

REFORMING THE POTTER'S CLAY
By Donald James Parker

Chapter 1

"I bet our dad's going to kiss your mom tonight," Esperanza, known usually as 'EJ', whispered to her brother, Pedro, and their friends Faith and Matthew.

"Let's quit talking about it and get into position to watch," Matthew said.

Brandishing a slim remote, as a wizard might a wand, Pedro pointed and hissed at the two twelve-year-olds. "We have to be quiet, or we're toast."

Pedro, fourteen and athletic from head to toe, was the ringleader of the group. Faith, a blue-eyed fourteen-year-old beauty, was Pedro's right-hand girl. Pedro beckoned with his finger, and Operation Parent Trap was launched.

Crawling like scouts taking position to survey enemy troop movements, the youngsters took cover behind a corner wall. Four heads, stacked like gumballs in a clear round tube, eavesdropped on the conversation in the next room.

"Oh, Salvador, that feels so good!" Barbara purred. "Do it some more."

The kids looked at each other with eyes as big as Tootsie Pops.

"Ohhhhh. I'll give you just sixty years to stop that." Barbara's purring changed to moaning.

Pedro pressed a hand over his mouth to keep from laughing.

"Sorry to pop your bubble, Barbara, but my hands will give out in about sixty seconds. A back massage is a gift from Heaven, huh?"

"No doubts there."

"Maybe you could give me one in return?"

Barbara groaned. "I'd rather get one than give one."

"That would put you in the majority. That vote might even be unanimous. How would you like to get together Saturday morning for breakfast?"

"My place or yours?"

"It doesn't matter to me. I just want to spend time with you."

"That's sweet of you, Sal. Why would you want to do that?"

"Fishing for compliments, are you?"

"Season's open all year."

Sal laughed. "OK, here you go: I want to spend more time with you because you're a warm, intelligent, and attractive lady."

"Hmmm. That's not a bad start. I'm not sure it's a keeper though."

"Hey, are you casting doubts on my compliments?"

"Not exactly. I'm just casting to tempt their big brother – or maybe an uncle."

"And you're tempting me, too."

"In what way?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"You know I would, so tell me."

"No."

"Salvador Morales! Am I going to have to tickle it out of you?"

"I'm not ticklish."

"Yeah, and St. Patrick wasn't Irish either."

"I'm warning you. If you tickle me, I might say a whole lot more than you want to hear."

"Impossible. For now, though, there is one question I want answered."

"Am I supposed to guess what the question is?"

"Hold on, big boy. I'll get there. I was just wondering why you've never tried to kiss me."

The kids, choking on squeals, barely contained themselves. Pedro put a hand on each of the two younger kids to keep them from scrambling out for a view.

"Have you tried to kiss me?" Sal asked.

"Well, no, but I figure that's the man's job."

"Why? A gentleman is never sure whether the lady desires intimacy. So, if a woman wants a kiss, maybe she should make the first move."

"I usually trust your opinions. OK. Pucker up, handsome."

"Are you hinting that you're going to kiss me?"

"I'm hinting you should shut up and get those lips ready."

The kids braced themselves for face mashing.

Barbara's face was inches from Sal's when she wailed, "Wait. I can't!"

"You can't kiss me?"

"No, no, no! That's not the problem. I can't do breakfast on Saturday! That's the day the new Harry Potter book comes out. The kids and I are going to the bookstore for a party. It's like a sunrise event, and it goes on for hours. If we don't get there early enough, they might be sold out. Hey, maybe you guys could come with us?"

Sal hopped to his feet and walked away from Barbara. His footsteps indicated that he was headed directly toward the kids. It looked like they were about to be busted. The four kids froze in place like they were playing statues. Their breathing stopped just before the footsteps did. Sal paused, sighed, and walked back to Barbara.

Faith sagged against a wall, looked up and lipped a silent 'Thank you.' Matthew knelt and softly beat his pale forehead on the carpet. Pedro made the sign of the cross.

Esperanza whispered, "I gotta go potty."

"Wow! I thought you were a Christian, Barbara."

"You thought right. Who says I'm not?"

"I'm not saying you're not a Christian because you're a Harry Potter fan. What I'm saying is, because you are a Christian, you should avoid Harry."

"Why? They're just innocent books for kids where good triumphs over evil."

"They contain witchcraft. Since when is witchcraft good?"

"I can't believe we're having this conversation!"

"Me either. I can't believe I have to warn you about the evils of witchcraft."

"What about Walt Disney movies?" She marched over to his entertainment center and pointed to his movie collection. "*Snow White*. There's a witch in there."

"You're right, but the witch is a bad guy – the villain. In Harry Potter, witches are heroes. It's not a problem for God if we talk about devils or witches, but Scripture warns us against pursuing the occult."

"Didn't you ever watch *Bewitched*? Samantha was the good guy."

"Yeah, when I was a kid."

The two adults became more agitated, and louder, as the conversation progressed. The kids, embarrassed by their parents' argument, could have eavesdropped from the street. Pedro thought about leading the kids back to the recreation room, but he was rooted by the spectacle.

Barbara let out an audible gasp. "I thought I knew you! You didn't seem to be a narrow-minded, judgmental fanatic."

"I thought I knew you, too. If someone who wants to be true to God is narrow-minded, then I plead guilty."

"Maybe you should plead insanity. We have a promising relationship, and you want

to jeopardize it by standing on a soapbox and preaching at me."

"I don't want to, Barbara. I have to."

