Lessons Learned by Alaana Fair

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Index

Chapter 1: Lessons Learned

Chapter 2: Lessons Learned

Chapter 3: Lessons Learned

Chapter 4: Lessons Learned

Chapter 5: Lessons Learned

Chapter 6: Lessons Learned

Chapter 7: Lessons Learned

Chapter 8: Lessons Learned

Chapter 9: Lessons Learned

Chapter 10: Lessons Learned

Chapter 11: Lessons Learned

Chapter 1: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 1

Draco laid the parchment down on his desk and swivelled his chair round to stare out the window at the beautiful summer garden. The peacocks were strutting about, no doubt looking for peahens to impress. He hated the menaces, but his mother loved them, so he let them stay without a fuss. Without much of a fuss, anyway.

He was happy in the life he'd made for himself. He had a son who was the light of his life; more precocious and stubborn than Draco had ever been, but well mannered and liked by almost everyone who knew him. He had a wife who ... well, whom he could at least tolerate on the rare occasions she was actually present. He had a profession that he thoroughly enjoyed, even if he did have to pander to the masses more than he ever thought he would. At least he wasn't in Azkaban, which was more than could be said for his father. His life was good. Or at least it had been until ten minutes ago.

The one thing Draco hated about his profession was that his success depended heavily on a few, well-placed contacts. Oh, the research part was a piece of cake; he could research potions in his sleep. But getting the ingredients he needed, and getting the potions into the hands of those who could mass-produce them and actually make a respectable profit – that was the difficult part. It demanded a considerable amount of diplomacy, which Draco abhorred but managed with a great deal of finesse.

This, however, might be more than even Draco could handle. He hadn't thought about Harry Potter in

years. Not since – well, some memories were better avoided entirely. He twirled his chair back round to glare at the neatly written words, willing them to change before his very eyes. It didn't work, of course, but it never hurt to try. He sighed as he pulled out a crisp piece of parchment. Dipping his quill in jet-black ink, he penned his reply.

Dear Professor Winklestick,

Of course, I'd be honoured to be of assistance. If I can pass on even the smallest amount of knowledge to your student, it will be knowledge well shared. I look forward to meeting with him and his father on Thursday next.

Yours Sincerely,

Draco Malfoy

Back to Index

Chapter 2: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 2

"Hello, Draco," Harry said as he stood in the doorway holding out his right hand.

Well, damn. What was it about Harry bloody Potter that always caught him off guard? He'd had his speech well prepared; the one that explained how he understood that Potter would be uncomfortable with Draco spending any time with his progeny. How their past would obviously hinder any progress that might be made. But Potter looked almost amicable, as though he actually wanted this to work. Draco, against his better judgement, quickly amended his speech and grasped the proffered hand in a firm grip.

"Good afternoon. Won't you both come in?"

"Thanks for doing this," Harry offered as Draco led them into the study he used on the few occasions he'd tutored Hogwarts students. "I can't imagine you were thrilled with the idea."

"Professor Winklestick is a colleague of mine. I do favours for him when he asks."

Draco sat behind his ostentatious desk and motioned Harry and son to the chairs that had been set up for them.

"Er, this is James, obviously," Harry said as he sat, casting a cautious glance at his son.

Draco had tried to avoid looking at the boy, afraid the bright red hair would hurt his eyes. He forced himself to smile. "Hello, James. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," he lied.

James nodded, but looked decidedly uncomfortable. Draco wondered how much the boy knew about him, especially about his past.

"Professor Winklestick owled over some of your previous work. Quite honestly, if you're going to improve, we'll have to start at the beginning. We'll try lessons twice a week and adjust the schedule as necessary. A potion will be assigned every weekend as homework. You should work under adult supervision at all times." Draco turned to Harry, barely containing a smirk. "Have your potion making

skills improved over the years? The boy will need assistance at home."

Harry surprised Draco by grinning. "Not much, I'm afraid, but I'll do my best."

Draco snorted, wondering if he could charge double if he had to tutor the parents as well. "Fine," he said as he handed Harry a rolled up parchment. "This will be our schedule until I say otherwise. Lessons will start next Thursday and please arrive on time."

Harry took the parchment and stood to leave while James lagged behind a bit, looking miserable as he stared studiously at his feet. Draco was just as surprised by what he said next as Harry apparently was. "James, you can do this if you put your mind to it."

The boy glanced up, speaking for the first time since his arrival. "I ... I just don't seem to get potions, Sir."

Draco smiled. He might still be a bit of an arse, but he'd learnt the first time he'd ever held his son, that children weren't the menaces he'd often thought they were. At least James didn't have Potter's green eyes to go with the messy red hair or he'd look vaguely like a human Christmas decoration. Draco could see a glimmer of hope in the boy's almost transparent blue eyes and thought perhaps, if he could just avoid Harry, this wouldn't be quite the misery that he'd feared it would be.

"You will," Draco answered reassuringly. "Trust me, and you will."

James looked up at his father, obviously asking for encouragement and Harry smiled at him, nodding. It was an oddly intimate moment between father and son, but it passed as quickly as it had come.

Harry held out his hand. "Thanks, Draco. Really. I ... thanks."

Draco shook his hand again, the touch of Harry's skin making him feel uncomfortable for more reasons than he cared to think about. He reminded himself that this was strictly business, and he planned for it

to stay that way.

Back to Index

Chapter 3: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 3

Draco waited impatiently, staring at his menu. The owl had come the morning after his meeting with the illustrious Potters.

Draco,

I was wondering if we could meet for lunch tomorrow. There are a few things I'd like to discuss before James starts his lessons on Thursday.

Harry

He had no idea what "things" Potter needed to discuss, but his curiosity had been piqued and he'd agreed, even though he'd known it was a bad idea. He should have expected Harry to be late, although Draco had to admit the French restaurant he'd specified probably wasn't one with which Potter was familiar. It was, however, one of the few that Draco felt comfortable in. The owners were foreign and didn't have the same prejudice against him that most British wizards still held.

"Mr Malfoy," the waiter asked, "would you care for another glass of wine while you wait?"

Draco simply nodded and pushed his empty glass forward. He despised being made to wait. Something the Boy Who Lived knew all too well.

He was almost finished with his second glass by the time Boy Wonder made an appearance, dripping like a wet rat from the steady summer rain that had begun to fall.

"Sorry I'm late," he said as he removed his soaked Auror robes to reveal a crisp white shirt and charcoal trousers. The crimson tie that hung neatly down his chest matched the deep red robes perfectly, making Draco think of things that were best left buried. "I thought I knew where this place was, but apparently they've moved since I last visited."

