual marriage take place?"

"That's flexible," Andromeda replied. "The contract specifies completion of magical education as a minimum requirement, but the exact timing would be determined by Harry and Daphne themselves."

"So nothing immediate," Rose said.

"God no," Harry said quickly. "We're nineteen. We're not getting married until we're actually ready for that."

"Though we are committed to each other," Daphne added, squeezing his hand. "This just makes it official in the eyes of magical law."

Calum shook his head slowly. "This is mental. I mean, I knew the magical world had some archaic customs, but betrothal contracts? That's properly medieval."

"Welcome to pureblood society," Daphne said dryly. "Where everything is unnecessarily complicated and bound by ancient traditions."

"The alternative is letting the Black family contract take precedence," Gareth said, his voice hard. "Which would mean Daphne becoming a secondary wife, subordinate to whoever Harry would be forced to marry through that contract. This way, at least she has equal standing, protection, and legal recognition."

"It's not ideal," Harry acknowledged. "But it's the best option we have right now."

Astoria had been quiet during this exchange, but now she spoke up. "This is because of that whole lordship thing, right? The one where you inherited from the Blacks?"

"More or less," Harry confirmed. "Accepting the Black heirship came with obligations I didn't know about initially. This is us dealing with the consequences and trying to protect what matters most."

Ted tapped one of the documents. "The contract also includes provisions for mutual consent. Either party can request modifications or delays, provided both families agree. It's not a trap or a cage."

"Just a very formal, legally binding agreement that our children are committed to marrying each other," Stuart summarized wryly. "No pressure there."

"We've had months to think about this," Daphne said firmly. "Harry and I both want this. The circumstances might not be ideal, but our feelings are genuine."

Evelyn smiled softly. "That much is obvious to anyone who spends five minutes watching you two together."

"Right then," Andromeda said, straightening the documents. "If everyone's in agreement, we just need signatures from the heads of both families, plus witnesses."

Gareth reached for a quill, then paused. He looked at Harry for a long moment. "Take care of her."

"Always," Harry promised without hesitation.

Gareth nodded and signed, Evelyn following suit. Rose and Stuart added their signatures as heads of the Wilson household, Harry's magical guardians. Ted and Andromeda witnessed and sealed the documents with their wands, the parchment glowing briefly as the magical contract took effect.

"Well," Calum said into the silence that followed. "That's done then. My cousin's officially engaged. This is weird."

"Betrothed," Daphne corrected. "There's a difference."

"Is there though? You're both locked in now. Might as well start planning the wedding."

"Calum," Rose warned.

"What? I'm just saying what everyone's thinking." He looked at Harry with exaggerated seriousness. "So when do I get to be best man? I assume that's automatic since I'm clearly your favorite relative."

"You're my only cousin," Harry pointed out.

"Exactly. No competition. I win by default."

"You're not even magical," Astoria interjected. "Can you be best man at a magical wedding?"

Calum turned to her, raising an eyebrow. "That feels discriminatory. Just because I can't cast spells doesn't mean I can't support my cousin on his big day."

"I didn't mean it like that," Astoria said quickly, her cheeks coloring slightly. "I just meant, wouldn't there be magical responsibilities or something?"

"Probably," Calum agreed easily. "But I'm sure we can work around it. I'm very adaptable." He flashed her a grin. "Plus, someone needs to provide the non-magical perspective. Keep things grounded."

"That's actually not a terrible point," Astoria admitted.

"See? You get it." Calum's grin widened.

Astoria looked flustered, opening her mouth to respond, but the house elf popped in at that moment to announce dinner was ready.

The meal was relaxed and cheerful, the earlier formality forgotten. Conversation flowed easily, with Calum keeping up a running commentary that had everyone chuckling, and even Gareth seemed more at ease as the evening progressed.

"So what's Hogwarts actually like?" Calum asked as they ate. "You've told me stories from the journal, but I want your live perspective. Is it really as mad as it sounds?"

"Depends on your definition of mad," Harry replied. "There are moving staircases, talking portraits, and ghosts floating through walls. Pretty standard really."

