Fool (Or, The Many Good Deeds of Draco Malfoy) -- Team Canon

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Team: Canon

Author: [info]avocado_love

Prompt: The Fool

Wordcount: 18,000+

Rating: R

Warnings: EWE, language, sexual situations

Summary: "You haven’t done one brave or noble thing in your life, Malfoy. Then you come into my house and ask me why I won’t do the right thing for you? What have you ever done for anyone?"

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With all his worldly possessions in one small pack, the Fool travels he knows not where.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Wine this good, Harry thought, as he leaned back in his comfortable chair and took another sip of the mulled spiced alcohol, should be considered a sin.

He was close enough to the fireplace to feel the scorching heat on his cheeks. The crackle and pop of the logs couldn't quite cover the steadily pounding rain outside, but Harry didn't mind. Sheltered and out of the cold, sitting by a fire with his shoes kicked off, instead of sloshing around after law breakers and dark wizards in the storm was a nice change.

A very nice change, thought Harry as he took another sip and reached over to turn on the telly.

Harry didn't have opportunity to indulge himself often; indeed, it was a rare occasion when he had a day off from work. As usual, Ginny wasn't there to occupy his time because she was off playing in Wiltshire. Thanks in a large part to her skill and dogged determination, the Harpies were finally having a winning season.

The fire gave a pop and caused a bit of ember to explode out of a log and knock against one of the magical screens Harry had put up. It fell with a tiny crack to the tile, and Harry watched the light slowly fade as he sipped his wine.

"Master Potter, sir?"

Harry nearly jumped at the sound of Kreacher's bullfrog voice so close to him. "Yes?" He tore his eyes away from the fire and glanced right beside the arm of his chair. How the old elf managed sneak up so quietly was beyond him.

Kreacher would never say so—he was nearly polite with a copy of Regulus's locket around his neck—but

from the tilt of his bat-like ears, and the glint in his eyes he still enjoyed being able to surprise his master.

"Mr. Malfoy is at the door asking to have a word, sir. Kreacher didn't know Master Potter was expecting company. If Kreacher was told, Kreacher would have fixed some appetizers and tea for your guest." There was more than a little censure in the house-elf's voice, but Harry ignored it in favour of staring, dumbstruck at him.

"Malfoy?" he asked, nearly sloshing his wine as he set it down on the coffee table, exchanging it in favour of his wand. "Why is he here?"

Kreacher blinked once, slowly. "Mr. Malfoy did not say. Mr. Malfoy is a proper wizard, and does not discuss his business with house-elves, sir."

Harry bit off a quick retort and got up from the chair, holding his wand stiffly to his side, not willing to even put it into his pocket. Never trust a Malfoy. He had learned that lesson time and time again with both Draco Malfoy and his late father.

He strode to the door, Kreacher at his heels wringing his hands and murmuring out loud about how, "Master Potter shouldn't go to the door to greet his guests. Kreacher would bring Mr. Malfoy in. A pureblooded wizard should be shown in. Yes, he should..."

Harry ignored him. He had seen how the Malfoys treated their house-elves. Kreacher had been old even when Harry first met him, and with each ensuing year he was a little less able to keep his feet. Poor Dobby hadn't been able to defend himself against the Malfoys, and there was no way Kreacher could either.

With a flick of his wrist, Harry unclasped the wards around the front door and opened it.

Draco Malfoy was standing on the top step. Harry hadn't seen him for going on four happy years now, but was taken aback at his appearance. His memories of Malfoy were obviously old and outdated. The man standing before him was just a little taller than him, and clad in a finely tailored green travelling cloak that seemed to highlight rather than clash with his blonde hair. Malfoy's face was just as pointy as

Harry remembered, though, and the sneer certainly seemed familiar. But there was something different...

We've both grown up, Harry thought, before belatedly snapping out, "What do you want, Malfoy?"

Malfoy raised a fine eyebrow, silently taking Harry to task for his rather rude behaviour. "Really, Potter, I know you were raised by Muggles, but I was under the impression that you lived in a house and not a barn." He paused then, as if waiting for an invitation that apparently was never going to come, "May I come in?"

Harry put out an arm and blocked the door. "What do you want, Malfoy?"

"What, Potter? Afraid of me, are you?" Malfoy gave a soft, rather undignified snort. He then produced his wand, ebony, twelve inches, which was sheathed in an elegant casing of dark wood. "Don't bother. You can hold it if you want, although we both know I have more to fear from you. The magnificent Chosen One."

His last few words dripped with so much familiar scorn that for a moment, Harry could have sworn he was not in the present at all, but about to step off onto the Platform of 9 ¾.

But no. He was an adult, and so was Malfoy. More than that, Harry was a fully trained Auror. He had a few tricks up his sleeve, and could handle himself if the git tried anything.

It would have been polite to refuse the offered wand, but even fully trained, Harry trusted Malfoy just about as far as he could throw him. He took the wand, handle first and silently stepped to the side, gesturing for Malfoy to enter.

Malfoy's face was impassive as he walked in, save for the slight lift of his right brow. "So this is the noble house of Black. You know, my mother came from that line. She would have inherited this if—"

"I know," Harry cut in, gesturing for Malfoy to keep walking. The sitting room was at the end of the hall. He didn't bother telling him of the family tree, or the names blasted off it. Narcissa had been a good little witch. She married a pureblood, and was allowed to remain as part of the family. The vague connection between him and the Malfoys always made him feel uncomfortable and a little dirty.

He retook his place on the sofa, allowing Malfoy the other chair. "Look Malfoy, I don't know if talking bloodlines is something purebloods do for fun, but I don't care. Why are you here?"

Malfoy studied him for a moment from behind his grey eyes, as if sizing up an opponent. Then he gave a single, slow nod. "My father has recently passed away. I'm sure you must have heard."

"Yes, in the Prophet. I'm sorry."

Malfoy's cheek gave a twitch. He clearly found fault with the flat, not quite sincere tone of Harry's voice. "I know what you thought of him. I know—" his voice broke, and he covered it with a quick clearing of his throat that fooled neither of them. "I know what most of the wizarding world thought of him, but he was a good man. A good father. He protected my mother and me, and he went before his time."

Harry was quiet, willing himself by sheer force of will not to comment. Of course, he had a completely different view of Lucius Malfoy: Death Eater. Bully. Bigot. Even the memory of the three Malfoys sitting huddled together in the broken Great Hall of Hogwarts didn't do much to put a dent in Harry's opinion. He just wished that Malfoy would get to the point. If the man was grieving, why come to him? He settled with a non-committal, "Yes, I remember how you looked up to him." More like, threatened everyone that his father would make them pay if things didn't go Malfoy's way...

"Yes, and he left everything to me, it seems. I am now in charge of the estate, the investments, and his business holdings." During this speech, Malfoy had been looking at the rug, but now he lifted his gaze. His expression was defiant, "The work I need to do to secure my family's holdings is complex, and I won't bore you, but I am coming up against some problems. Potter, that wand you're holding is my great aunt Cassandra's."

He paused. Was he looking for some sort of pity? Why else would he bring up his dead father? Did he really expect Harry to have any feelings for the man, or care about the wand that belonged to his great

aunt—?

Then it hit him.

"You're not master of this wand." Harry's voice was calm, although his mind was roiling with the implications.

"No." Malfoy let a quick scowl cross his face before he stood and faced Harry, back to the fire as if he was the one who owned this house, and Harry was his guest. Perhaps, deep in his mind, it would always be that way in the Noble House of Black. "Most of the time, a wand will accept a new master when it is handed down from one family member to another. Aunt Cassandra, it seemed, always had a mind of her own. Her wand equally so." He paused, fixing Harry with a haughty gaze, "I've come to ask for my wand back, Potter. I know you have your own. Surely, there's no reason to keep mine."

Harry blinked in surprise. "What makes you think I've kept it all this time and not just tossed it out?" In truth, the wand was sitting up in his attic in a box of old things... probably. He'd have to go searching for it. He hadn't seen or so much as thought of the thing for years.

"Tossed out a wand?" Malfoy shot him a scathing look, as if he was mad. Then, with a quick shake of his head he withdrew something from his coat pocket. A magical chequebook. Once the cheque was signed, the amount of money instantly transferred from one vault to the other. "Come now, how much will it be, Potter?"

Harry just stared at him.

Malfoy's voice took on a harder edge. "Money is no object, Potter. Just name your price."

"No."

"No?"

Harry stood as well, coming around his chair to grip at the top. He needed a second to think, to deal with the implications of what was going on. How he wished Hermione was here. His friend would be able to lay out the pros and cons with unwavering clarity. Harry just had a sure feeling deep in his gut that giving Malfoy his wand back would be a bad move. Later, when he had time, he would examine that feeling. Right now, he had to act.

"You lost that wand in a fair battle," he couldn't help but add, "it sees me as its master, now."

"Fair-!" Malfoy broke off, looking like he wanted to swear at Harry, but somehow managed to hold himself back. "What was fair about the Dark Lord invading my family's home, and making us his prisoners? You try living with that for a year and then see how you do in a fight."

"Oh piss off, Malfoy. You let Hermione be tortured. You did nothing."

"I didn't betray you." Malfoy's voice took on a high, almost hysterical quality. "Not even to my father when it would have meant so much to him—to us. Don't delude yourself, Potter. Living with the Dark Lord was Hell. You have no idea how-" again he broke off, biting back words that threatened to spill out.

Later on, it would seem strange to Harry that Malfoy's story would inspire no pity. At that moment, however, he didn't see the angry young man in front of him. He could only see a pointy-faced child sneering at him from the other side of a train compartment door, "Just watch yourself, Potter, because I'll be dogging your footsteps in case you step out of line".

"You made your bed, Malfoy. Now you have to sleep in it."

Malfoy's face took on a puckered look, as if he had just bitten into a lemon. There was a jerky, almost unconnected air about him as he shoved the magical chequebook back into his pocket. "Even your hero Dumbledore gave Severus Snape a second chance." He raised his chin proudly, the fireplace throwing a golden light upon half of his face, "You aren't half the man he was."

If Harry had hackles, they would have gone straight up. How dare Malfoy talk about Dumbledore? After what he did! If he hadn't hemmed and hawed up on the tower, if he had accepted the common sense that Dumbledore had been offering....

And above it all, Malfoy's comment hurt; it hurt because Harry knew he was right. Dumbledore would have given the wand back to Malfoy.

Harry swallowed hard. Two instincts were warring inside of him. His sense of justice, which told him that the wand was Malfoy's and it was only right to give it back, and his gut which screamed to keep it away, far away.