"Yes, there was a fire in their old building last year. I thought, as an Auror, you would have known that."

"Yeah, well, as head of the department, I don't get involved with cases as much as I used to. I do vaguely remember reading about it in the Prophet though, now that you mention it."

The waiter appeared, and they both ordered, giving Draco a chance to curtail his annoyance. "So what is so important that it required a meeting?" Draco asked as soon as the waiter had departed. "I do know how to do my job, if that's your concern."

"No," Harry said, shaking his head furiously. "No, it has nothing to do with that. It's ... James." The man paused, looking as though he was uncertain of where to begin. "I'm sure you know about me and Ginny."

"Everyone and his crup knows about the problems of the wizarding world's golden couple. I don't see what that has to do with me."

Harry sighed, clearly not impressed by Draco's remark. "James ... he didn't ... isn't handling the divorce very well. He used to be more ... I don't know. He used to be a normal kid, you know? He used to be funny and laugh about everything. He always reminded me of Fred and George."

Draco saw just a hint of pain flicker across the man's face at the mention of the Weasley twins, and Draco wondered if some losses would ever be forgotten. It gave him the irrational urge to comfort, but he wasn't at all sure how to do that. "Children are resilient, Harry. Look what we went through. We turned out all right."

"I know. It's just ... since Ginny's moved out, he's changed. He's quieter and less confident. He second-guesses every decision he makes. He—" Harry took in a deep breath and let it out in a slow, steady puff of air. "—I just thought you should be aware of the situation, that's all."

So that explained why the boy had looked so despondent the day before. Draco had wondered why he'd seemed so unlike the carefree boy Draco had glimpsed running around platform nine and three-quarters on Scorpius's first day aboard the Hogwarts Express. "I'm sorry to hear that," Draco said honestly. It was a shame children had to suffer from their parents' decisions, but he supposed some things would never change.

"Yeah. Me too. I'd hoped once he was home things would get back to normal, but it seems to have made matters worse. I don't know how it will affect his lessons, but, well, at least now you know."

"Pardon me for asking, but, under the circumstances ... how are things between you and your ex-wife?"

"I ... they're okay. We've been trying to do what's best for the kids. She doesn't hate me, which is probably more than I should expect, since this whole mess is my fault." Harry smiled then, a shy smile that Draco had seen before. It had been years, and Draco had tried his best to block it from his memory. He thought he'd succeeded, but apparently not.

Their food arrived just in time to prevent the conversation from going somewhere it really had no business going. They ate in relative silence while Draco studied his old schoolmate. He hadn't changed that much over the years. He still had that innocence, that air of youthfulness, even now when they were far from youth. Yet there was something different that Draco couldn't quite put his finger on. He didn't really want to delve into that line of thought though. He was here because of a job he'd been asked to do, and he had no intentions of letting Harry Potter distract him.

"James really will need help at home if he is to improve. I wasn't exaggerating about that. His grades are abysmal at best. He has a lot of catching up to do."

Harry bit his lip as if there was something else he wanted to say, as if he hadn't been ready for the change of subject, but after a moment, he appeared to come to some internal decision and decided to let whatever it was go. "I know. I've ... I'll help as much as I can. I've told Kingsley I need to take a bit of holiday time this summer to be with the kids. I just have a few things that need to be taken care of first and then I'm taking a month off. Ginny will have them in August, so I'd like to spend as much time with them as I can." Harry then looked up from his plate, his expression one that Draco couldn't quite read. "Thanks for doing this. He's a smart boy. He just ... needs some motivation. Right now he won't really talk to either Ginny or me, and I think maybe someone else - someone outside the family – will probably be able to get through to him better than we could. I love my son, Draco. But I can't seem to help him."

Draco nodded. Apparently, not even the great Harry Potter could fix everything. He hoped Harry was right and that it would be so simple. Something in his gut, however, told him otherwise. He wasn't sure, though, if his concern was for James or for himself.

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Back to Index

Chapter 4: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 4

"I was hoping we could take a trip this summer. Perhaps Spain or France, maybe even one of the islands. What do you think, Draco?"

Draco glanced up from his untouched food to look into his mother's hopeful eyes. He knew things were still difficult for her, even if she hid it well enough. He hated to say no, but truthfully, he was glad to have a good excuse. "I'm afraid I can't. I have a student to tutor this summer."

"Really?" Scorpius piped up energetically. "Anyone I know?"

"I'm sure you do. It's James Potter."

Draco didn't miss his mother's surprised, inquisitive look, but he chose to ignore it.

"Oh. Yeah, I've seen him at school, but I've never really talked to him. I had Care of Magical Creatures with his brother, but neither one of them are very social with Slytherins."

"His parents approve of your tutoring him?" His mother's tone was conversational but he recognised the undercurrent, the hundreds of questions she would never ask.

"Apparently so. At least his father appears to. I see no reason why you shouldn't take a holiday though,

Mother. Surely one of your friends would be happy to accompany you."

Thankfully, his mother recognised the change of subject for what it was and didn't push further about his new student. His son, on the other hand, had not yet learnt to read him so well.

"Didn't you and Mr Potter hate each other in school?"

"Hate is a strong word, Scorpius, and that was a long time ago. We were children. People grow up, as you well know."

"Yes, but—"

One pointed stare was enough to stop his son's protest mid-sentence. "I've been asked to tutor him and I shall, as I would any other student. My relationship with his father has nothing, whatsoever, to do with it."

Draco only wished his words were true. He hadn't been able to keep his mind off Harry Potter since their meeting four days ago. At times he thought it was just a resurgence of memories pushing their way into his conscious thought, but he had to admit the man was ... different. It puzzled him, and Draco had never been good at resisting a puzzle. He'd also never been quite so nervous about tutoring a student before. He was bloody brilliant at what he did. There was no doubt in his mind of that. If Severus were still alive, he would have probably been both proud and envious of Draco's sheer talent. And helping the famous Harry Potter's son would go a long way in proving that he was not his father, if only to himself. It was an important venture. One he simply could not fail.

"Will Astoria be joining us this summer, or does she plan to stay away indefinitely?"

Draco glared at his mother. She knew never to mention his wife when Scorpius was present.

"I'm afraid I have no idea," he answered coolly. "I've not heard from her of late."

Scorpius cleared his throat, looking obviously uncomfortable. "I ... she owled me a week before the end of term and asked if I wanted her to come. I didn't think it was necessary."