"Don't forget the giant squid in the lake," Daphne added. "And Peeves."

"Who's Peeves?"

"A poltergeist who lives to make everyone's life difficult," Daphne explained. "He's been at Hogwarts for centuries, apparently. No one's been able to get rid of him."

Astoria leaned forward eagerly. "Is it true there are secret passages all over the castle?"

"Loads of them," Harry confirmed. "We've found a few ourselves. The castle is absolutely massive. You could spend years there and still discover new rooms and corridors."

"That sounds amazing," Astoria breathed.

"It is," Daphne assured her. "You'll love it there. Though fair warning, the stairs really do move sometimes. You learn to give yourself extra time to get to class."

"And some of the portraits are proper gossips," Harry added. "They know everything that happens in the castle and love sharing it."

"Speaking of gossip," Calum interjected, looking between Harry and Daphne with barely suppressed mirth. "What's the school's reaction to you two being an item? I imagine that causes some talk."

"Some," Daphne admitted. "But most people have gotten used to it by now."

"We try to keep things relatively private," Harry said. "Not that we're hiding anything, just that we don't need everyone knowing our business."

Calum snorted. "Mate, you qualified for international dueling tournaments together and just signed a betrothal contract. I think your business is pretty public at this point."

"Fair," Harry conceded.

After dinner, they moved back to the sitting room. Calum engaged Gareth in conversation about non-magical sports, which led to a spirited debate about the relative merits of football versus rugby that had Astoria and Stuart joining in enthusiastically.

Eventually, Rose glanced at her watch and sighed. "We should probably head out. It's getting late and we've got an early start tomorrow."

"Are you sure you can't stay longer?" Evelyn asked. "We've plenty of room."

"We appreciate it, but we've got commitments back home," Stuart said apologetically. "But this has been lovely. Thank you for having us."

Goodbyes were exchanged with promises to stay in touch and wishes for safe travels. Andromeda and Ted departed as well, reminding Harry and Daphne they were available if any questions arose about the contract or anything else.

Harry walked with his family to the portkey area where Rose pulled him into a tight hug.

"I'm proud of you," she murmured. "Your mum would be too."

"Thanks, Aunt Rosie." Harry hugged her back, then shook Stuart's hand.

Calum clapped him on the shoulder. "Try not to embarrass Britain too badly at the Championships, yeah?"

"I'll do my best."

"And seriously, good luck in France. Learn everything you can from that Flamel bloke. Those opportunities don't come around often."

"I know." Harry smiled. "Thanks for coming today."

"Course. What are cousins for?" Calum's expression turned sly. "Besides, I had to meet the girl who convinced you to sign your life away. She must be something special."

"She is."

"Yeah, I can see that." Calum glanced back toward where Daphne was approaching with her family. His eyes flickered over to Astoria for a moment, their eyes meeting, and they shared a small smile. He turned back to Harry once again. "You're lucky, you know. Most people don't find that kind of connection."

"I know," Harry said quietly. "Believe me, I know."

One by one, they stepped forward, grabbing hold of the small rope that would take them back home. Harry rejoined Daphne just as they vanished.

Gareth and Evelyn excused themselves to their study to handle some correspondence, leaving Harry and Daphne alone with Astoria.

"Right, I'm off to bed," Astoria announced, stretching. "Long day."

She turned to leave, but Daphne's hand shot out, catching her sister's wrist.

"Not so fast."

Astoria turned back, eyebrows raised curiously. "What?"

"Don't 'what' me." Daphne said with a knowing smile. "You were chatting quite a bit with Calum today."

"Was I? Hadn't noticed really." Astoria replied flippantly, her cheeks pinking. Neither Harry nor Daphne missed it, and they exchanged an amused glance.

"Hadn't noticed," Daphne repeated dryly. "You, who notices everything, hadn't noticed spending half the afternoon talking to Harry's cousin."

"I was just being polite to a guest." Astoria tried to pull away, but Daphne held firm.