"Dumbledore would have wanted some good to come out of this."

"This?" Malfoy looked about the room in contempt, "What are you talking about, Potter?"

Honestly, Harry wasn't completely sure himself. He just started talking—a mix between what his gut and heart said. And as the words were spoken, he became confident, "It's just... you've had all of these chances, Malfoy. There were so many times in the past when you could have done the right thing, but you didn't. You could have taken Dumbledore's hand on the tower. You could have helped us out of the basement. You could have taken down one Death Eater in the battle of Hogwarts, but you didn't." Harry's eyes locked with Malfoy's across the room. Green against silver. "You haven't done one brave or noble thing in your life. Ever. Then you come into my house and ask me why I won't do the right thing for you? What have you ever done for anyone?"

For a moment Malfoy seemed completely thunderstruck by Harry's words. Then his face hardened into an impenetrable mask. "I shouldn't have bothered to hope that you'd see some sort of reason, Potter," he spat, crossed the room and headed to the door, "It seems as though that famous scar of yours has truly addled your brains."

Harry stared straight ahead, and didn't watch as Malfoy made his retreat out of the house. Malfoy's childish barb told him he'd got his point across.

It wasn't until about two full minutes after the door was slammed shut that Harry realized he still had possession of Malfoy's aunt's wand. Why would Malfoy forget about something so important, unless...

...Unless he had even less control of this wand than he had let on.

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It took nearly forty-five seconds after Harry realised he still had Draco's wand for Draco to do the same.

He swore and kicked at the Muggle trash bin that was unlucky enough to be in his path.

Not that the wand was in any way important to him. Now, however, he would have to go back to the Malfoy vault and talk the portrait of his ancestors into admitting him entrance to get another wand—a wand that surely would be as useless as the last one.

In the weeks right after the Dark Lord fell, Draco had tried every one of his ancestor's wands in that damned vault, and not one of them had taken to him. Of course, he couldn't go to Ollivander, and everyone knew a wand by another maker was sub par, even the reputed French makers. The last thing he wanted was to bond his magic to a low quality wand.

Damn that Potter! Why couldn't he be like any normal human being and accept the ludicrous sum of money that Draco was willing to throw at him? No one, not even a former Gryffindor, could possibly be this noble.

Draco stopped mid-step as an idea—no—the solution to his problems flashed into his mind.

Of course Potter was a noble do-gooder. That was just the type of insufferable git that he was. But what if he saw that Draco had taken up some outside interests, say, to the charities that were closest to his

heart?

The very idea of having to work for what should come automatically, annoyed Draco. Damn Potter. Most in the wizarding world knew what title and privileges pure-bloods—his family in particular—were supposed to be afforded. It was galling to have to prove himself.

It also seemed like he didn't have much of a choice.

Draco shook his head at his own thoughts, and summoned Tinky, his house elf, to bade her to Apparate him back to Malfoy Manor.

Oh yes, he could find one way or another to buy Potter off.

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A week later

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The fool in colorful motley clothes, pack tied to a staff, a small dog, a cliff.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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"Harry!" Ginny's voice rang out from the kitchen, sweet and melodic. "Breakfast is ready!"

"Coming!" Getting off of the couch and giving a stretch, Harry hunted around for the remote control and turned off the telly. He had been in the middle of a Muggle Sunday news program, and Ginny barely

tolerated the Muggle contraption when she was around and it was absolutely forbidden to have it on when they were trying to have a peaceful meal. It was another strike against him that he was he was still dressed in his motley sleepwear coming on eleven in the morning.

He walked into the kitchen, eyeing the eggs over toast that Ginny had made for him and gave her a grateful peck on the cheek. Sadly, she had inherited more Quidditch skills from her father than cooking skills from her mother, but he had learned better than to complain about her Sunday breakfasts. Between both of their schedules, they so rarely had a meal together that it was best to keep the peace.

"Thanks, Ginny." He sat down with his plate and reached over to the day's Daily Prophet that was sitting on the dining room table. It was always a good idea to be up to speed with both the wizard and Muggle news.

Ginny flashed him a radiant smile and ruffled his hair as she too grabbed a plate and sat down. She started talking... something about having to appeal to her manager about a new uniform in time for the next match ... but honestly, Harry wasn't listening... or, he wasn't listening actively. One part of his brain was paying attention enough to insert agreeable, "Yes's, no's, and umm-hmm's," at the correct pauses in Ginny's monologue. It had been something he had so much practice with that it had become nearly second-nature.

Until something finally caught his attention.

"Wait, what?" He glanced up, startled with a bit of egg white on his bottom lip. "This is our day to be together, Gin."

Ginny pressed her lips together in annoyance. "I told you that Rosalinda and I were going to the Witches Swap Meet two weeks ago." She paused, and then gave a little huff at the blank look on her boyfriend's face. "Honestly, how do you expect me to ever brighten this place up?"

Harry glanced around. Now that Kreacher had been taking care of things consistently for the past few years, Grimmauld place had never looked better. The oak wood was oiled to a shiny glow, the floors were scrubbed, and even the portraits seemed—well, not cheery—, but more perky. Yes, the place would never have a bright glow about it, but then again this was once the Noble House of Black. How bright

could it possibly be? "I like it."

She snorted ungracefully into her eggs. "Well I don't. Let's make a compromise; you get to approve of any changes before I make them, okay?"

Harry reluctantly agreed. It was, after all, his house.

Despite beginning her meal after him, Ginny was the first to finish. She had her purse in her hand and pecked him a light kiss goodbye before he was able to say too much else on the matter.

He watched the door swing shut, and then gave a sigh, digging into his half eaten breakfast. He wasn't all that hungry any more.

Harry could just imagine what his best mate would say about the whole thing.

"Women are mental, Harry," Ron would tell him, once Hermione was safely out of earshot. "Completely mental. No figuring them out. She's probably marking her territory or something, getting ready for the big move in. When do you think you're going to make it official, anyway?"

A twinge of guilt pinged at Harry's stomach, making him push away the remainder of his breakfast. Ron had never said as much, but it seemed like the whole Weasley family was holding their breath, waiting for the date when Harry would make Ginny an honourable woman. Of course they had been engaged... forever, it seemed. Since six months after the fall of Voldemort. It was the same with Ron and Hermione, only they had actually set a date for a wedding: six short months from that day.

Everyone knew it was Harry's turn. He even knew it was his turn... maybe that's what Ginny was on about. Maybe she was just trying to hint at him to hurry up.

Only subtle hints weren't Ginny's style. She was like a bludger with her hinting, which was always a

Godsend for Harry. No beating around the bush with Ginny. She had the Weasley temper, after all.

As he thought, his eyes drifted once more to the Daily Prophet. Nothing interesting today. Even Rita Skeeter had been silent for the last few weeks.

Harry was walking the paper to the trash bin when a little blurb at the bottom of page one caught his eye. Brows furrowing, he stopped mid-stride and took a look.

Draco Malfoy, largely reclusive heir to the Malfoy fortune, makes a surprise contribution to the East India Spattergroit Foundation.... contin on page 6.

Spattergroit?

Harry quickly turned to page six, which turned out to be the society section. There was a small article with an equally small picture. Harry had to squint to see it. Malfoy was in the forefront, shaking hands with a pudgy man in a Healer's frock, and smiling at the camera. In the background, out of focus and barely discernible, were the figures of spattergroit victims on their beds. As Harry watched, the image of Malfoy broke his schooled features for a bare moment and wrinkled his nose ever so slightly.

Harry wasn't sure that he could blame him. Apparently spattergroit was not only unpleasant to look at, but unpleasant to smell as well.

Why would someone like Malfoy bother to be there at all? He turned up his aristocratic nose at anything remotely unpleasant, and his whole family never gave any charity unless it benefited them directly.

Then Harry remembered his own words, just a week ago. "You come into my house and ask me why I won't do the right thing for you? What have you ever done for anyone?"

He tipped back his head and laughed and laughed and laughed. It had been a long time since he had laughed so hard, and when he was done his stomach ached. Clearly, he was contributing to society for

the first time in years just to impress him. How much of a fool did Malfoy think Harry was? His actions were so transparent it was beyond hilarious.... Yet...

Yet.

It was interesting to see Malfoy in the news for this sort of thing. Harry had to admit, grudgingly, that he was a little impressed with the effort. No matter what the reasoning, he at least was doing something with his giant inheritance.

Still chortling, Harry re-read the newspaper again, and then carefully took out the page and set it to the side, tossing the rest away. He had the feeling he'd be hearing from Malfoy again.

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He is on his way to a brand new beginning.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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On the next Saturday, Kreacher again interrupted Harry to tell him that he had a visitor. Despite being in the middle of an exciting mystery show on the telly, Harry switched off the device and asked the house-elf to see the guest in.

Malfoy walked into the sitting room, again taking full command of the room as if it were his. He was dressed in a dark velvet cloak trimmed with forest green cuffs, and his boots clacked expensively on the floor.

Harry lifted an eyebrow, pretending surprise. "What do you want this time, Malfoy?"

Malfoy paused, looking slightly shocked at Harry's rudeness, but Harry could see the barest ghost of a smile flirt over his lips. Through years of Auror training in interrogations, Harry had a good sense of what other parties were usually thinking. Malfoy clearly thought he had the upper-hand, but wasn't ready to tip Harry onto it... yet.

"I wanted to tell you that I've given what you've said a great deal of thought." He stood before Harry, back ramrod straight and looking for all the world, sincere—at least, as sincere as a Malfoy could look.

It occurred to Harry then that Malfoy would continue to stand until given permission to sit. It was only polite, after all. The Auror training in Harry and long standing dislike of Malfoy loathed having a Malfoy at a higher elevation than himself. So Harry gestured to the chair in front of him, almost as an afterthought. "And?"

"And you're right, Potter." Malfoy gave a sigh, slightly heavier than was necessary.

All part of putting on a good show, Harry thought, cynically.

"I've done nothing with what I've been given. I'm twenty-five years old... even wandless, there should be some way I can contribute to the greater good."

Talk of ‘greater good' and ‘Malfoy' should never be in the same room. A quick flash of anger caused Harry to abandon his plan to string Malfoy along, and he decided to just lay his cards on the table. "Malfoy, stop. Just stop before you embarrass yourself. I know what you're after."

Malfoy had the good grace to look mildly surprised. "Whatever do you mean, Potter?"