"Scorpius, she's your mother—"

"I know, but ... well, she's never really acted like it, has she? And I thought ... I'm no longer a child, Father. I told her not to bother."

Draco knew this time would come eventually. Astoria hadn't always been such a cold-hearted bitch, but it hadn't taken her long to learn to hate him. Draco took full responsibility for that, but he'd never expected her hatred of him to spill over to their son. Unfortunately, he felt even that was his fault. From the moment the boy was born, he'd been a mirror image of Draco. Even as a baby, Scorpius had the same sharp features, the same grey eyes, even the same platinum blond hair. If Astoria had stayed around long enough, though, she would have realised that their son was not at all like his father. Scorpius was cheerful and pleasant, well behaved and full of an innocence that Draco wondered if he'd ever had, even at a young age. He had an aura about him that made everyone he'd ever met fall instantly in love with him and want to bend over backwards to protect him. Granted, he had his faults, but in truth, Scorpius reminded Draco more of Harry Potter than he did of himself. The fact remained though, that one of Draco's biggest regrets was his inability to marry for love. That he'd failed to give his son a mother who would love him as a mother should. "I'm sorry, son," he said quietly.

Scorpius smiled, his eyes filled with a love and acceptance that Draco knew he didn't deserve. "It's all right, Father. It'll be nice to spend the summer with just you. Maybe you can help me practice flying. I'd like to try out for Quidditch next year and I'm ... well, I'm not the greatest flyer - not yet anyway. And I could help you with your research. Professor Winklestick says I'm a natural at Potions."

"I think I'd like that." Draco loved his son more than he'd ever thought it possible to love another living thing. He'd tried to be the best father he could, but he knew he'd made mistakes along the way. The fact that Scorpius still looked at him as if he'd hung the moon was the reason for everything he'd done in the last twelve years. He would not be a disappointment to his son. No matter what it cost him.

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Back to Index

Chapter 5: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 5

When Draco had emphasised that James shouldn’t be late, he hadn't meant for the boy to be early, but apparently the Potter family had a problem with the concept of being on time. Draco scowled at the house-elf who was bouncing nervously on his odd little toes.

"Fine, Binny. Would you please ask Scorpius to entertain him in the parlour? I can't leave this potion for at least fifteen minutes lest it explode and take half the manor with it."

The elf nodded so briskly Draco worried that his head might pop off and roll away at any moment, leaving no one to notify Scorpius that his assistance was needed.

By the time Draco finally entered the parlour, he was surprised to see Scorpius enthusiastically showing off Draco's potion patents as if they were Quidditch trophies. He was glad that his son was so proud of his accomplishments, but he doubted very much James was even remotely interested.

"Thank you for keeping my student company, Scorpius," he said to his son before turning a curious eye to James. "Did your father not escort you today?" The question was asked purely because Draco had expected Harry to be more interested in his son's activities, not because he'd particularly wanted to see the man.

"Er ... yeah, but he couldn't stay. I'm sorry I'm early. Dad had to get back to work and—"

"It's not a problem, James," Draco interrupted. "If it's more convenient for you to come early, we can adjust the schedule."

The boy ducked his head and glanced at Scorpius shyly. "Um ... thanks for the tour, Scorpius. It was nice to properly meet you."

Scorpius smiled proudly, ever the proper Malfoy host.

"All right then. The lab is this way." Draco indicated the direction before leading the way. He could sense the boy's amazement as he stared at the multitude of paintings lining the wide hallway. Surely he had been in more grandiose places before. They probably dined with the Minister himself on a weekly basis.

"This is a beautiful home, Mr Malfoy. The only place I've ever seen that's this nice is Hogwarts."

Oh. Apparently not. "Yes, well, it's been the family home for centuries. The house-elves take great pride in its upkeep."

They reached the doorway leading into his lab and Draco swung the door open, motioning for James to enter first. The boy's eyes widened as he stared at the wall lined with glass shelves, filled from top to bottom with a variety of boxes and coloured bottles in all shapes and sizes.

"Much of our work will be done here." Draco pointed toward the large wooden table in the middle of the

room. "Why don't you have a seat and we can go over some of the basics first?"

The boy sat quietly as Draco reviewed concepts that any first year Potions student should know. Other than James' occasional nod and the nervous fiddling with the hem of his shirt, Draco felt like he was talking to himself.

"This isn't a lecture, James. I'll expect you to speak up and ask questions if you don't understand something. Otherwise, I'll assume you've got it and move on."

"Um ... I think I'm okay with the theory part. It's the practical stuff that I always seem to bollocks up."

"Well, then, why don't we try a simple potion and see how you do?" Draco looked over the list of potions Professor Winklestick had owled. There were two columns: one very short one for the potions James had successfully brewed, and one very long one for the potions he'd attempted yet failed. It was rather easy to discern a pattern. The potions the boy had brewed correctly were ones that required little if no precision in preparation. Perhaps he just needed help mastering his technique for manipulating his ingredients.

"Let's begin with a simple Burn-Healing Paste. Here's the list of ingredients you'll need. On the shelves, all ingredients are separated by type." Draco stood and motioned for James to follow. As he approached the shelves, he could almost see the boy’s eyes begin to glaze over at the sheer quantity presented. "It's not nearly as daunting as it looks," Draco said, unable to suppress a slight smirk.

"There aren't quite this many at Hogwarts, that's all," James replied nervously.

"No, I suppose there aren't. From these stores alone, I can brew ninety percent of the potions known to mankind, and many as yet undiscovered. That's the true joy of potion making, James. Once you understand the fundamentals, there's no limit to what your imagination can come up with. Once you know what each ingredient does and how it interacts with other ingredients, you can manipulate things however you want. It's not just about gathering a list of ingredients and following instructions, although that's the way you usually learn. It's more about understanding than doing. Does that make any sense?"

James chewed his bottom lip as he looked the shelves up and down. Draco had to force himself to turn away, lest his mind wander to forbidden thoughts. "I suppose it does, but how do you understand what they do? There's just so many of them."

"Time, James. And practice." Draco smiled as the boy's shoulders slumped. "And many, many mistakes."

"I don't like to make mistakes," he answered with an odd determination.

"Well, you'll need to get used to it. You will make more mistakes than you can possibly count before you master Potions. But the important thing is to learn from them. If you can learn from your mistakes, then they're not really mistakes at all."