"Uh-huh. And that bit where you two were debating the merits of Muggle literature versus magical texts for twenty minutes? That was just politeness?"

"It was an interesting conversation topic," Astoria said primly. "He's surprisingly well-read for someone who doesn't attend Hogwarts."

"Surprisingly well-read," Harry snorted.

Daphne's grin widened. "How fascinating. And here I thought you found non-magical people boring."

"I never said that."

"You strongly implied it. Multiple times."

Astoria's blush deepened. "Calum's different. He's actually intelligent and has interesting perspectives on things. Plus, he's funny."

"Oh, he's funny now? My, my, Tori. This is quite the character development."

"You're reading too much into this," Astoria insisted, finally managing to extract her wrist from Daphne's grip. "We just had some nice conversations. That's all."

"If you say so." Daphne's tone made it clear she didn't believe a word of it.

"I do say so." Astoria lifted her chin. "Goodnight, Daphne. Harry."

She swept from the room with as much dignity as she could muster, which was rather undermined by the speed of her departure. Daphne watched her go, smirking.

"She's absolutely smitten," she declared once Astoria was out of earshot.

"Sure you're not looking too much into this?" Harry asked with a chuckle. "I mean, they only met today."

"And?" She asked with a raised eyebrow. "Didn't we start fancying each other, even if a little bit, the day we first met?"

"Well, when you put it like that..." Harry smiled. "Still, I didn't notice them getting that cozy with each other."

"Of course you didn't. You can be a bit oblivious about these things." Daphne settled back against him. "But trust me, there was definitely something there. The way she kept looking at him, how animated she got during their conversations. And did you see how flustered she got when he complimented her?"

"You're having too much fun with this, aren't you?" Harry asked teasingly.

"You bet I am," she grinned, pressing her lips against his.

Meanwhile, the Wilsons had arrived in a secluded clearing not far away from their home and were making their way through Muggle London.

"So," Stuart said casually as they walked. "You and Astoria seemed to get on well."

Calum didn't look at him. "She's nice enough. Smart too."

"Uh-huh. That why you spent half the day talking to her?"

"We had interesting conversations," Calum said defensively. "She's actually got opinions on things beyond what's the latest fashion or celebrity gossip. Makes a change from some of the girls I meet."

"She's eighteen," Rose pointed out gently.

"So? I'm nineteen. That's hardly a massive age gap." Calum shoved his hands in his pockets. "Not that it matters. She's magical, I'm not. Bit of a fundamental incompatibility there."

"That didn't stop me and your dad," Rose said softly.

"Yeah, but you're actually magical, Mum. You just can't use it. I literally have zero magical ability whatsoever." Calum's tone was matter-of-fact rather than bitter. "Can't exactly date a witch when I can't even see half the world she lives in."

"True enough," Stuart agreed. "Though for what it's worth, I don't think Astoria cares about that as much as you might think."

Calum shot him a look. "And how would you know?"

"Because I was paying attention while you two were deep in discussion about whether Shakespeare would've made a good wizard." Stuart grinned. "She was definitely interested, lad."

"You're seeing things."

"Am I? Because I'm pretty sure she blushed when you called her clever."

"That's just — she was probably warm or something."

"Right." Stuart's grin widened. "Face it, Calum. You fancy Daphne's little sister."

"I barely know her!"

"Doesn't mean you don't fancy her."

"You're being ridiculous," Calum muttered.

"If you say so. Though when you're writing letters to her next month, I want full credit for calling it now."

"I'm not going to write to her."

"Sure you aren't."

"I'm not!"

"Whatever you say, Cal." Rose interjected finally, chuckling. "Though if you did want to write to her, I'm sure Harry would probably arrange for owl post delivery. You know, since you're non-magical and all."

"Shut up, Mum."

"I'm sure he'd love to help his dear cousin navigate the complexities of magical romance."

"He's my only cousin, and he's terrible at this."

"And yet he's the one who's betrothed to a beautiful, brilliant witch. So clearly he's doing something right."

"That's — that doesn't — oh, sod off."