Harry nearly rolled his eyes. Instead he got up and went to the kitchen. He returned a moment later with his copy of the Prophet, holding it in his hand as proof. "You don't honestly expect me to give the wand

back to you just because you threw some money at the Spattergroit Foundation?"

"Hardly," Malfoy's sneer was back, and Harry was almost glad to see it. That was the Malfoy he knew. "I'm not surprised that you don't believe me. After all you've had me pegged for a dark wizard since we were both eleven."

"And what have you done to prove otherwise?"

"That is exactly my point. I haven't, and when you pointed that out I'll admit I felt... ashamed."

Harry blinked in surprise and watched as Malfoy turned to face the fireplace for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts before he continued. "I'm not coming here asking for forgiveness, or for a second chance which you obviously won't grant. I'm just telling you, Potter, that I want to change and that you've inspired it."

The newspaper felt limp and clammy in his hands all of a sudden, and Harry put it on a side table. "I don't see how I—"

"Don't you?" And now Malfoy was facing him again, sneer gone and looking nearly... humble. "You were always my greatest rival—The Boy Who Lived—The boy I could never beat." He let out a small, breathless laugh and shook his head. "I always thought that it was because Dumbledore fawned over you or because Granger covered for you or... well, any number of things. I never pointed the finger where it belonged, and you caused me to see that. So, thank you." Then, quite unexpectedly, he held out his hand to shake.

Harry stood, shocked at the gesture of friendship, wondering if this was perhaps some sort of a trick. But Malfoy was waiting, and when Harry moved forward his hand felt both soft and unexpectedly strong in his grip. Harry didn't have much time to think about it before Malfoy released him, gave him a curt nod, and excused himself out as if embarrassed.

Harry watched him go, hand still semi-extended, bemused.

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So filled with visions and daydreams is he, that he doesn't see the cliff he is likely to fall over.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Three weeks later, most of the bemusement still lingered whenever Harry thought about Malfoy, and it was difficult not to think of the man. His now frequent charitable donations and public appearances constantly dotted the Daily Prophet. Harry, newshound that he was, found himself turning from the top stories and leading wizarding news to scanning the softer print of the society pages to catch a glimpse of Malfoy.

At first Harry had inwardly scoffed at the thought of Malfoy turning over a new leaf—he just wanted his wand back, and clearly the only way he knew how to fix things was to throw money around in order to get what he wanted. But now that the charitable madness had been going on for nearly a month, Harry began to feel a little worm of doubt wiggle into his brain. Was he being too hard on Malfoy? After all, he had known him only as a boy. Maybe he had done some growing up after losing his father... maybe...

Harry hadn't had the chance to see the Prophet today; he had left his house too early for the normal post-owl to catch him, because he was having breakfast with Ginny at their favorite café. The Harpies had made it to the playoffs, and he wanted to celebrate with her before she became too busy with practice to have any time.

"Need a refill, son?"

Harry glanced up at the waitress. She had a strident voice, and fried red hair that was only barely contained by a nest of hair-pins, but her face was kindly and held just the slightest bit of pity. On the

table before him were cups containing the dregs of several drinks, from orange juice to water to tea.

He had been here for an hour and a half already, waiting.

"I'd like that," he said with a smile, and then quickly added, "My girlfriend should be here shortly." It was a pathetic balm to his dignity, but the waitress nodded sympathetically and poured a refill of his orange juice just the same.

The bells attached to the front door jingled and Harry glanced about hopefully, but it was only an older couple walking in, arm in arm.

He watched them for a moment, thinking that would be the image he and Ginny would have, sixty or seventy years in the future. Instead of this thought cheering him, though, it made him feel rather sad instead, seeing as he was sitting alone.

If Ginny wasn't here by the time the waitress came back, he was going to leave.

The door jingled again, as if on cue. Harry turned again to look, but it wasn't Ginny. It was, in fact, the last person he ever expected to see at a low budget Muggle restaurant in the heart of London.

Draco Malfoy didn't smile outright at him. The tug on the corner of his mouth was much too cool, almost calculating. When the hostess asked to seat him, however, he shook his head and approached Harry's table. "Fancy meeting you here, Potter. May I have a seat?" He promptly sat himself down without waiting for an answer.

Harry sputtered for a moment. "Malfoy, what are you doing here? Are you stalking me? Are—" a horrible thought crept into his mind and he reached under his coat for his wand, "Are you the reason why Ginny's so late?" If Malfoy had done anything to her, he was a dead man.

To his relief, though, Malfoy looked honestly taken aback. "Hardly, Potter. If your girlfriend has stood you

up, it's nothing to do with me." He glanced around, taking in the surroundings, "Although I am surprised. The papers say you've been together for years. Shouldn't you be past the dating phase by now?"

Harry glared at him, but allowed his fingers to slide off his wand. "I'll have you know we're living together."

Malfoy's brows shot up. "Really? That's funny, because I've been to your house twice now, and I haven't seen her."

"She's a Harpy." At Malfoy's mocking smile and snort of laughter, Harry clarified, "I mean, she plays Quidditch, the Holyhead Harpies."

"Oh, of course, the women's team." Malfoy leaned forward, taking a piece of complementary toast from Harry's plate without asking. "Well, I'm sure whatever has held her up must be very important."

Before Harry could quiz him about that little comment, the waitress was once again standing at the table, this time with menus in her hand.

"He's not staying," Harry said, abruptly.

"Just until his girlfriend shows up." Malfoy flashed a charming smile at the waitress, and took a menu for himself. "I'll have a coffee please, two creams and two sugars." He then looked at Harry, who was winding himself up in a huff, and repeated, "Just until your girlfriend shows."

"Fine." Harry buried himself behind his own menu. His stomach was feeling a bit queasy after a breakfast of pure liquids, as he hadn't really had the heart to eat anything while waiting for Ginny.

After deciding on a simple fare of bacon and eggs, he put his menu down to see Malfoy pondering over his. His nose was slightly wrinkled in distaste as he turned the menu over and over. Obviously this common food was not up to his standards. To Harry's surprise, and relief, he didn't speak his distaste out

loud and politely ordered a mixed fruit salad meal when the waitress came up with Malfoy's coffee.

"So...er..." Harry hated awkward silences, and this was quickly becoming one. "I've seen you in the Prophet."

Malfoy smiled, an expression that went right up to his eyes, making their dull slate color seem to shine for a moment. It was... surprisingly arresting.

"Oh that," Malfoy waved a hand as if brushing away an errant fly, "well I can't say that I'm not enjoying spending my money on a good cause if I see one. I had my Gringotts accountant ring up my total expenses for the year, and let's just say that the money I was wasting on vacations alone is better spent doing this. Don't you agree?" And then he fixed Harry with a sudden, unexpected stare, as if he cared what Harry's opinion was.

Harry could only shrug. "I suppose." He paused, wondering if he should bring up what was on his mind. The last thing he needed was a fight in the café, but he had never been much good at keeping things to himself. "But I don't think that a few weeks of charity work is going to make up for... everything." For being an insufferable coward, for riding the fence during the war to see which one would win, rather than doing what was right. For... everything.

To Harry's surprise though, Malfoy didn't seem very offended. In fact, he seemed to be almost anticipating the comment. "Well, I've only just begun, haven't I?" He idly twisted his spoon around and around in his coffee cup before looking back at Harry, "And now I have a question for you."

"I wasn't aware this was an interview."

"Hardly. What I want to know is, why are you with the Weasley girl if you don't love her?"

Harry, to his shame, fumbled the glass of orange juice in his hands and it fell sideways on the table, soaking the tablecloth, their plates and Harry's trousers. Malfoy was able to gracefully push away from the table and stand up before his clothes got the same treatment. Harry cursed and stood up, trying to

brush the orange droplets off of him before it soaked in. He was unsuccessful.

The waitress was back, all thick bright lipstick smiles and with a handy towel. "Food will be up shortly, gentlemen," she said, once the table was squared away.

Harry waited until she was safely out of earshot to hiss, "What's wrong with you? Of course I love Ginny. She's just late is all. Why would you—no, I don't even want to know."

But Malfoy just smirked and answered anyway, "If my fiancée were late to a date with me, I would be... quite upset."

"I am upset," countered Harry, "and worried. It's not like her."

In response, Malfoy just leaned back, sipping at his coffee, his grey eyes watching Harry over the cup as if to say, "Isn't it?"

Food came right after that, and Harry stabbed angrily at his eggs. Thankfully, Malfoy was quiet, leaving Harry to his thoughts. As much as he hated to admit it, Malfoy did have a point. There was a reason why he wasn't charging off, looking for Ginny. He had lied to Malfoy just now. She had done this before, many times. It was just... she had a bad memory, was all. And she refused to carry one of those Muggle cell phones. He loved her, and that included loving her little idiosyncrasies; he had enough of his own for her to deal with.

But the silence was becoming oppressive again, and Harry found himself speaking before he really realized what he was doing, "I remember, in fifth year I was tricked into running gung-ho into a situation because I thought—wrongly—that someone was in danger."

"Sirius Black."

Harry glanced up in surprise, then mentally kicked himself. Of course Malfoy would know the story. His

father had been arrested because of the whole fiasco. He didn't know why he hadn't thought of that before... maybe because in a way Malfoy seemed somewhat removed from Harry's life at Hogwarts. He was an antagonist that had always hovered at the edge, like an annoying rash, but never directly involved... until that night at the Astronomy Tower.

Harry nodded, "Yes, Sirius Black. And—well, you know what happened."

"Yes." Malfoy drawled, popping a grape into his mouth in a delicate way that somehow managed to catch Harry's attention. "I do." The grape slipped in between his lips, and Harry found himself watching with rapt attention. Malfoy's eyes met his own. "Perhaps you just cared about Black more then you care for Weasley."

That felt like a slap in the face. "You don't know what you're talking about," Harry snapped, stabbing at his eggs again.

It was Malfoy's nature to snap back, but for some reason he just shrugged and popped another grape into his mouth, once again catching Harry's attention.

The rest of the meal went by quickly, with little said on either side, except for when Malfoy decided to snag a piece of Harry's bacon right off his plate. Perhaps because of his new found love for charity, Malfoy offered to pick up the tab though, so Harry didn't have much to complain about.

Another soft yet firm handshake later—was it Harry's imagination or did it linger one or two seconds longer than needed?—And Malfoy was once again walking away from him...

... Just as Ginny came bustling in, her red hair pinned up elegantly and her brown eyes bright. "Oh Harry... I'm not late, am I?"