The boy looked up, startled, and then grinned as though Draco's permission to make mistakes had been a wondrous gift. Draco wondered at that moment if James' fear was not of Potions at all, but of failure. That was certainly something Draco could relate to, and something he was more than willing to help the boy overcome.

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Back to Index

Chapter 6: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 6

The first few weeks of James' lessons were awkward at best; not just for James but for Draco as well. Harry Potter was everything that Draco hadn't expected him to be. Cordial, bordering on friendly. Inquisitive. Helpful even. But most surprisingly, he was appreciative.

Draco should have been annoyed by the constant stream of owls carrying questions about James' homework - potions that any normal adult should be able to brew in their sleep. But the questions were always followed by a gracious thank you and a note on how pleased Harry was with his son's progress. The words stripped Draco of his irritation before it had a chance to take root. Draco had forgotten what it felt like to be appreciated. He felt great pride in his work, but any appreciation for the potions he created were met with only a minimum amount of gratitude, as if nothing he could accomplish would ever make up for his past mistakes.

The first time James came tearing into his office fuming with indignation because he couldn't get a potion right, Draco realised how much the boy's success meant to him. Meant to them both.

"I don't understand why it's not working!"

"Don't you?"

"No! If I bloody well knew then I'd fix it, wouldn't I?"

The boy crossed his arms and half-scowled, half-pouted. Draco couldn't help but find the look a bit endearing after the last couple of weeks of almost complete calm and mild disinterest.

"Tell me what ingredients you used."

James sighed, scrubbing his face with his hands before pulling out his parchment. "Dried lavender spikes—"

"What type of lavender?"

"Lavandin."

Draco nodded. "All right, what else?"

"Dragon eggshells."

"And how were they prepared?"

"Ground into a powder using a marble mortar and no more than twenty, but no less than ten strokes of a pestle."

"Very good. What else?"

"One beak of a Fwooper."

"And why the beak?"

"Er..."

Draco lifted his eyes from where he'd been pretending to read. "Er?"

"I ... because that's what the list said?"

"An appropriate answer; however, not the one I was after."

"I don't know."

"Of course you don't. I didn't tell you. How would you know?"

"Er..."

Draco chuckled. 'Er' seemed to be one of the boy's favourite words. "My point is, unless you know why you're using the beak, how can you know precisely if you're using it correctly and therefore how can you know exactly what you're doing wrong?"

"But that's not how they usually teach Potions, is it?"

"Unfortunately no, which is part of the reason you're here, mostly the reason eighty percent of adults buy their potions at an apothecary, and entirely the reason that I have a job. However, I am not they and if you want me to teach you how to make a proper potion you will need to learn why as well as how. Understood?"

James grinned and it was so infectious, Draco had to fight not to grin back. "So how am I supposed to know the whys as well as the hows?"

"You will use this." Draco handed James a large tome that probably weighed as much as the boy did. Luckily, there were Lightening Charms for such things. "This book has every potion ingredient known to mankind – many of them illegal and highly dangerous, so you might not want to show it to your father," Draco added with a wink.

James was obviously in awe, if the whispered, "cool" was anything to go by. Draco hid his smile. The boy had definitely grown on him over the weeks.

"It doesn't have a name?" James asked as he studied both the front and back covers.

"Does it need one?"

"Well, yeah. A book should have a name."

"Very well—" Draco waved his wand over the worn leather cover and fancy letters began to appear.

"Draco Malfoy's Tome of Potion Ingredients by the infamous, brilliant and extremely handsome, Draco Malfoy," James read aloud through his giggles.

Draco gave the boy a serious look. "You don't like the name?"

James smiled again. "I think it's brilliant!"

"Good. Now gather your things. Your father will be here any moment to collect you."

James jumped up from his chair and headed toward the door, but turned before opening it. "Mr Malfoy?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks," James said quietly, looking down at the book in his hands instead of at Draco.

"Just don't lose it," Draco said as he stood to escort James to the Floo to meet his father. "It's my only copy."

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Draco,

Where would one find toenail clippings from a Jarvey?

Harry

~~~

Harry,

Why would one want to find toenail clippings from a Jarvey?

Draco

~~~

Draco,

Because your brilliant student, my brilliant son, told me that if I added two toenail clippings from a Jarvey to a normal Headache Potion it would double its effectiveness and I've had a headache for three
~~~

days that I can't seem to get rid of.

Harry

~~~

Harry,

Don't hurt yourself by thinking too hard. That's probably what caused the headache to begin with. I've enclosed a potion that will work. I'll think of a way for you to repay me, I'm sure.