"Fine. I don't have to stand here and listen."

"Then sit down."

"I'll sit down – in my car before I drive it home."

Footsteps came their way again, and Barbara yelled. "Faith! Matthew! Come on, we're going home." She swung around the corner just as the kids scrambled to get to their feet. "Oh, there you are. Get your stuff. We're so out of here!"

The two Nelson children grabbed their backpacks. They looked over at Pedro and EJ, who stood in stunned silence, blown away by the sudden turn of events. Barbara hustled the children out the door before they could even say goodbye.

Sal, muttering, hurried around the corner toward the kitchen. His children, side by side and arms linked, blocked his path.

"What?" he yelled.

"Nice maneuver, Hoover," Pedro said. "Blew a relationship with a beautiful woman and our friendship with her kids – and for what?"

"OK, hold on. Take off your judge's robes, come on into the living room, and sit on the couch. We're going to have one of those old-fashioned, heart-to-heart, father-child discussions."

They both moaned. "Do we have to?" EJ asked.

"Only if you want to eat tomorrow."

"That's blackmail," Pedro said.

"Whatever! Do you call it blackmail if a policeman threatens to take you to jail if you break the law?"

Pedro shook his head and closed his eyes. "Fine. Have it your way. Come on, EJ, let's get it over with."

They settled onto the couch, crossing their arms like a synchronized pouting team and glaring at their dad.

"First of all, how much did you guys hear of our conversation?"

"Pretty much all of it, Dad. I mean...it's not like you guys were whispering," Pedro said.

"That's true. You know, kids, we've had this discussion about Harry Potter in the past. You know how I feel."

"But why, *Padre mio*? Have you read even one of the books?" EJ asked.

"No. I don't need to read them. The pastor told us enough in church for me to make an intelligent decision."

"You always tell us to be our own person. To make our own decisions and not to take other people's word for things," Pedro said.

"Well, yeah, but..."

"But what, Dad?"

"Yeah, what's good for the goose is good for the duck," Esperanza said.

Sal laughed. "That's not exactly the right phrase, *mi corazón*, but I get what you mean. Look, I don't have to get hit by a truck to know that it hurts. Nor am I going to doubt someone who tells me it does. Pastor Williams has never steered us wrong. But, I'll tell you what – we'll read a Harry Potter book. We'll find out, together, why Pastor warns against J. K. Rowling's writing."

"Yippee!" Esperanza jumped up and down. "We're going to get some Harry Potter. Get book three. That's my favorite."

"That's your what?"

"Uhh...I heard it's really good."

"Miss EJ Morales! Out with the truth! I told you kids not to read Harry."

"I kind of read over Faith's shoulder when I was at her house."

"And I'm going to kind of paddle your butt," Sal stated as he walked towards her.

She stiffened and watched his approach, fear written on her face. He sat down beside her, reached over and put his arm around her small shoulders. "Honey, you know when I tell you not to do something, I'm doing it for your own protection. It might not make sense to you, but please remember I love you and I want only what's best for your life."

"You've told me this before, Daddy."

"Yes, I have, but it looks like you need to hear it again. Remember when you were five and had just gotten tall enough to reach the toaster? I told you not to touch it because it was hot. You didn't trust me, and what happened?"

"I got burned."

"Exactly, but you did learn that toasters really are hot, and that Dad knew what he was talking about. In this case, the danger is more difficult to grasp. And the pain it can cause is much worse than a toaster burn. Am I making any sense here, kiddo?"

"Kinda. I just have to trust you on this stuff, right?"

"Yep. By the way, we're not going to buy a Harry Potter book. We'll borrow one from the library, starting with the first one. And we'll study it together to see what it contains. OK?"

Esperanza nodded. Dad looked over at Pedro. "Does that work for you, son?"

"Whatever. You're calling the shots here."

"You seem to be a little beyond mad, *mi hijo*. What's up with that?"

EJ grinned. "He's upset because you caused his girlfriend to go home. He's got a crush on Faith."

"Do not!"

"Do too!"

"Don't either."

"Pedro's got a *novia*. Neener neener neener!"

Pedro rolled up his hand into a fist. "Shut your face!"

Sal put a hand on each of the kids' shoulders. "That's enough of that discussion, and that kind of language. Any more outbursts like that and I'll have you doing imitations of the Karate Kid. Understand?"

"You mean we'll be learning martial arts?" EJ asked.

"No. You'll be doing the wax-on, wax-off routine as you wash and wax the car. Maybe a Tom Sawyer imitation would be next. That fence out front is getting a little faded."

"Daddy, you wouldn't!" EJ moaned.

"Try me. You won't like the results. Do you get my point?"

EJ rolled her eyes at the ceiling. Pedro just nodded.

Sal checked his watch. "There's still time to hit the library tonight before they close. Time to do some detective work."

"Can we get some ice cream on the way back?" EJ pleaded.

"I thought you had ice cream while you were watching the movie."

"But that wasn't Baskin and Robbins."

"No, and I didn't have to borrow money from the bank to pay for it either! Did you realize for the price on one B&R cone, I can buy a half gallon of ice cream at the grocery store?"

EJ pouted again. "I should. You've delivered that sermon more times than Baskin and Robbins has flavors."

"Dad, I have one question."

"Shoot, Pedro."

"If you find that there's nothing bad in Harry Potter, are you going to make up with Barbara?"

Sal grinned. "In the words of a famous teenage philosopher, 'DUH!'"