****

At his heel, a small dog harries him (or tries to warn him of a possible mis-step).

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Draco's jaws felt stiff, his lips waxy from all the false smiling that was required for this latest charity function. Merlin, how he hated being there. He hated parading himself around like a two Knut whore, hated having to smile at those people who were so obviously below him... and he hated, hated having to shake all of their disgusting hands.

If he had his wand, he could cast a nonverbal spell to cleanse his hands after every touch. But the piece of wood he held was next to useless. Instead he had purchased a full box of Muggle sani-wipes and kept them stuffed in a deep pocket of his coat. If anyone ever saw how his hands drifted to his pocket after every round of handshakes, no one said anything.

In his other deep pocket was his other saving grace—the wand he was currently using. It was a Great Uncle's and, of course, next to useless, but he only had to touch his fingers to the cold dead wood to remind himself why he was putting up with all of these indignities.

Draco had been more than a little pleased at the progress he was making with Potter. The gleam of suspicion in his green eyes had all but faded by the end of their meal a few days earlier. The fool seemed to be buying his sudden turnaround as genuine. Draco couldn't afford to stop now. Soon, he hoped, Potter's conscience would get to him. Soon, Draco would have a shot at getting his wand back.

So Draco smiled again and gracefully accepted the thanks for the offer of money by another well-wisher, very conscious of the news reporters that hung around the edge of the gathering. He made sure to put his right side to the cameras—his best side in his opinion.

It was a boring lunch, interrupted by guest speakers who stood up to make long-winded speeches about why they were all there and what good the money that was being collected would do. Honestly, Draco hadn't been listening. These functions had melded into one another as the weeks passed, and he

couldn't even remember what charity his money was going to this time.

Something about Africa and tents or... something. He couldn't remember.

Another well-wisher came up to shake his hand, and Draco felt like his fake smiling was going to appear demented soon enough. If only he had a working wand and could perform a glamour... but no, no, not yet.

Soon.

After wiping off his fingers in his pocket, he made an excuse to step outside for a smoke—Draco didn't smoke, but he needed the fresh air.

The heat of the spring day hit him like a slap in the face. Draco sighed and leaned against the railing which on a normal day would lead visitors to the door of the museum. It was closed to the public during the charity luncheon.

Behind him, he could hear the sounds of people speaking— still congratulating each other on their do-goodedness. Honestly, these people were worse than he was. At least he had an ulterior motive to impress Potter. The men in there... well, he didn't know what their motive was, and that scared him a little.

Draco gazed out across the street. Despite knowing he was closer to his goal than ever before, he felt unexpectedly low. His short-term future seemed to be filled with these boring, annoying functions, and the thought of going back into this one made his tongue curl in distaste.

Perhaps he should just go for a walk—just a little jaunt to clear his mind.

Draco was walking before he had even fully even made up his mind—his legs had apparently decided to make the decision for him. He would probably be missed at the function, but hopefully he wouldn't be

gone long enough to make a story for the reporters. It was just a little walk.

Although the building front was decorated with all types of modern Muggle art, the rest of the neighborhood was in very poor condition. Draco wasn't all that familiar with Muggle architecture, but he knew empty warehouses and dilapidated buildings when he saw them. Who in their right mind would bother to build a museum here? The location insulted the businessman in Draco, and he gave a sniff of disapproval.

A sound caught his attention. It was coming from one of the dull warehouses, and as Draco moved closer he could see paint chipping off of the sides. The sound of barking dogs echoed again and again within the steel walls. Still bored, and a little curious, Draco searched for the entrance. Was this some kind of holding facility for Muggle pets?

The door was hard to spot as it was painted the same type of dull grey as the rest of the building. A hand written sign above proclaimed it as London's Animal Welfare Society.

Stepping inside, Draco could see that London's Animal Welfare Society was doing very poorly indeed. For one, there was nobody there to greet him at the counter. The whole place smelled of cleaning astringent, and the sound of barking from the back rooms was loud and raucous.

Draco rang the bell at the front desk, and counted to thirty in his head, but no one bothered to show.

Not about to let that deter him, he stepped behind the counter and let himself into the back rooms.

Large kennels lined each side of the room, and as Draco walked on he was greeted by yapping, yelping, barking and howling dogs. Each animal seemed to have been furnished with a small cut of blanket, some food, and a water bowl. But... so bare. His house-elves had better furnished cubby-holes.

Once the dogs caught sight of him, the sound became nearly deafening, but he ignored them all as he walked down the isle, heedless of their jumping against the wire doorways and spinning around in excited circles.

Occasionally he would stop to glance at one or two of them —one a floppy haired mutt with expressive brown eyes that cowered when he stopped closer, and another, a dark one with a docked stub of a tail that wiggled frantically at his glance.

He didn't know what he was looking for, or indeed why he was even here in this Muggle pet-pit, but as he stepped to the last cage in the corner, he stopped.

The dog within was a small terrier. Its body was pure white, save for some double coloring of light and dark brown about its head. Its ears were mismatched, the white ear standing straight up, and the dark ear folded down.

It watched Draco with the same regal air that he regarded it. It was alert, but neither wagged its tail nor shrank back when he bent down to let it sniff at his hand through the wire.

A Malfoy didn't need to ask permission from anyone, and Draco jiggled the door of the cage. It was old or not very secure, and he was able to quickly open the door and take the little Jack Russell out. Draco gave the dog a quick once-over from front to back. It was impossible to tell without a charm, of course, but it seemed healthy enough with bright eyes and no ugly scars to mar the fur. The dog, for his part, gave a courtesy lick to his hand, but didn't wiggle or squirm.

"What are you doing?!"

Draco could barely hear the voice over the sound of barking dogs, but turned to see a horrified Muggle woman bearing down on him from across the room. He stood up, tucking the terrier in the crook of his arm. "What does it look like I'm doing?" he asked, with a well placed sneer, "You must get the occasional customer here?"

The woman stopped short, staring at Draco with a wild expression that he couldn't quite place. She was older, perhaps in her fifties, with flyaway grey hair and stress lines about her eyes. She looked like she was longing to snatch the dog away, but was afraid to do so. A quick glance downward told Draco why. The terrier, so obedient in his grip, was snarling at the woman. He could feel a vibration of the dog's

growl against his body.

"But, but," the woman stammered. "Sir! If you'd like a dog, I could show them to you, but that one bites people. He is not for adoption."

"Nonsense." Draco snapped, laying a hand on the dog's head. It quieted immediately. "I wish to buy this dog immediately. How much is it?"

She now looked a little insulted. "I don't sell dogs. I adopt them out—"

"Then consider this a donation to your..." he paused, glancing around the pens in obvious distaste, "cause."

In the end, the poor woman really didn't have much of a choice. Draco was adamant, and the little dog would not allow himself to be taken from his arms without snapping furiously. She led him out of the kennels to the front counter, and fussed around with the forms and till with the air of someone who had probably never had much practice. It seemed to Draco like this place never got any visitors at all.

"Name?" She asked, once she had finally got herself together.

"Draco Malfoy."

She started to write down the name then stopped and glanced up at him. "I meant, of the dog."

"Pyxis." The tradition of naming children after constellations was a long held one in the Malfoy family. Draco had never had a pet before, but figured the same rule should apply here.

"Oh," the woman's eyes unfocused for a second and she smiled at him, the first genuine smile he had seen literally all day. "Pyxis, the compass constellation." She smiled again as she wrote it down, took the

payment and handed the receipt back to Draco. "I hope your little friend points you in the right direction."

He tried not to roll his eyes, and mostly succeeded. "Quite. Well, thank you Mrs...?"

"Malone. Maria Malone. I'm the owner, operator, kennel manager... you name it."

Well that explained why the place was so run down. There had to be at least thirty dogs in that one room alone. The idiot Muggle would be far too overworked to manage the place effectively. It seemed as if none of the business owners in this part of London were using the common sense that they were born with. Draco nodded curtly to the woman, retucked Pyxis back under his arm, and left.

His absence from the charity event had not gone unnoticed, but he quickly diverted any questions with a smooth answer or two. All attention quickly went to Pyxis, anyway.

To Draco's delight, the dog became a little snarling devil when anyone moved to touch his person. Draco still had to smile and nod and answer increasingly inane questions, but all efforts to shake his hand or to shake others were thwarted by a jealous Pyxis.

As the evening came to a close, Draco found himself a seat and fed his little charge bits of cheese and sausage.

He couldn't stop thinking about the dumpy little Animal Welfare Society, and how it was so obviously being mismanaged. It offended the businessman in him.

So when the charity event finally wound down, Draco found himself at the front door of the little warehouse. This time, Maria Malone came to answer the front bell. Her mouth dropped in surprise and dismay upon seeing him again, obviously thinking he was unhappy with Pyxis.

"I want a tour of this place." Said Draco, before she could comment, "I want to know how you run it,

from top to bottom. And if I like what I see, Mrs. Malone, I promise I'll make it worth your while."

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The Fool might be about to make a move, not just to a new home, but new job, new life.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Draco didn't leave until late that night, his mind buzzing with facts and figures, hastily scribbled notes on yellow parchment. While part of him was drooling at the business opportunity, he was mostly appalled on a business level on how botched this operation had been run. Despite the name, The Animal Welfare Society was not a government backed program. No, it had been run, maintained and owned solely by Maria Malone, which was a shame because the woman was slowly running it right into the ground.

Once the house-elf Apparated Draco home, he was forced to wait outside the gates for his mother to come down and drop the wards. After the Dark Lord had taken over their home for the better part of a year, the Malfoys had learned a hard lesson, not only to look twice at a man promising to make all of their anti-Muggle dreams come true, but also to make sure that never again would someone be able to take over their domain.

Unfortunately, the wards only recognized wards with magical intent, and without a working wand, Draco had none. He was forced to suffer the indignity of having his mother let him into his own home.

"What is that?" Narcissa asked, upon spying the sleeping Pyxis in his arms.

"It's a dog, Mother." Draco gave her an absent kiss on the cheek as he walked by. Pyxis was beginning to stir, so he set the terrier down and bade his house-elf Tinky to make sure that he was properly fed, watered and walked before bed. Tinky bowed low, and nodded, bravely taking charge of Pyxis even when

he showed her teeth to her.

"Well, it had better be housebroken," Narcissa sniffed, "and I will not have any fleas about the house. Make sure you instruct the house-elves to wash it on a daily basis."

"Yes, Mother. Any news while I was out?"