Draco

P.S. Tell James well done. He's absolutely right.

~~~

"But Dad said—"

"Your dad has pathetic potion making skills! Don't listen to him, listen to me."

James chuckled, making Draco's lip quirk just the tiniest bit. "Funny. That's exactly what my dad said."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah. He said that at Hogwarts you were always better at Potions than he was. That I'd unfortunately

inherited the Potter Potion Gene."

Draco had to laugh because Harry could quite possibly be right. James was improving and he really did try, but something was preventing him from taking the ideas and theory that he no doubt knew and actually putting them to use. His intelligence wasn't in question; he was bright enough. Draco had requested information about his other classes and had learnt that while he wasn't an exceptional student, he was all right. The past year had been a struggle for him in many of his classes, but none quite as much as Potions.

No, the boy was smart enough, he just lacked ... confidence. For their first few lessons, Draco wondered if he had any self-esteem at all. Draco would have thought growing up as the son of Harry Potter would have given him an overabundance of self-importance, but then again, constantly being compared to the Boy Who Lived might come with a higher price than Draco had imagined.

"Explain to me how you made the potion."

"You sat there and watched me. You know very well how I made it." James crossed his arms and scowled as if daring Draco to disagree. It should have irritated him that the boy was being so belligerent, but for some reason, it didn't.

"Which means," Draco responded calmly, "that I'll know if you forget to tell me something, won't it? Now walk me through every step and tell me exactly what you did."

James sighed, then his scowl finally twisted into that look of determination that Draco unfortunately knew he'd inherited from his father.

"I added two ounces of crocodile saliva to the heated cauldron. Then I cut six baby squid tentacles in precisely ten slices each and added them as soon as the crocodile saliva began to steam—"

"And you're sure it was just steaming. It hadn't begun to boil?"

"No. I'm sure. As soon as it began to steam, I dropped the tentacles in, five slices at a time and stirred three clockwise strokes between each."

"All right. Then what?"

"Then I waited two minutes and added two pinches of dried ginger roots and it turned orange instead of purple!"

"And what would make it turn orange instead of purple?"

James sat for a moment looking thoughtful until his expression turned to confusion. "If the ginger roots had been dried too long or maybe if they had been dried in sunlight instead of total darkness, but it came from your stores, so—"

"Second rule of potion making, James."

"What? You haven't given me a second rule of potion making!"

"Which is what today's lesson will be about." Draco sat on the table next to James' cauldron and waved his wand so the bubbling orange liquid disappeared. "The second rule of potion making is always be sure you can trust your sources."

"But ... but it all ... the dried ginger roots came from you."

Draco didn't even try to hide his smirk. "Yes, they did."

"You mean you ... on purpose! I'm really starting to hate you," James grumbled under his breath.

"I'm sure there are a number of clubs you could join. But I must say I'm rather proud that you sorted it out so quickly."

"I can't believe you did that. Do you know how many times I tried this at home? Dad was going spare trying to help. We couldn't figure it out!"

"Of course you couldn't. But the important thing is, you have now. And you'll know in the future to trust your instincts. If you think you've done everything right, look to other sources for the problem. Your potion will only be as good as the ingredients you use."

"Dad will kill you when he finds out."

Draco chuckled at the thought of Harry working furiously to try to help his son with a potion that was probably far beyond his scope. James was probably right. Harry would be livid and for some reason that, more than anything else, made him smile. James must have read something in his expression, because his next question took Draco completely off guard.

"Why did you and Dad hate each other at Hogwarts?"

Draco stood a bit more abruptly than he'd meant to, subconsciously tugging his robes tightly around himself. "It's not important."

"Dad says he never gave you a chance. That if he hadn't judged you so quickly things might have been different between the two of you. He says he wishes he had."

A sharp pain lanced Draco's chest and he had to fight to seem unaffected by the words. Yes, many things could have been different, but that line of thought was pointless. You couldn't change the past, no

matter how much you wanted to.

"I was an obnoxious, self-centred brat and your father was the wizarding world's boy hero," Draco snapped as he busied himself with straightening ingredients that were already in perfect order. He had no intention of discussing his past with anyone, much less with the son of Harry Potter. But when he turned to face James, all he saw was a curious child. A child he'd become more attached to than he should have ever let himself become. He sighed heavily and took the seat next to his student. "James, that's all most people saw in either of us and that's certainly all we saw in each other. We were natural enemies from the very beginning. I doubt anything could have changed that."

"You're not anymore, though, right? I mean, Dad says you're brilliant at Potions and at teaching and—"

"Why do I get the feeling you and your father talk too much about me and not enough about Potions?"

James bit his lip and started to say something else but apparently changed his mind. "Yeah, okay, I get that you don't want to talk about it. But ... you're friends now, aren't you? Kind of."

There was a sort of pleading in the boy's voice that Draco didn’t quite understand. Why it seemed so important that he and Harry be friends, Draco couldn't fathom, but it obviously was. "Yes, James, I suppose we kind of are. Now can we get back to your lesson?"

The boy beamed as if Draco had just given him permission to skive off homework for the next month. Draco, on the other hand, wanted nothing more than to find a dark corner to curl up in until the onslaught of memories could be pushed back to where they belonged.

TBC

Back to Index

Chapter 7: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 7

Draco entered the parlour with a mixture of worry and irritation. James hadn't been late for a single lesson over the last month and a half; in fact, he'd seemed to be purposefully arriving earlier and earlier each day. Draco had his suspicions about why this was. They ranged anywhere from simple boredom at home, to the friendship he'd seen flourishing between James and Scorpius over the weeks. Scorpius seemed to enjoy entertaining James while he waited for Draco as much as James seemed to like to be entertained. Draco had entered the parlour several times to find the boys doubled over in fits of giggles. He'd not been brave enough to ask what all the ruckus had been. There were some things a father simply didn't want to know.

"Has James not arrived yet? He's half an hour late."

Scorpius shook his head, looking as worried as Draco was. "Thursday he said he was going to stay with his mother this week. You don't think she'd forbid him to come, do you?"

Draco mentally hexed himself for not remembering. It would have probably been a good idea to contact James' mother to make sure she was aware of their arrangement. He'd assumed Harry had given her all the details though. Just as he was about to pick up a quill to owl Harry with his concerns, the Floo roared to life and out stepped a very exhausted looking James Potter.

"Sorry I'm late," he said immediately. "I couldn't find my Potions book and I panicked that it had been

lost in the move and I knew that if I lost it you'd hex me to—"

"James, breathe," Draco said with a chuckle. "It's all right; we were just a bit worried. Everything okay at home?"

"I ... yeah, it's just ... staying with Mum is going to take some getting used to, and Rose and Hugo were over, and I was still unpacking and everything was so chaotic and ... yeah, everything's fine. I'm just a bit knackered, that's all."

"I'm sorry, James. I should have owled your mother beforehand. I'd honestly forgotten that you were staying with her this month. Are the lesson times convenient for her, or do you think we'll need to reschedule?"

"No, they're fine. I'll be on time next lesson. I promise."

Draco took one look at the boy and knew there'd be no progress made in their lessons today. He looked like he'd been dragged through the Forbidden Forest by angry centaurs. "Scorpius and I seem to have missed lunch this afternoon, have you eaten?"

It took Scorpius only a split-second to catch on and he thankfully didn't blurt out that they'd only finished lunch an hour ago. "Father, do you think we could have a picnic by the lake? It's a beautiful day and you could show James the greenhouse where you grow some of your potion ingredients."

"I think that's a fabulous idea, Scorpius. I've been meaning to get to that part of our lessons, and haven't managed it yet. James, what do you think?"

The relief on the boy's face was immeasurable. "That'd be brilliant. I'm afraid of what might happen if I attempted to make a potion now anyway."

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The rest of August brought with it a completely unexpected array of feelings for Draco. Dealing with Ginny Weasley-Potter wasn't nearly as stressful as Draco had imagined. She was, while not exactly friendly, at least cordial. On one occasion, she'd even managed to thank him for his assistance with James, although he could tell it took a bit of work to get the words past her lips. He always responded with politeness, whether he wanted to or not. He thought he owed James that much.

The steady stream of owls from Harry had diminished, much to Draco's chagrin. He'd become accustomed to being interrupted in the middle of dinner three times a week. James was making great strides toward becoming a proficient Potions student. By September first, Draco had no doubt the boy would start his third year at Hogwarts without a thing to worry about.

Draco was already starting to dread that day. He always missed his son when he was away, but this summer had been one of their best summers ever. Between flying together and experimenting with various potions, he was used to the boy's company. He had to admit, he'd become comfortable with James' company as well.

At least his mother would be home by then so the house wouldn't seem so terribly empty. Of course, she'd bring with her an entirely new set of problems. His mother had never needed Legilimency to know what he was thinking, and as much as he tried not to think about Harry Potter, he seemed, more often than not, to be completely unsuccessful.

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"Don't look so nervous. You've successfully brewed all of the assigned potions for first and second year as well as many that will be assigned this year. Not to mention all the potions you've helped me make for my stores. You're ready. I have complete faith in you."

James stood and turned to lay Draco's ingredient book on the large wooden table where they'd spent so much of their time over the summer. "Thanks for letting me use your book. It helped a lot." James grinned mischievously. "Especially the little notes in the margins. I'll be the life of the party at Hogwarts

this year."

"Yes... well, just don't let your parents know the mischief came from me. I already have enough to answer for since I taught you to brew those See Me Not Potions. Your father still doesn't believe I didn't know they'd make clothes invisible if it spilled on them."

James burst out laughing. "Oh, you should have seen his face when that cauldron exploded and covered him with it! I wish you'd been there. You would have loved it."

Yes, Draco thought, he probably would have loved it, but it wouldn't have been for the humour.

"You'll be at King's Cross on Monday, won't you?" James asked more seriously. Draco couldn't quite determine why it would matter if he was going to be there or not, but it was obvious by the boy's expression that it did.

"Of course, I'll be there. I wouldn't dream of sending Scorpius off without saying goodbye."

James grinned from ear to ear. "Good. I'll see you then—"

"You forgot something," Draco said as he stood and handed James a book much like his old leather-bound copy. "I believe this might come in handy. I left out the illegal and highly dangerous ones. Professor Winklestick would have been very displeased otherwise."

James took it, studying the front cover, and then looked up expectantly. Draco smiled, waving his wand until neatly written bold letters appeared.

James Sirius Potter's Book of Potion Ingredients

--by the illustrious, brilliant, Draco Malfoy

"You left out handsome."

Draco shrugged. "Everyone already knows that anyway. No need to be redundant."