Rose chuckled, linking her arm through Stuart's. "You'll learn soon enough, Cal."

"He'll get it soon," Stuart agreed, watching his son kick a pebble as they walked. "Good for both of them, I think."

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Three hours later, Harry and Daphne found themselves back in France, ready to spend three weeks learning from some of the greatest minds the world had ever known.

"Ah, our young champions arrive," Nicolas said warmly, rising to greet them. "Congratulations on your victories at the qualifying tournament. Most impressive."

"Thank you for having us," Daphne said respectfully.

"Polite as always," Perenelle smiled, gesturing for them to sit. "Come, we have much to discuss."

They settled at the table, accepting tea and the pastries.

"Your letters have been fascinating reading," Nicolas continued. "Particularly your questions about advanced magical theory and the nature of spell construction. You've clearly moved beyond rote learning into genuine understanding."

"It's an interest we developed quite early on," Harry said. "To think about why spells work, not just how to cast them."

"A practical way of thinking," Nicolas's eyes twinkled. "Always preserve your curiosity and dedication. They'd take you a long way ahead."

"Speaking of advancement," Perenelle interjected, "Albus mentioned in his last letter that you've both begun work on becoming Animagi. Is that true?"

"We can transform," Daphne confirmed. "Instinctual transformations are still beyond us, but we're getting closer."

"At your age, that's remarkable progress," Perenelle said approvingly. "Animagus transformation is considered risky and advanced for good reason. It requires not just technical skill but genuine emotional depth and self-awareness."

"Which brings us to one of the primary focuses for your time here," Nicolas said, his tone becoming more serious. "Advanced Occlumency."

Harry and Daphne exchanged glances.

"We've done some work on mental defenses," Harry said carefully. "Shielding techniques, organizing our thoughts."

"That's a start, but not sufficient," Perenelle said calmly. "Not for what you may face in the future. True Occlumency isn't just about keeping others out of your mind. It's about understanding your own mind so thoroughly that you can shape and control it at will."

"When I took Albus as my student," Nicolas continued, leaning back in his chair, "the first thing I insisted upon was mastering Occlumency before we progressed to anything else. He was frustrated by the delay, eager to learn alchemy and advanced magic. But I was immovable on this point."

"Why?" Daphne asked. "I understand mental defenses are important, but why make it a prerequisite for everything else?"

"Because advanced magic requires you to interact with forces and energies that can influence your mind in subtle ways," Perenelle explained. "Alchemy particularly so. You're dealing with fundamental transformations of matter and energy. If your mind isn't properly shielded and organized, those transformations can affect you in unexpected ways."

"Additionally," Nicolas added, "true mastery of any magic requires absolute clarity of thought and purpose. You cannot achieve that clarity if your mind is a chaotic jumble of unexamined thoughts and emotions. Occlumency teaches you to understand yourself, which is the foundation for understanding magic."

"How long did it take Dumbledore to master it?" Harry asked.

"Three months of intensive daily practice before I was satisfied with his proficiency," Nicolas replied. "Albus was exceptionally talented and highly motivated, but even so, it took time. You have three weeks. We won't achieve mastery, but we can significantly improve your current capabilities."

"We're willing to work hard," Daphne said firmly.

"I know you are," Nicolas smiled. "You've demonstrated that clearly enough. Now, let me explain what we'll be doing..."

The rest of that first day was spent in theory. Nicolas explained Occlumency not as a single technique but as a philosophy of mental organization and control. He described the mind as a castle, with different rooms holding different memories, emotions, and knowledge.

"Most people leave the doors to all these rooms wide open," he explained as they sat in his study surrounded by books that were probably older than some countries. "Their thoughts flow freely, which is fine for daily life but leaves them vulnerable to external intrusion or manipulation."

"Occlumency teaches you to close and lock those doors," Perenelle continued. "Not to block out your own thoughts and feelings, but to control access to them. To decide consciously what you wish to think about and when."

"It sounds exhausting," Daphne observed.