Narcissa sniffed again, "The Black family house-elf is awaiting you in the study. It has been there for some hours. How you can put up with the smell, Draco my dear, I'll never know."

That got Draco's attention and he nodded curtly, making a quick right turn to the passage that led to his own private study. Sure enough, Kreacher was there, waiting for him. The old house elf bowed obediently upon his arrival. His mother had been exaggerating more than a little, or perhaps she had simply been pulling from memories from the past, something she had been doing more and more lately. Kreacher, although more shabby and decrepit then any of the Malfoy family elves had been, did not smell. Luckily for Draco, he still recognized Narcissa as one of the Black family relatives, and through her, Draco himself.

"Mister Malfoy, sir. Kreacher begs your pardon for interrupting him so late." The elf bowed deeply again, letting the ridiculous locket he was wearing nearly touch the floor.

Draco waved a hand dismissively. "You have news on Potter?"

Kreacher nodded, and Draco thought that he caught a gleam of... triumph in his old eyes. But that was impossible. House-elves did not plot. They didn't have the brains.

"Master Potter is going to a Quidditch game in three weeks time, to surprise the Weasley, sir. Kreacher has heard the Weasley talking, always talking. Her team has patched uniforms. The Weasley says it is disgraceful and that Master Potter should donate."

Draco chose his next words carefully, "And why hasn't Potter bought her team what she wanted?" Because what Ginny wants, she gets. He added to himself, spitefully. He should have just paid someone to cast Imperio on her to ask for Draco's wand back. It would have saved a lot of trouble.

Kreacher hesitated, then trembled in the classic way a house-elf tended to do when it was torn. Draco waited patiently and finally Kreacher murmured out, "My master is not the best with hints, sir." Draco expected the elf to instantly punish himself for such a callous remark, but either Potter had forbidden such an act, or Kreacher was just weird. He just stood there, staring up at Draco with large eyes, still trembling.

Draco allowed himself a smile, "Excellent news, Kreacher. Think of how good you have done for your master. If Weasley is happy, he will be too." It was normally beneath Draco to compliment the likes of a house-elf, but Kreacher was not his own, and he was invaluable in his quest to get on Potter's good side. His information had already led him to the Muggle café... Draco doubted that the house-elf would steer him wrong. "Very good." This was said mostly to himself as he turned away, "You may go now."

He walked out, mind still ablaze with thoughts of the business opportunity missed with the Welfare Society. It was always good to diversify the family business holdings.

He did not notice Kreacher bow again, and did not hear him think out loud as he was so apt to do. "Kreacher is a good elf. Master Malfoy is from a good, pure family. He is better than the Weasley, oh yes."

Then he disappeared with a crack.

****

Unfortunately, in this childlike state the person is likely to be overly optimistic or naive.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Harry could feel the cold wind stinging his face even under the warming charm. On the grounds, wandering the stands before a Quidditch game, it was brutal. He could just imagine what it would be like for Ginny and the rest of the team up in the air. Charms of any sort weren't allowed on a professional Quidditch pitch.

Gin would probably be in a foul mood after this game... not that he could really blame her. Hopefully his surprise visit would brighten her mood.

He frowned to himself, and the hand in his right pocket touched a box of magically shrunken red roses. He and Ginny had had another row earlier in the week. Harry had still been stung over being stood up at the café, and Ginny... well, she apologized, but she always apologized and then kept on not showing up for things.

Now that the argument was nearly a week behind them, Harry realized that he had kept on pushing her, kept picking at her until she finally snapped and accused him of cheating on her when she was gone.

After a stupid accusation like that, nothing useful could be settled.

Harry had planned on coming to this game—Gin's important match during the playoffs—, but he had wanted to surprise her and not to come apologizing. But, it was what they both needed now. It was time for him to step up and be the better man and just say he was sorry for acting stupid... even if he'd had a different point, originally.

He could almost hear Ron's voice again in his mind, saying what had most recently become a chant, "Women are mental, mate. Completely mental."

The cold gritty wind blew again, pushing his fringe to the side and accidentally revealing his scar. Quickly, Harry brought a hand up to his forehead to smooth his hair back down. Not that his face wasn't always

splattered across the newsprint of the Prophet, but he'd rather not have any more attention than was necessary.

Not that it had been much of a problem, lately, as none other than Draco Malfoy had been taking up the headlines. Oh, it had started small, but now his charitable contributions were really starting to get some notice. The editorials were alternating between wondering why the Malfoy heir had turned over a new leaf, and praising him for doing it.

Harry had mixed feelings as well. Only one thing was for sure—in all of the pictures of fundraisers, scholarship awards, charitable luncheons, public speakings, cheque writings, foundation startings, and blood drives, Harry had seen—even the more recent ones with that little dog in his arms—Malfoy had not been smiling. Not once.

The git wasn't enjoying himself. Harry had watched him.... er known him for the better part of seven years. He could just tell.

As Harry thought about this, he continued to walk, and soon found himself at the entrance to the team's locker rooms. There were two main rooms inside; the one where the team showered and dressed, and the one reserved for VIPs and the press. The latter was the room in which Harry went, having no desire to accidentally see any of Ginny's teammates in a state of undress.

He was in the corridor nearly to the public room when he quite literally bumped onto one of Ginny's teammates, Rosalinda, who scurried in the other direction.

"Harry!" She yelped, hand clutching at her chest, startled.

"Whoops, sorry about that, Rose." Harry put on what he hoped was a winning smile, "Is that a new uniform?" At her startled nod, he asked, "Is Ginny in?"

"Ginny?!" Rosalinda's voice rose and seemed to carry unnaturally far. "Oh yeah, Harry," again, her voice seemed louder than usual, "I'm so glad you're here! She's right in there..."

It was then that Harry realized what was happening. Rosalinda wasn't unusually startled, she was trying to shout a warning.

Quickly, he ducked past Rosalinda and into the private locker...

Ginny hadn't heard her friend's attempt at a warning, and neither, apparently had her male companion. He had her in his arms against the wall, and he was...

... and she was...

Harry spun around, shouldering Rosalinda out of the way, and walked out.

Shock had seized up his mind. He couldn't see, couldn't think save for one thought: but she said I was the one cheating!

He walked, blood rushing in his ears and drowning out all noise around him. Someone was calling his name, sounding as if they were ten miles away. Then a hand touched his shoulder. He lurched around, expecting to see Ginny, but instead seeing...

... Malfoy?

Malfoy asked what was wrong. Or at least, his mouth moved, and while Harry couldn't grasp the words, he could see the concern on his face.

He said something in reply, but it probably came out as mush other than, "Ginny... her trainer..." for his mind hadn't put together who that man was up until then, only what he was doing.

Malfoy gave a curt nod and bent down to murmur something to his waiting house-elf, words that meant nothing to Harry. "Tinky, go immediately to my mother and have her cancel the most recent cheque."

Once the elf Apparated away, Malfoy looped an almost friendly arm about Harry's shoulder, and steered him to the right.

It was strange. Time seemed to speed up and slow down alternately in Harry's shocked mind. Malfoy popped them to the darkened restaurant, and bade the hostess to get them a seat somewhere private. Suddenly Harry was in a booth, Malfoy sitting on the other side of him. There was a tumbler in his hands, and he brought it to his lips without knowing what it was. The fierce alcohol burned down his throat, snapping time into something more or less close to normal.

Ginny...

God help him, her cheating explained everything and nothing at all. Her disappearances, her lateness... but why was she trying so hard to press him to marry? Why was she trying to move in? Guilt? Jealousy?

Harry found himself chortling into his drink, as a thought struck him. Malfoy raised an eyebrow as he drank from his own glass filled with some sort of hyper blue, fruit smelling alcohol.

"It's.. It's just.." Harry snorted again, then took a breath to steady himself, "Women, mate. They're mental. I'll never understand them."

Malfoy seemed to realize he was coming out of his shock, "Perhaps, just the ginger ones with poor breeding." Harry opened his mouth, automatically ready to defend Ginny, but then shut it again, and Malfoy continued blandly, "Besides, what will people think, hearing that sort of thing from The Chosen One? They'll think he's batting from the other side."

Harry rolled his eyes at that, but couldn't help but notice the way that the tip of Malfoy's tongue darted out to take a droplet that had lingered on his lower lip. The twinge of feeling was immediately accompanied by pain as if he had just touched something that burned. How could Ginny do this to him...

after all they had been through...

"How could she?" It came out as a groan, and he took another sip, wanting the feel, the numbness of alcohol.

The other man shook his head, and Harry could swear he saw him make a motion as if he wanted to roll his eyes. "Isn't it obvious? She doesn't deserve you, Potter. Drink up, you'll feel better."

He doubted that. Harry took another drink anyway, thinking that it might be better if Ron was there instead of—but no, he was her brother, wasn't he? Maybe Malfoy was the best for this. He was completely unapologetic. He didn't try to explain it all away. He just seemed to be trying to get him drunk.

Harry could do that.

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But the card carries a little bark of warning as well. Stop daydreaming and fantasising and watch your step, lest you fall and end up looking the fool.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Pyxis gave a sharp bark, and Draco quickly shushed him. The little dog wanted to be up and in his arms, but right now both arms were full of a sloppy, nearly unconscious Harry Potter.

"Potter, you must eat like a pig to be this heavy," Draco growled as he staggered his way up the stairs to Grimmauld Place. Potter had been just lucid enough to Apparate them both to his house without

splinching either one of them. It had been a wild, unsteady ride, and the man had sagged against Draco the moment their feet touched ground.

Cursing under his breath, and hissing at Pyxis who was yapping some kind of a warning at his heels, Draco shifted Potter about in his grip and grabbed the other man's wand hand. He still had the wand in his grip, and seemed to do the trick when Draco murmured an unlocking spell.

His arms trembling from the strain, Draco somehow got himself and Potter up the stairs into the master bedroom. He dumped Potter on the bed with an exaggerated sigh, then quickly bent down to soothe Pyxis.

That done, he went to work on Potter's shoes, pulling them off with rough force. Words that he had been keeping in all night bubbled out, unbidden now that Potter was firmly unconscious. "God, you're pathetic, Potter. How hard could it have been to keep a Weasley happy? Just show her twenty galleons and she's yours for life. Or was the sex that bad?"

Shoes gone, he loosened the belt on Potter's pants and a few tight buttons on his shirt. His motives weren't sexual. He just didn't want Potter encumbered by clothes and to wake up early from discomfort. But as the shirt came off, Draco found himself pausing at the sight of Potter's chest: he was built under that raggedy shirt, with a tuft of dark chest hair and thin line leading down to his groin. Unbidden, Draco let his touch linger right on the slight rises of muscle before he realized what he was doing, and pulled his hand back with a snap.