~~~

Draco hadn't realised he'd dozed off until he felt a firm hand on his shoulder. "Hey, how is he?"

He looked up to see the last person he would have expected. "He'll be fine. He's just sleeping. Why are you here? Surely a student falling off his broom doesn't warrant an Auror investigation?"

"No," Harry answered, shaking his head. "But apparently my son is in a bit of trouble for hexing a student with a rather nasty curse. Have they told you what happened?"

"No, nothing," Draco answered, not even attempting to disguise his irritation. "McGonagall said she had another matter to attend to and would be back shortly. That was two hours ago."

"I should probably wait then—"

"If you know what happened to my son, you should probably tell me before I hex it out of you." Draco almost grimaced at the acidic tone in his voice, but instead of scowling, the corner of Harry's lip quirked up into a half grin. Draco hated that grin. At least he tried to.

"A fifth year apparently took exception to being booted from the Slytherin Quidditch team by a second year and hexed Scorpius' broom. James overheard him bragging about it after practice and decided to take it upon himself to make sure it didn't happen again."
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Draco rolled his eyes. "Playing at being the Gryffindor hero, is he?"

Harry sat in the chair next to Draco and chuckled. "It appears he's taken a liking to Scorpius. Much the same as he has to the boy's father."

Draco wasn't sure why that statement pleased him so much. The mere idea of Harry Potter's son jumping to Scorpius' defence warmed him in a way he didn't care to think about, but he would be damned if he'd let Harry know that. "I suppose I owe him a debt of gratitude then."

"I think perhaps it's the other way round. Have you seen his Potions grades lately?"

Draco couldn't help but smirk. Professor Winklestick had just owled James' most recent grades and they were greatly improved. "Yes. He appears to be 'getting it' this year."

"I was planning to owl you later actually. I was thinking perhaps I needed to improve my skills before he gets home this summer or I'll never be able to help him with his homework."

"I doubt he'll be in need of my assistance next summer."

"Maybe not, but he's asked that you be allowed to tutor him again anyway. If you don't mind, that is."

Draco could think of a hundred reasons why he should mind, but not a single reason why he did. He simply shrugged. "If that's what you both want."

The smile on Harry's face was mesmerising. Soft and warm and genuine and ... Draco had to stop himself from wishing for things that were never meant to be.

TBC

Back to Index

Chapter 8: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 8

"It sounds like you had a successful year, Scorpius. I don't recall there ever being a time when the House Cup ended in a draw, and certainly not one between Slytherin and Gryffindor."

"Oh, Grandmother, it was brilliant!" Scorpius was practically bouncing in his chair at the dining table. Draco hid his grin behind his napkin. He'd never known his son to be quite so animated. "My housemates weren't exactly thrilled at first because a lot of the points for Gryffindor came from James tutoring me and a few others in Defence Against the Dark Arts, but then I reminded them about all the points I'd earned by helping Albus and his little Gryffindor friends with Potions and they had to back off. There was one amazing party afterwards, that's for sure."

"Albus?" Narcissa asked thoughtfully. "He's the younger Potter boy, correct? The one in your year?"

Draco shot her warning glance. He wasn't sure where she was headed, but she had that look in her eye that was never good.

"Yeah. He's in my year, but he's in Gryffindor. They're not as bad as everyone used to say. A bit stubborn and not always the sharpest quill in the inkwell, but most of them have a wicked sense of humour. "

Narcissa looked up from her plate just long enough to catch Draco's eyes. Luckily, he'd become quite adept at ignoring his mother's stares.

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Draco reclined in his plush chair and studied his student. It appeared the past year had been good to James Potter. He held himself more upright, shoulders back, head high, indicating more confidence than he'd had the previous summer. Draco's innate curiosity made him want to ask what had changed. Surely, the simple ability to throw together a decent potion wasn't enough to have affected him so much. He'd heard through the proverbial grapevine that James had improved in all of his subjects, not just Potions. He'd even learnt from his son that James had continued to not only hex anyone who looked at Scorpius the wrong way, but to help him with his Defence Against the Dark Arts work, a subject in which James was now top of his class. Draco would have expected that to have been the case from the very beginning, but he knew the boy had struggled with that as well.

"Good morning, James. You do realise you don't actually need these lessons any longer, don't you?"

"Yeah, I know, but I was hoping that with your help I'd be able to pull out an Outstanding in my O.W.L.'s."