"At first, yes. Like any skill, it becomes easier with practice until it's second nature." Nicolas pulled down an ancient tome and opened it carefully. "But the benefits extend far beyond simply keeping Legilimens out of your mind. Enhanced memory, better emotional regulation, clearer thinking under pressure. All of these come from proper Occlumency."

They practiced basic techniques before dinner: meditation, visualization exercises, constructing mental frameworks. Stuff they'd already done before, but pushed to another level by the Flamels. They found it challenging but oddly satisfying, like organizing a cluttered room until everything had its proper place.

"You're both naturals at this," Perenelle commented as they wrapped up for the day. "Many students struggle with the visualization steps, but you've grasped them quickly."

"We've had some experience with mental discipline from our training," Harry explained. "Moody drilled into us the importance of staying calm and focused during combat."

"That will serve you well here." Nicolas closed the book they'd been using. "Tomorrow we'll begin even more advanced techniques. For now, rest. Occlumency practice can be mentally taxing."

Dinner was a relaxed affair, with conversation ranging from their time at Hogwarts to observations about magical theory to amusing stories from the Flamels' extremely long lives. It was strange, Harry reflected, sitting at a table with people who had lived for over six centuries, discussing magic like it was the most natural thing in the world.

After dinner, they had the evening to themselves. They had the same room as before, and they settled in rather easily.

Harry was examining a particularly interesting text on wandless magic when he heard the bathroom door open with a soft click.

Daphne entered, having changed into a comfortable nightdress, her hair down. "How are you holding up?"

"Good. You?"

"Mentally exhausted but satisfied." She settled onto the bed beside where he sat. "Nicolas wasn't exaggerating about this kind of Occlumency training being taxing."

"No, he wasn't." Harry set aside the book and took her in his arms. "But I can see why he insists on it. The mental clarity even from just today's practice is noticeable."

They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, the windows open to let in the warm evening air and the scent of the gardens.

"Can I ask you something?" Daphne said eventually.

"Always."

"Are you doing okay? With everything? The betrothal contract, the Championships coming up, all of it?"

Harry considered the question seriously. "Yeah, I think so. It's a lot, but it doesn't feel overwhelming. Maybe because we're in it together."

"Good." She leaned against him. "I worry sometimes that you're taking on too much."

"Same to you," he replied, cupping her face and pulling her closer. "We're in this together, remember?"

"Together," she agreed, kissing him softly. As she pulled back just enough, she tilted her head upwards to grin at him, her fingers tracing lazy circles on his chest through the thin cotton of his t-shirt. "You know," she murmured, her voice low and playful, "we never really celebrated our betrothal properly. No champagne, no cake... no wild night to seal the deal."

Harry's eyebrow arched, that familiar spark lighting in his green eyes. "Wild night, huh? You saying the contract isn't official until we christen it?"

"Not really, but I say it needs celebrating." She shifted in his lap, the silk of her nightdress sliding up her thighs as she straddled him fully. "And since we're doing it the old-fashioned way, I can think of no better way to make it stick. Think you're up for making it binding?"

He laughed, his hands settling on her hips, thumbs brushing the hem of the nightdress. "Oh, I'm up for it." His voice dropped, rough with want. "Question is, how loud are you planning to get?"

"Depends how good you are tonight." She leaned in, nipping his lower lip. "Show me."

Harry didn't need telling twice. His mouth crashed against hers hungrily, and Daphne moaned into it, grinding down on the growing bulge in his shorts. He was already hard, had been getting there since she'd climbed into his lap, and the friction made him groan.

"Fuck, Daph," he muttered against her lips, his fingers digging into her hips.

She reached down, palming him through the fabric, feeling him twitch under her touch. "You're so hard already."

"Whose fault is that?" He tugged the straps of her nightdress down her shoulders, exposing her breasts. No bra, never one when she wore these things to bed. He cupped one of her tits, thumb flicking over her nipple until it peaked, and leaned down to take it in his mouth.

Daphne's head fell back, a sharp gasp escaping her. "Yes — right there." She rocked against him harder, the seam of his shorts rubbing her clit through the thin silk of the nightdress. "Harry, I need —"

"Need what?" he teased, switching to the other breast, teeth grazing just enough to make her shiver. "Tell me."