"Maybe it wasn't the sex, then," he mused, the rancour taken out of his voice. "Maybe she's more of a fool than I thought."

Pyxis gave another yip, softer now that he had been scolded so many times, and it knocked Draco back into reality again. Time was wasting.

"Come, Pyxis." He strode out of the room and paused in the passage, sizing up the house.

If he were Potter, where would he hide the wand?

Somewhere safe. Somewhere secure. A wand was a special kind of magical item. It couldn't be shrunken or transfigured into something else. Perhaps if Potter had a sort of a study...

It turned out that Potter did have a study. And it was so dusty and ill used that Draco found himself sneezing after half an hour of being in there. There was nothing of use, save for some interesting dark books. He wasn't a thief—he was just trying to retrieve what was rightfully his.

Next was the drawing room, simply because it appeared to be on the first floor. Draco pulled open every drawer and cabinet he found, one by one, rifling through them before shutting them again. It galled him on a deep level that he had to place things back where they belonged, but he couldn't risk Potter—or that aged house-elf—sensing anything out of the ordinary.

It had been late when he and Potter had first Apparated to the house, and the hours quickly passed as Draco searched. Nothing, nothing, nothing... His frustration grew. If he had a half-working wand he could have Accio'ed for it instead of searching the Muggle way. He wanted nothing more than to just rip the place apart and start knocking the furniture over in tantrum. But, no, he had to be sly... it had to be here somewhere...

Unless it was in Gringotts.

There was still a chance it could be in Grimmauld Place, and Draco was determined not to let it slip through his fingers just because his eyes were gritty with exhaustion, and the lights of false dawn were starting to stream through the windows. Even Pyxis was curled up on the floor, snoring.

It was the dog who gave him the warning. He knew the little dog was good for something. Pyxis shot up awake, both ears—even the little floppy one—pricked towards the stairs, and gave a little growl.

Draco quickly shut the kitchen utensil drawer he was rifling through, and turned around just in time to see Potter descending down the stairs.

Potter was in the middle of yawning, his hair all pushed in one direction, which made him look rather cute and mussed. "'Morning Malfoy," he muttered, then did a double take, literally, stopping mid-yawn. "What are you doing here?"

Maybe another man would have stuttered, but Draco's ire was still up from an entire night of fruitless searching. Anger always made his wits sharpen. "What does it look like, Potter?" he snarled, "you don't expect Pyxis to die of starvation! Do you not have one single edible thing in this house?"

Potter stared at him for a long, long moment. Finally he gave a halfhearted shrug and came down the steps. Draco quickly picked up Pyxis in case they were about to be thrown out, but Potter just brushed past them both and reached up to a high cabinet. "Here, a little of this won't hurt," he said, coming back with a small box of what looked like cat food. "I sometimes feed the strays in the ally out back."

Draco had just caught himself staring at the way the hem of Potter's shirt was ridden up, and how his trousers were just hanging off of his hips... he blinked, realizing he was staring and snapped, "Oh, how generous of you."

The first hint of a smile since the previous day tugged on the corner of Potter's lips. "I thought you would think so, Malfoy, since you're the expert on charity and all." Then he reached out to casually ruffle Pyxis' ears before turning around and finding a bowl.

Draco glared down at the little terrier. "You were supposed to bite him." he reminded, softly.

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A Fool can be a Fool.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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Draco's acute disappointment at not finding the wand only sharpened when he and Pyxis left Grimmauld Place later that day, and he had to summon his house-elf once more to Apparate him back to his house. After the dog food incident, Potter had become rather morose, insisting on grieving over his relationship with the Weasley girl and actually asking—asking Draco what he should do next. Didn't Potter have friends for that sort of thing?

Draco simply told him what he thought—that any decent wizard would not only kick the cheating girl to the curb, but also incinerate all of her things in a very public manner. Potter seemed to be only half listening.

It was midday now, and he was exhausted and in need of a good bath. Drowsily, he leaned against the iron bars of the main gates, waiting for his mother to let him in.

He waited.

And waited.

Draco might have dozed for a few seconds, because he caught his chin just as it was about to fall to his own chest. "Tinky! What on Earth is taking my mother so long?"

The little elf bit her lip and wrung her hands, "Tinky does not know, sir. Tinky is outside, with you!"

"Well go in and find out, immediately, you stupid creature."

Tinky squeaked and with a crack, was gone.

Draco sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, feeling a migraine coming on. Pyxis, perhaps sensing his mood, wiggled in his arms until he was high enough to lick under his chin, eliciting a tired sort of chuckle from Draco.

Tinky popped back to his side of the wards. She was trembling from head to foot, still wringing her hands, "Oh! Oh, Tinky tried to wake her sir, but she will not stir! Tinky is sorry, Master! I tried!" With that, she turned around and started to thunk her head against the iron gates, as self-punishment for her failure.

Draco's mouth went dry. "What?" But Tinky was too busy hitting her head to hear him. His mother wouldn't wake up? Oh God. Oh God no... no... "Let me in!" Taking the bars in his hands, he shook uselessly at the gate, "Let me in! Let me in, damn you!" It was no use and when he tried to scale the wall out of desperation, the slipping charms kicked in, making it impossible for him to hold his grip.

He slipped, falling on his arse. "TINKY!"

The house elf stopped her own beating and looked at him, rubbing her head, "Y-yes master?"

"Apparate me to Grimmauld Place, immediately!"

******

Harry was sitting on his sofa, gripping a frame with a picture with him and Ginny in it. They were dancing around the foundation of a water fountain, the exact replica of one of the pictures Harry had of his parents in his photo album. It had been his idea, of course. He thought it would be nice, to see life coming about in a full circle.

... He'd never noticed until now how picture-Ginny seemed to be leaning away from him as they danced.

He tore his eyes away from the picture, frowned at the wall, and looked back at his dancing fiancée. He expected the very thought of her in another man's arms to hit him like a sledge-hammer, like it had last night.

He felt... nothing. It was like he was looking at a stranger in that picture. That wasn't his Ginny he was seeing there... he wasn't sure now that he had ever seen her.

But that was wrong, wasn't it? He should feel like his heart was being torn out of his chest. He should feel like running down to wherever Ginny was now and just beating the life out of whoever had stolen her away from him.

Harry gripped the edges of the frame so hard that his knuckles were turning white. He had to feel something. It wasn't right to feel this way, less than a day after finding out. It wasn't right to feel... Merlin, he felt relieved, didn't he? Deep down inside, he felt relieved.

He was a monster.

BAMBAMBAMBAMBAM!

The sound of someone beating on his front door startled Harry into dropping the picture. It fell to the wood floor and shattered so that Ginny's face now looked to be split in two.

Harry was up and running to the door, wand at the ready... only to come face to face with Malfoy ... again.

"What—" He managed to ask, before Malfoy grabbed his arm and started to pull him forward. Malfoy's face was suffused with blood, his silver eyes wide and panicked.

"My mother won't come to the door. She might be hurt or injured or—Please, Potter, I need my wand!"

Harry was close to Malfoy now, for the other man was gripping at his arm with vice-like strength. Despite himself, and the situation, he could smell the faint scent of sandalwood on the other man's skin. "Calm down, Malfoy."

"NO!" There was something wild in Malfoy's eyes, something desperate and frantic, "The manor is blocked by wards that will allow in those with magical blood. Family blood. I need my wand!"

"Malfoy-"

"Give it to me! Haven't I done enough?!"

Harry froze. "What? I mean, no. Just—"

"NO!" Fully panicked now, Malfoy made a grab for Harry's wand, but the other man easily grabbed his wrist, stopping him. Malfoy screeched something out—the words were lost on Harry—and suddenly Malfoy had thrown himself on Harry, trying to push him down and take the wand away from him by force.

They both fell to the floor, grabbing, fighting. That damned dog of Malfoy's was barking, and Harry yelped in pain and surprise as he felt teeth sink into his ankle. He would have kicked out, but Malfoy's legs were there too, blocking his own, and Malfoy's slim fingers were trying to pry his wand hand open...

But Harry had not been sleeping in his Auror training classes. He threw his wand to the side, freeing up his hands, for he didn't want to hurt Malfoy with magic.

This was personal. Physical.

Malfoy growled, the vibration running the length of Harry's body, and tried to abandon the fight in favour of retrieving the wand. As soon as his weight left Harry's body, he set his plan into motion. Flipping over, he kicked the dog away and threw himself at Malfoy, catching him around the waist and pushing him to the ground.

Now it was Harry who had the advantage. He crawled his way up Malfoy, inch by inch, deftly avoiding his kicks until he was straddling Malfoy, pinning those dangerous hands to the floor over his head.

Malfoy thrashed around like a fish under him, trying to buck up and throw Harry off, tossing his head this way and that in denial. "Let me go! Let me go! My mother—"

"I'll floo the healers for your mother."

"Idiot!" Even pinned down, Malfoy managed a decent sneer. "I told you. The wards won't allow anyone not of my family blood in."

"I'm not giving you your wand back."

"You'd have my mother die, Potter?! After what she did for you?!"

Harry squeezed Malfoy's wrists, hard enough to make the other man gasp in pain. Harry didn't care. He could feel the roar of blood in his head, and for some reason he was half-hard, but it was nothing—nothing compared to the squeezing desperate pain in his chest; realization, disappointment, betrayal.

Malfoy was staring at him, no friendship in his eyes. He could almost see the cogs turning slowly in that slimy mind of his, trying to look for a way out. Harry felt sick inside. He had begun to trust him—he had begun to like him.

"It was all about the wand, wasn't it?" he asked, and saw how Malfoy's eyes widened ever so slightly.

"Never about charity... never about me. It was about your damned wand."

Malfoy licked his lips nervously and tried to shift, wincing as Harry tightened his grip once more. "Potter... my mother..."

He wasn't denying it. The snake. The coward. Harry leaned close, right in Malfoy's personal space. So close that he could see Malfoy's rapid breath fog the edge of his glasses. "Is that actually true? Or are you just trying to fool me again?"

"Please..." Harry would have never believed it if he didn't see it for himself, but it looked as if moisture was collecting on the edges of Malfoy's eyes. "I'm telling you the truth. She could be dying. We're just wasting time."