"You won't sit O.W.L's until year five, why worry about it now?"

"I don't want to take any chances, what with everyone and their brother vying for the fifteen Auror positions available."

"Still want to be an Auror like your father, then?"
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The boy grinned mischievously. "Nah, not like my dad. Better."

Draco chuckled. "That might be a bit tougher than you think. I hear he's the best they have."

"Of course he is." James shrugged, as if the fact didn't bother him, but Draco knew better. "But Dad says if I work hard and do my best, I can be whatever I want."

"And that's what you want?"

"It's the only way anyone will ever see me for who I am, not just the son of ... well, you know better than anyone what I mean."

Yes. Draco did know, and it made perfect sense. If anyone had something to prove it would be the eldest son of the famous Harry Potter. "Okay, then. Let's get to work. I won't make it easy for you, though. You do realise that, don't you?"

James smiled – that same enigmatic smile that his father had shared over the last year when they had met to discuss Harry's potion making skills, or lack thereof. He couldn't honestly say that Harry's skills had improved much, as their meetings had usually occurred over lunch and had quickly dissolved into more discussions of their children and the latest Ministry gossip than of ingredients or stirring techniques, but the man would at least be able to prevent any major catastrophes where his son was concerned.

"All right. We'll spend the first few lessons reviewing what you know. Then, if you've really improved as much as Professor Winklestick says you have, I have a special potion I'd like you to try."

The boy's eyes lit up with excitement and Draco couldn't help but grin. In that moment, he realised how much he'd missed their lessons over the school year. There was something about James Potter that had Draco silently cheering him on, hoping against hope that he would win whatever internal battle he'd set

for himself.

"All in good time, James. Review first, fun later."

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"So what's this potion you keep threatening me with?"

James was leaning back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest, not in a defensive or belligerent manner, but in a way that showed he was completely comfortable in Draco's presence. His long legs were stretched out beneath the table and casually crossed at the ankles as if he belonged there as much as Draco did. He really had come a long way, not just in his potion making, but also in his demeanour and his confidence. He'd come to accept his home life and his parent's divorce as just another unpleasant fact that he must live with. Draco had known he would eventually, but he was surprised by how proud he was of the boy. His skill with Potions was now well beyond his years, and what worried Draco was that the boy had become almost complacent. His original idea of having him make Felix Felicis just wouldn't do. It wasn't enough of a challenge for him. A change of plan was in order.

"It's called Memoria Adepto. Have you ever heard of it?"

"Er, yeah, I think we studied it in class last year. Isn't it some kind of memory enhancer?"

"Not exactly. It's in the family of Healing Potions. It can help to repair memories that have been lost due to head trauma or for those who've been Obliviated. It's extremely time consuming and takes several weeks to brew. Every step must be done with exact precision. It won't be easy." Draco shuffled through a stack of parchments, pulling out the one and only copy of instructions. "First I'd like you to copy this down so you have your own. You'll need to study it carefully before we start. This is not the kind of potion you can jump headlong into – making mistakes on this one could have disastrous results."

James took the parchment and studied it, his face growing paler by the minute. Draco expected as much. When he finally looked up, Draco caught a glimpse of the insecure little boy he'd met at that first
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meeting.

"This is impossible."

"Nothing's impossible."

"Maybe not for you, but—"

"I said it wouldn't be easy."

"Yeah, but ..." Draco raised his eyebrows in challenge. It took a few minutes, but James eventually narrowed his eyes in resolve. "Fine. I'll try, but ... yeah, okay, where do I start?"

Draco grinned, a sense of relief washing over him. This would certainly be a test for the boy, but Draco had every confidence he would pass. "The same as always, James. All potions start the same way, whether it's a simple Healing Potion or a complicated Memoria Adepto. You begin with the best ingredients and prepare them perfectly. Then you mix them in the correct order, perfect your timing, and you end up with a proper potion. If you mess anything up, even the most minute step, you end up with rubbish."

James sighed heavily, looking down at the parchment as if it were a death sentence. He glanced momentarily at Draco, searching his face as if looking for a glimmer of doubt, and upon finding none, he nodded in understanding. He silently pulled out a quill and began copying down the ingredients he would need to get started. A completely irrational surge of pride welled up in Draco's chest, but luckily he managed to squash it before saying something ridiculously sentimental.

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James' first attempt at making the potion was abysmal; his second, a week later, wasn't much better. He'd not managed to get past the first step and was understandably frustrated. Draco remembered
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feeling the same way when he was creating the potion. That sense of impossibility. That feeling that he'd never get it right. But he had, and he knew James would too, as long as he didn't give up.

"I don't know what I'm doing wrong! I shredded the Jobberknoll feathers exactly the way I was supposed to. I timed it perfectly, I stirred it—"

"If you'd done everything perfectly you wouldn't have ended up with—" Draco scrunched up his nose at the green mess that was slowly congealing in the shiny cauldron, "—this."

"Fine. What am I doing wrong? You know, don't you."

"Of course I know. What kind of a Potion Master would I be if I didn't?"

"Then why won't you tell me?"

Draco sat on the stool next to the worktable, motioning for James to sit as well. "If I told you, then what good would it do? Yes, you'd be able to make the potion, but it would be my success, not yours. Making potions isn't just about adding things together; it's about understanding the nuances of every step. And this isn't just about making a potion, James. It's about thinking. About studying the ingredients and understanding what they do and how they react, about figuring out why it turned green instead of blue, why it's solidifying into a disgusting glob instead of the beautiful liquid it should be. About trusting in your ability and believing in yourself. If you can learn that, you really can do anything."

"I don't know if I can—"

"Yes, you can. I wouldn't ask you to if I didn't think you could."

Draco waited, wondering if he had perhaps pushed too hard, but slowly the defeated look in the boy's eyes hardened into the determination Draco had grown to expect, and Draco knew he'd been right. Underneath that good natured reserve was a tenacity that was just dying to come out and if James was

ever going to be better than his father, he would need every ounce of it.

James stood without a word and dumped the messy concoction into the sink, then strode to the ingredients cabinet and began to pull out bottles. Draco followed, laying a hand on his arm and shaking his head. "Not today. Go home. Study your list of ingredients. Think about what each of them does and how they interact. Figure out what you did wrong. Then and only then, should you try again."

James' lip twisted until a small grin broke through the scowl. "Yeah, okay, but—"

"In the meantime, I'd like you to practice making Sleeping Draught and Pepperup Potion. My stores are running low."