"You," she breathed. "Inside me. Now."

He pulled back, his eyes dark. "Bossy tonight."

"You love it." She slid off his lap just long enough to yank his t-shirt over his head, tossing it aside. Her hands went to his shorts next, shoving them down. His cock sprang free, thick and throbbing, and she wrapped her fingers around it without hesitation, stroking once, twice.

Harry hissed, hips bucking into her grip. "Fuck, Daph."

"Bed," she ordered, pushing him back until he was sprawled across the sheets. She hiked her nightdress up to her waist, revealing she wasn't wearing anything underneath. "Been thinking about this all day."

"Dirty girl." He grabbed her waist, pulling her down so she straddled him again. The head of his cock nudged her entrance, slick and ready. "You're soaked."

"For you," she said, sinking down slowly, taking him inch by inch. They both groaned as he filled her, stretching her just right. "Fuck, you feel good."

Harry's hands gripped her ass, guiding her as she started to move. "Ride me, baby. Just like that."

She did, slow at first, rolling her hips, savoring the feel of him inside her. But slow never lasted long with them. Soon she was bouncing, her breasts jiggling with each thrust, her hands braced on his chest. "Harder," she gasped. "Harry, fuck me harder."

He sat up suddenly, wrapping an arm around her waist and flipping them so fast she yelped. Now she was on her back, her legs spread wide, and her nightdress bunched around her middle. Harry hooked one of her knees over his shoulder and drove into her, deep and relentless.

"Yes—oh Harry, yes!" Daphne's nails raked down his back, leaving red trails. "Right there, don't stop—"

"Like that?" He angled his hips, hitting that spot inside her that made her see stars. "You're so fucking tight, Daph. Love how you take me."

She clenched around him intentionally, and he cursed, his pace faltering for a second. "Do that again," he growled.

She did, grinning wickedly even as pleasure coiled tight in her belly. "Make me come, Harry. I want it."

He reached between them, his thumb finding her clit and rubbing in tight circles. "Come on my cock, Daph. Let me feel it."

That pushed her over. Daphne arched off the bed, crying out his name as her orgasm crashed through her, her inner walls pulsing around him. "Harry—fuck, I'm coming—"

He didn't let up, fucking her through her climax, drawing it out until she was trembling. "Good girl," he praised, his voice strained. "So good for me."

"Your turn," she panted, pushing at his chest until he pulled out and rolled onto his back. She climbed over him again, this time facing away, sinking down reverse so he had a perfect view of her ass. "Like this?"

"Fuck yes." His hands gripped her hips, guiding her as she rode him hard and fast. The angle was deeper, and she moaned loudly with every bounce.

"Look at you," he rasped, one hand sliding up her spine to tangle in her hair. "Taking me so well. You love this, don't you?"

"Love your cock," she shot back, breathless. "Love how you fuck me."

He slapped her ass lightly, the sound echoing in the room. "Louder."

"I love it!" she cried, slamming down harder. "Love you fucking me—Harry, I'm close again—"

"Do it," he urged, thrusting up to meet her. "Come again. Milk me dry."

She did, shattering a second time with a broken moan, her whole body shaking. Harry followed seconds later, groaning her name as he came inside her, his hips jerking with each pulse.

They collapsed together, sweaty and spent, her nightdress twisted around her waist, his shorts somewhere on the floor. Harry pulled her close, kissing her shoulder.

"Betrothal officially celebrated?" he asked, voice hoarse.

Daphne laughed breathlessly, turning to nuzzle his neck. "Think we need a few more rounds to be sure."

He grinned against her skin. "Give me five minutes."

Five minutes turned to three.

Daphne's laugh turned into a moan the second Harry's fingers found her again, sliding through the slick mess between her thighs. She was still sprawled across his chest, her nightdress twisted around her waist, and her legs tangled with his. "Three minutes," she corrected breathlessly, "you're getting faster."