"Fine." Harry released Malfoy and sat up, allowing the other man to do the same and rub at his wrists. He didn't make a move to come at him again, so Harry got up and walked stiffly to where his wand lay, in the corner where he had thrown it. He must be crazy for what he was about to do. Hadn't he just been shown proof that Malfoy was a bastard through and through?

He was hurt and tired, though, and he just didn't care any more. Ginny and Malfoy—both liars in their own right. Both needing to be exorcized from his life.

Walking over, he presented his own wand to Malfoy, handle first. "You're not getting your wand back, Malfoy. You can't be trusted."

Malfoy eyed Harry's wand with something akin to astonishment, but he made no move to grab it. "Then why are you offering yours?"

For who had Ollivander locked in his house for so long, Malfoy obviously never really learned much about wand lore. "Because it won't work very well. I just won the battle, and it won't recognize you as its master. It should be enough to get you into your wards, but not much else." He let his voice drop slightly, as he did in criminal interrogations. "You have two hours to get it back, Malfoy, or I will be looking for you

with your old wand. It still recognizes me as its master."

Malfoy's lips parted slightly in surprise, but then he took the wand. He didn't say thanks. It wasn't his nature. Instead he turned about, scooping up Pyxis, who had hidden himself in a corner after being kicked off of Harry's leg.

Harry watched him for a moment, before a thought occurred to him. "Malfoy." He saw the other man turn about, eyebrow up in questioning. "Send your elf back with the wand. I don't want to see you in his house ever again."

He saw a flash of something... some kind of twisting emotion in Malfoy's face for a half second. Before Harry could identify it, it was gone. Malfoy nodded curtly and Disapparated.

Two hours later, on the dot, Tinky the house elf appeared, bowed low and presented Harry's wand wrapped in a velvet lined mahogany box.

****

Three months later.

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Time for them to listen to that watchful little dog, which might be a concerned friend, a wise tarot reader, or just their instincts.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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"Mother, are you sure you don't want to go out into the garden?" Draco asked as he adjusted his tie, and slipped his fingers under his collar to make sure everything was even. "I won't be back for the rest of the

day, you know, and I don't trust the elves to be careful."

Narcissa snorted ungracefully at that. Since her collapse nearly three months before, she had been too weak to walk long distances and had been forced to use a magical chair that hovered a few centimetres off the ground. She hated it, and was still struggling to find a sense of dignity that befitted a Malfoy while confined to a chair. "I think I can manage. I haven't lost the use of my magic after all, dear."

Draco stiffened at that, but tried not to take offence. His mother had been cranky lately. He had been as well, but for a completely different reason. "I'll leave you to your day, then." Turning about, he leaned down to give her a quick kiss on the cheek. He intended to leave, but to his surprise, Narcissa grabbed his arm, stopping him.

Narcissa swept her eyes over her only son then gave a sigh and reached forward, trying to straighten his already perfectly pressed jacket and flicking imaginary bits of lint off. "You do look smart in these ridiculous Muggle clothes," she admitted, with a touch of fake annoyance. "Why you spend so much time there is beyond me. The Muggles don't deserve your time."

"I don't do it for the Muggles, mother."

She shot him a look. "Of course not." Then, satisfied, she gave a pat to his arm and released him, turning away in dismissal.

Draco headed out the door, and down the passages. Tinky came running up—or rather—was dragged by the leash of an overexcited Pyxis. Draco relieved her of the lead and gave a quick tug to Pyxis to remind him to stay in line as well. Today was an important day, and he would not have his own dog misbehave.

The Jack Russell glanced up at him, looking almost comical with one ear up and one ear down before sitting, and waiting patiently.

Tinky Apparated Draco to their usual spot, a few blocks away from their destination in an alley behind a few expensive looking flats. Draco liked to give the Muggles the impression that he lived there, and he spent a few enjoyable minutes walking Pyxis in the warm spring sunshine before he came to the building

where he had spent so much of his time as of late.

It was early in the day, but the staff was already setting out a string of Muggle balloons which led right to the entrance. Draco nodded at their greetings, and watched them for a moment, but could not find any fault in their arrangement. Satisfied, he stepped through the entrance.

It had been bloody hard work getting the Animal Welfare Society moved into the new location. Draco had had to educate himself on Muggle practices, and the permits alone had been Hell. It was worth it, though. Instead of one dingy little warehouse, they now had three floors. The first floor would be animals shown in a more ‘natural' setting, kennels separated by glass with little couches and rugs. This was the display area for the public to get them used to the idea that the animals were going to be in people's homes—wizard, or Muggle. The second floor was for the Muggle public with the usual fare: Dogs, cats, ferrets, birds and reptile. Dogs and cats were separated by a ventilation system so they didn't become alarmed at each other's scents.

The third floor, and the one that Draco was most proud of— it had also given him the worst headaches - was the wizard floor, separated by a disillusionment charm and accessible only by a short floo from the second floor to the third.

He had been lucky that Maria Malone had been so inept at her own business practices: it was easy to have the third floor put in without the use of memory charms. All of the bookkeepers were Draco's of course, and were handy at keeping her in the dark as well.

The end-result was that Maria was mostly in charge of the Muggle section, while Draco was involved with the top. Two guesses on which made the most money.

Maria greeted him just as he was heading to his office. Gone were the stress lines on her face. Now she looked bright, entirely too chipper for this time in the morning. Well, she was the public face of the business, after all. The Society had been open for three weeks, although the official Grand Opening was today. It was going to be stressful and noisy and if she wanted to handle it—fine.

"Draco, you look positively photogenic today!" She beamed, showing a double set of dimples on each

cheek. "The cameras will love you."

Draco murmured something and crossed his office to pick up a copy of a Muggle newspaper. There was a blurb about the Grand Opening on the third page, but it wasn't as big as Draco would have liked it to be. The Muggle papers were harder to pay off, for some reason, than the Prophet. "You told the reporters not to come until ten, yes?" he asked, tearing his eyes from the disappointing paper. He wanted them to be there when the Grand Opening was in full swing so they would have lots of fodder.

Maria brushed off his words with an errant flip of her hand. "Yes, yes. I was talking about the television show—don't tell me you've forgotten." she added, seeing the blank look on Draco's face.

Honestly, Draco had never really seen the appeal of Muggle television. It seemed to be a fine waste of time. He did remember Maria blabbing on about something a month ago. Some Muggle producer had heard of their little effort through some sort of ‘internets' and wanted to fly out an American personality to help train the staff in tips on how to manage some of the more...exuberant dogs.

Draco didn't see how an American show could help promote any local business, but that was a good example of how Maria was so inept. He had simply asked if they were going to be charging anything, and Maria had answered no. Well, free staff training was free staff training, so he had shrugged and told Maria to take care of it.

"I remember," he answered smoothly, "I don't watch much telly." He heard a light tapping at his window, and frowned. "Just... take care of it, Maria."

The woman nodded, excitement lighting up her eyes, and she headed out.

As soon as the door closed, Draco got up and walked to the window, letting the post owl in. As he had expected—and paid for—the story on the Grand Opening took up nearly half the page. As he scanned it, he was pleased to note that his name was nowhere to be mentioned. The part of him that reveled in attention, the childlike boy, did sulk a little, but it was prudent to keep the Malfoy name away from this place until the Wizard Community's memories of the war faded. It might be years. It didn't matter.

He should have put the paper to the side, but as always, he found himself leafing through the back society pages, looking for any instance of Potter.

Draco hadn't had any contact from the other man since that day. At first he had been relieved, for he had made an arse out of himself and let his cover slip in a moment of temper brought on by sleep exhaustion. He was lucky that Potter hadn't hexed him.

Even with that unfortunate incident, Draco had still thought that he might have a way into Potter's good graces: after the news of Potter's breakup with Weasley had hit, surely he would welcome some of his advice like he had on the night of the Quidditch game.

Surely someone like Potter couldn't hold that much of a grudge.

But as the weeks wore on, there had been no mention in the papers of any sort of Potter/Weasley breakup. Draco knew that the reporters for the Prophet were diligent. The only conclusion was that the stupid fool had taken her back.

And that, that had eaten away at Draco.

Even though Draco had only met Potter in a friendly setting a handful of times, he thought he had a good grasp of the man: Potter was woefully in love with love. Draco's guess was that his stupid parents and their stupid melodramatic death made him have some kind of complex about marrying the first girl he fucked.

It was a shame. A waste. Potter was a powerful wizard. He shouldn't be tied down to some poorly bred witch who didn't respect him.

Draco shifted uncomfortably in his seat, remembering how Potter had held him down and pinned his wrists over his head. It didn't seem so erotic at the time as he was too worried to think of anything but his mother, but the dreams in the last three months had told him that his subconscious had found the whole thing to be very sexual. Potter, in all of his angry glory pinning him down... he could have done

anything to Draco, and Draco couldn't have stopped him...

"Bah." He tossed the newspaper aside and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. The timepiece on the table told him that he had spent much too long daydreaming. He had a Grand Opening to get too, after all.

He glanced over to the corner of the room. Pyxis was napping in his little dog bed as usual. At Draco's quick command, he got up and allowed himself to be attached to the lead once more.

Outside of his office, Draco saw a strange sight. The Muggle TV show crew seemed to have arrived, and the staff—both Muggle and wizard— were flushed with excitement. Draco carefully threaded his away around babbling people and awkward looking Muggles with bulky cameras. Pyxis needed a walk before it became too busy to do anything else.

"Oh there he is!"

Draco heard the voice of Maria to his right and he looked about. The woman was conversing with a short Spanish Muggle, and at Draco's glance, she quickly waved him over.

What had the woman got into now? He wondered, heading on over with Pyxis at his heels.

The Spanish Muggle seemed to be delighted at Draco's very look, and he turned to Maria. "This is what I am talking about. This man moves with calm-assertive energy." He gestured down to Pyxis, "You see, he is walking with purpose and he is simply allowing the dog to follow. This is what I must teach your staff." He held out his hand, catching Draco's own in a firm handshake. "Ceaser Millan, and you are...?"

"Draco Malfoy." Draco shot Maria a look that any other would clearly take as I am going to kill you for bringing this into my business.

Maria just grinned happily at him. "He is the one who really breathed life into this, Ceaser. He just came in and insisted on adopting the most mean-tempered dog I had. We got to talking, and here we are!

Pyxis is now just the most well-behaved dog you would ever see."

"Yes, that is the power of being a pack leader." Ceaser made a snapping motion, and at once one of the cameras was trained on himself and Draco. "We will begin filming in a few minutes, and I would like to use you as a good example of how to lead by using the power of the pack."