"Complaining?" He circled her clit slowly, teasingly, watching her hips twitch. "Because you're still dripping for me. Makes me want to add more."

She pushed up on her elbows, her hair falling in a curtain around them. "Then stop teasing." She reached down, wrapped her fingers around his half-hard cock, and stroked once, firmly. "I want you on your knees behind me. Now."

Harry's eyes flashed. He was fully hard again in two strokes. "Really bossy."

"You love it." She rolled off him, her nightdress slipping down her body and pooling on the floor as she crawled to the edge of the bed. On her knees, ass up, she looked back over her shoulder. "Come on, Harry. Don't make your fiancée beg."

The word lit up something fierce inside him and he was behind her in a heartbeat, his hands spreading her open. "Fucking hell, Daph." Two fingers dragged through her folds, pushing their combined release back inside her. "Look at you. Fucked open and still greedy."

"Less talking," she gasped, pushing back onto his fingers. "More celebrating."

Harry lined up and thrust in to the hilt in one smooth stroke. They both groaned, Daphne's head dropping to the sheets as he filled her completely. "Fuck—yes. Just like that."

He didn't ease into it. His hips snapped forward, hard and fast, the slap of skin echoing in the room. Daphne braced her forearms on the mattress, taking every thrust, her moans rising with each deep stroke.

"Harder," she demanded, her voice muffled by the pillow. "I want to feel you tomorrow, Harry. Mark me."

He growled, leaning over her, one hand sliding up her spine to fist her hair. He tugged her head back gently, arching her spine. "You will," he rasped against her ear. "Gonna leave you sore and dripping with me for days."

Daphne clenched around him intentionally again, and he cursed, his hips stuttering. "Keep doing that."

She did, over and over, until his rhythm faltered. "Gonna come," he warned, his teeth grazing her shoulder.

"Not yet." She pulled off him suddenly, spinning around to face him. Before he could protest, she shoved him flat on his back and straddled him facing forward. "Not turning me around this time."

She sank down slowly, letting him watch every inch disappear inside her. Harry's hands gripped her hips, guiding but not controlling. "Fuck, look at you," he breathed, his eyes locked where they joined. "Taking me so deep."

Daphne rolled her hips, grinding down hard, then started bouncing, her breasts jiggling with each thrust. "Touch me," she ordered, her voice wrecked.

Harry sat up, his mouth latching onto her nipple, sucking hard while his fingers dug into her ass. She rode him faster, her head thrown back, and her moans spilling freely. "Harry – fuck, you feel so good –"

"Love watching you fuck yourself on me," he rasped, switching to the other breast, his teeth grazing just enough to make her gasp. "Come on, baby. Use me."

She did, slamming down over and over, chasing her third orgasm like it was a drug. Harry thrust up to meet her, the angle perfect. When his thumb found her clit again, rubbing tight circles, she shattered.

"Harry – fuck, I'm –" Her words dissolved into a scream as she came, pulsing around him, her nails digging into his shoulders. He kept moving, drawing it out, until she was trembling and oversensitive.

He flipped them one last time, pinning her beneath him, pounding into her through the aftershocks. "Where?" he gritted out, close.

"Inside," she gasped, her legs wrapping around his waist. "Fill me up again. Want to feel you leaking out of me all night."

That did it. Harry buried himself deep and came with a guttural groan, his hips jerking as he emptied into her a second time. Daphne clenched around him, milking every drop, her own aftershocks rippling through her.

They stayed locked together, breathing hard, sweat cooling on their skin. Harry's forehead dropped to hers, both of them shaking. "Fuck," he panted. "Think I saw stars."

Daphne laughed weakly, her fingers tracing the red marks on his back. "Good. Means I did my job."

He rolled off but pulled her with him, tucking her against his chest. "Contract's definitely sealed now."

She nuzzled his neck, still catching her breath. "Might need to renew it weekly. Just to be sure."

Harry grinned, already hardening against her thigh. "Shower's still on the table for another round."

She was up and dragging him toward the bathroom before he finished the sentence.

To be continued...