It was more of a statement than a question, and Draco found himself a little taken back. Most people—people who knew what was good for them—were at least a little deferential, but flattery did work wonders for him, and if this silly little man insisted on putting him up onto a pedestal, who was he to complain?

At least this was an American Muggle show. His status as a silent partner to the Animal Welfare Society shouldn't be compromised.

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Harry sat back on the sofa, sipping a butterbeer. Back in the kitchen, he could hear Kreacher mumbling to himself as he scrubbed the pots and pans. The old house-elf had been unusually morose lately, which was strange because Harry didn't think that he had that much of a strong attachment to Ginny. When he had made the mistake of bringing it up, Kreacher snarled something about ‘the Weasley who hurts my master' and went on to violently sweep the floor.

Well, whatever. The house would be deathly silent without Kreacher around, so Harry didn't want to push him too much.

Sipping at his butterbeer again, he sat back and turned on the telly, ready to lose himself in some stupid programming

He was in luck. It was turning on a new hour, and new shows were starting.

"When good dogs go bad," the serious voice announcer said, to pictures of dogs barking and being general nuisances to one another, "there's one man who is their best friend: Ceaser Millan."

Right, Harry thought, and reached for the remote control.

Then the main host entered the screen. The Dog Whisperer. To Harry's surprise, he appeared to be standing outside of a building that Harry had seen before. Wasn't that... wasn't that the new dog pound about a half kilometre from the Ministry?

"We are here at the grand opening of the Animal Welfare Society of London," Ceaser told the camera, as he walked backwards into the building. The screen panned out to show an arched lobby with clear enclosures on each side. "This building is filled with people who love animals. And I'm here to help the employees learn to control some of the more difficult cases with calm-assertive energy."

"Let's meet the owners." The shot changed to one of Ceaser coming up to the main lobby, as if it had been his first time being there. He was greeted by a short, smiling woman named Maria.

"And this," she said, and the camera zoomed out a little to include a second person in the shot, "is my business partner, Draco."

Harry nearly stopped breathing. "What the—"

He fell off the sofa and moved closer, nearly kneeling in front of the TV, staring at it in shock.

Malfoy... Draco bloody Malfoy was shaking Ceaser's hand, the little Jack Russell Terrier by his feet. He looked... gorgeous in that perfect suit—sauvé and in control.

In the next shot, Ceaser was talking to a group of young staff members, teaching them how to hold the lead, and how to approach a dog with no touch, no talk, no eye contact. Harry was hardly listening. He watched intently for the shots where Malfoy would appear—and he did that quite often. Ceaser seemed

to be using Malfoy as a teaching aide, praising his calm-assertive leadership, having him walk a dog and then having a member of the staff do the same.

It took several tries for one nervous-looking young lady to do what Ceaser asked of her correctly. Harry was watching Malfoy in the background, frowning over the whole thing, but when the young lady succeeded and the dog she was handling lifted its head up and gave her a sloppy kiss, he smiled.

Harry could feel his heart pounding.

The segment lasted only fifteen minutes, and then Ceaser was helping a lady with a dog that liked to attack cats. Harry turned off the telly and sat back on his heels.

So Malfoy was the businessman behind that, eh? Predictably, all of his public charity work had stopped when Harry had made it clear he wouldn't be fooled any longer. Obviously he had kept up with this, though Harry couldn't remember seeing him in the Prophet.

No, strike that. He hadn't been in the Prophet at all. Harry would have remembered... he had scanned the newspapers on a daily basis, trying to figure out what the ex-Slytherin was up too now.

So why...?

Harry had the feeling he knew why. Maybe somewhere, somehow along the line through all of the stupid functions and false charities, Malfoy had actually been touched by something. Maybe he had changed.

"Kreacher?" Harry asked, standing up. "Where'd you put my cloak?"

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There's more than just change, renewal, and a brand new beginning in the Fool, there's also movement,

a fresh, exciting new time.

- The Fool Tarot Card

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The entrance of the lobby looked just as grand in real life as it did on the television screen. Harry walked slowly through the corridors, taking in what he could and always keeping an eye out for a certain blond.

One would think that an animal shelter run by a Malfoy would be the height of despair, where the pretty animals were kept in cages with minimal food and the ugly ones cast away to rot. To Harry's surprise, however, there were all types of dogs and cats, and they all seemed lively, alert and happy.

They were enclosed in large glass cages, furnished like a standard muggle sitting room complete with a small dog-sized sofa, fake telly, and all sorts of squeaky toys littering the floor. Several of the staff were inside the cages, playing with the dogs and patiently teaching them to sit and stay.

Harry was hardly the only customer. In fact, there was a small crowd gathered around each cage. Muggle families with small children in tow were everywhere. Harry grinned as he heard one child call out, "I want that one, mummy! No, that one! Mummy, I want them all!"

Cute kid.

"Sir? Mr. Potter?" There was a light touch to his elbow, and Harry turned to meet the smiling face of a young staff member. Hurriedly, Harry reached up to press down some of the hair on his forehead, but it was too late, he had been recognized.

"Sir," the staff member said in an undertone, "if you're looking for something a little more... extraordinary, we do have another level." And he pointed to what looked like a dead end, but if Harry

concentrated enough, he could feel the effects of a disillusionment charm.

Definitely Malfoy's work.

"Later, perhaps." he said, "Right now I'm here to see Mr. Malfoy. Is he in?"

"Oh, he is, sir." The staff member hesitated, clearly torn between the fact that Malfoy did not like to be interrupted, and that this was Harry Potter asking him. Harry's fame won out over his fear for his boss. "Right this way."

He led him past a door that said "Employees Only" and to another set of doors. Wisely, he let Harry go first to knock.

"Yes?" Malfoy's voice called out, from behind the door. A quick bark told Harry that Pyxis was there as well.

Harry opened the door and stepped inside. He had a moment of pleasure, watching Malfoy's mouth fall open in shock before he got a hold of himself again. "Potter! What are you doing here?"

He made sure he closed the door behind him before coming up to the desk. "Why didn't you tell me about this place?"

"This?" Malfoy's shock turned into confusion, "I don't make it a habit to talk about my business prospects with acquaintances, Potter. I repeat: What are you doing here?"

"I was in the neighbourhood." Harry gave a bit of a shrug, "I never imagined you would become involved in Animal Welfare, Malfoy."

Malfoy narrowed his eyes. "Don't make it sound like what it isn't."

"Isn't what?" Harry walked around the desk, making Malfoy glare at him and swivel his chair so that they faced each other. "Charity?"

"This is not charity," Malfoy growled, "Charity, as I've found out is for fools and charlatans. This was just a..." he waved his fingers out towards the general direction of the main lobby, "business opportunity that was screaming to be taken advantage of."

"Malfoy, each dog has its own sofa."

"In order to show the public what the beast will look like in their own homes! Don't you know anything about business?" Clearly agitated, Malfoy stood up, arms crossed against his chest. For the life of him, he looked like a pouting child.

Harry studied him for a moment. "I think you are a good man, Malfoy. Way, deep down inside. Why are you afraid to show it?"

"For the same reason you're still with that Weasley girl!" he snapped.

Harry laughed, causing Malfoy to startle and fall out of his defensive position. "You thought that I'd stay with Ginny after what she did? No, Malfoy. We had a very quiet, very private breakup, and as far as I know she's happy with her new trainer boyfriend." He saw Malfoy's shoulders relax slightly, and he gave a slow nod.

"Good. She didn't deserve you."

"And who does?" Somehow... Harry wasn't quite sure when, they had gone from snarling at one another to speaking in low tones. Malfoy was still standing with his arms crossed over his chest, looking away, and Harry advanced slowly. No touch. No talk. No eye contact. Ceaser Millan would have been proud. He

walked right up to Malfoy, waiting for him to make the next move.

Draco couldn't avoid the other man's gaze for very long. "Maybe you need someone more direct," he said, at last, "someone who will tell you when you're screwing up instead of... instead of screwing another man."

They were close now. Very close. Harry closed the distance and kissed Malfoy softly on the lips. Malfoy's eyes slid shut, and even though his still folded arms were trapped between his and Harry's chest like a barrier, he leaned forward, opening his mouth and inviting Harry inside.

Their tongues met, tasting, learning the insides of each other's mouths until Malfoy groaned and Harry pushed forward in a rush, backing Malfoy against his desk and running a hand through his hair up to the back of his neck to steady him. He then took Malfoy's mouth roughly, delighting in the way that Malfoy pushed back. He was no blushing red-headed virgin. He was just as tough and smart as Harry, and Harry thought he would enjoy fighting him for control.

Finally Malfoy got one arm free from between them and pressed it against Harry's chest, separating them and giving them both a moment to breathe. "Why, Potter," he said, voice smooth as silk even though his lips were red and there was a blush to his cheeks, "is that your wand or are you just happy to see me."

Harry grinned, but reluctantly peeled himself back. "It's Harry, if you please, and no it's not my wand." From his pocket he withdrew the same mahogany box that Malfoy had gifted him a few months back. "It's yours."

"Harry?" Draco repeated, sounding shocked and awed. His first name on his tongue made Harry shiver inside.

"You're a good man." Harry trailed off, reaching with his other hand to cup Draco's chin, "Maybe you don't want to believe it, but you are. Besides, I shouldn't keep your own wand from you. It's wrong."

"Yes it is." Draco agreed, and kissed Harry again. After they parted he took the box with reverence, but

didn't open it. "But... you said it still sees you as its Master."

"Well, I guess you'll just have to win it from me," quipped Harry, with a smile. "I'll leave it up to your imagination to figure out how. Would you like to talk about it? Say, over dinner?" It sounded a lot smoother when he had rehearsed the line on his way to the office, but Harry was cheered as Draco nodded and pulled him into yet another kiss.

They couldn't keep their hands off of each other, and soon enough Harry had Draco's back on the desk and was running his tongue under his ear in a way that made him gasp and shiver. Harry grinned and pulled Draco's legs apart, settling himself between to have better access when something white crossed into his vision.

Pyxis was in the corner of the room, watching them both with his head cocked to the side, curious.

"What?" Draco demanded, as Harry hesitated. He twisted about and followed his line of vision. "Pyxis, out!" His voice was not calm, but was definitely assertive enough to get the little terrier running through the little dog door that was for his use only.

"Now," Draco purred, as he ran a finger down Harry's chest, "where were we?"

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As a card, the Fool ultimately stands for a new start.

Don't forget to return to LiveJournal or InsaneJournal to comment!

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