James let out a huff that quickly became a childish snigger. "Yeah, okay, I get it," he said, making Draco smile.

TBC

Back to Index

Chapter 9: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 9

"James, the shrivelfig goes before the rat's spleen. You know that!"

"I know, I just ... oh, fuck it!" James threw his stirring stick to the table and fell back into his chair.

Draco sat next to him, taking a deep breath before responding to the childish outburst. Luckily, he'd dealt with enough of these from his own son to know how to handle them. "James, this is an easy one. You've made it countless times; you're just not focusing. What's the problem?"

When James looked up, his eyes seemed older than ever, weighed down as if all the burdens of the world were on his shoulders. "It's just ..." he sighed, his shoulders slumping in defeat. "It's Dad."

Oh. Draco knew he should end their lesson and send the boy home, but his bloody curiosity wouldn't let him. "Look, James, I'm not a counsellor, but if it will help you to get your mind back on your work, you can talk to me about whatever it is that's bothering you."

The boy hesitated only a second. "You obviously haven't seen the Prophet today."

Draco wasn't about to admit that he no longer subscribed to the useless rag. He'd given up reading it years ago. "No. I haven't. Is there an expose on why James Potter has forgotten everything he's learnt about potions over the last two years?"

James reached into his bag and pulled out the morning's edition. On the front cover was a photo of Harry in what looked like an extremely compromising position with another man. Hundreds of thoughts swirled through Draco's mind, but one look at his student made them easy to push away.

"Have you talked to your father?"

"No! What am I supposed to say to him? Hey, Dad, saw the paper. How's your new boyfriend?" James stood abruptly and began pacing the same trail that Draco knew he, himself, had paced on several occasions.

"You should talk to him, James. He's the only one who can answer the questions that must be running through your mind."

"I can't ... I mean, I know it's not ... there's nothing wrong with it, but ... why would he marry my mum if...? Why wouldn't he have told us?"

The anguish in the boy's eyes made Draco's heart ache. He'd often wondered how long it would be before his own son asked him the same questions. He looked closely at the boy and realised that, against all odds, he'd come to care about James Potter. Not just as a student, but also as a child, and now as a very confused young man. As Draco saw it, he had two choices: push him away and let him figure it out for himself, or try to help him understand. The latter would mean saying aloud something he swore he'd never again admit to another living soul. Surprisingly, the choice was an easy one.

"Sometimes," he answered softly, "people just want to be normal. Sometimes they try so hard that they convince themselves they are. But it's not something you can change, James. It's who you are, and no matter how much you run away from it or how hard you deny it, or try to cover it up, or pretend that it doesn't exist, you can't ignore it. Not deep down where it counts."

James had halted his pacing at Draco's first word and he stood staring, blinking back moisture that made his wide eyes look almost iridescent. His confusion slowly made way to realisation and Draco simply nodded before he could ask the question. "Would it really be so bad? Does it change who he is?"

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Draco wasn't really surprised when he opened the door to find Harry shuffling his feet nervously on his front step. He'd expected the visit sooner or later. What he wasn't at all sure of, was what the visit would entail. There were a hundred different possibilities.
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"Harry, this is a surprise. Won't you come in?"

"Thanks. I—"

"Would you like some tea?" Draco asked as he led the way to the parlour. "Or perhaps ... something stronger?"

Harry laughed as he sat. "Yeah, I think something stronger would be good."

Draco poured them both a glass of his finest Bourbon and sat in the chair farthest from the sofa where Harry was bouncing his knee nervously.

"James and I had a long talk."

Draco nodded, but didn't respond. Truthfully, he had no idea what he should say.

"He said ... bloody hell, this is an uncomfortable conversation."

Draco chuckled and some of the tension drained from the room. "You don't need to explain anything to me, Harry. What goes on in your life is really none of my business."

"I know, but I ... fuck, I need to talk to someone and James ... he said that you ... that you didn't come right out and say it but that he thought you ... might understand."

"Harry, your sexual preferences are your own business."

Harry snorted and looked at him as if he was a three-headed Thestral. "It's not really just my business anymore now, is it? The Prophet seems to think the whole world needs to know."

"Yes, well, the Prophet is run by boring busybodies who have no lives of their own. You should know that by now. And for the record, yes, I understand completely." There he'd said it. It wasn't nearly as hard as he'd thought it would be. "How's James?" he asked quickly, trying to forego any questions Harry might feel compelled to ask.

"He's all right now. He was understandably freaked out at first, as were Al and Lily. Thankfully Ginny already knew and has been somewhat helpful."

"And how are you?"

Harry looked more surprised by the question than Draco thought he should have been under the circumstances. Perhaps he didn't consider them friends, after all.

"I'm all right. I've taken a leave of absence from work. Kingsley said I didn't need to, but it's caused chaos every time I've been there. Reporters camped outside the Ministry, outside my home. I'm moving back into Grimmauld Place. Hermione's agreed to help me put the Fidelius Charm back on it so they can't find me. It's ... it's ridiculous. I've been getting hundreds of owls. People saying they hate me, people begging me to deny it, people asking me to be a spokesperson for their cause, people wanting—"

"And what do you want?"

Harry looked at him again as if surprised by the question. "When has what I wanted ever really mattered?"

That statement hurt more than it should have, but Draco refused to let his emotions get the best of him. "Since you no longer have a prophecy hanging over your head. You're an adult now, fully capable of making your own decisions."

"Yeah, I guess I'm still not used to that."

"Perhaps it's time you got used to it, then."

"I don't know what I want anymore. I'm not sure that I ever have, really. When I was a kid, before I found out I was a wizard, I just wanted what any kid would want. To be loved. To have someone who thought I was worth loving. To be special to someone. Then when I found out I was special I just wanted to be normal - a normal wizard with a normal life. And now ... I have no idea what I want."

Harry looked so lost, almost helpless. Something Draco had a hard time imagining even in his wildest dreams. Harry Potter was many things, but helpless had never been one of them. Yet Draco understood exactly how he felt. He knew more than he ever wanted to know about what Harry wanted and the knowledge hurt more than he'd let himself admit. Draco had too many things he wanted to say, but couldn't and knew if he didn't end this conversation soon he'd surely regret it.

"Perhaps it's time you sorted that out too. How do you ever expect to be happy if you don't know what you want out of life?"

"Do you know what you want?"

The question blindsided him. He didn't dwell on such things. It wasn't healthy. "I thought I knew once, but I'm not so sure anymore. What I want ... what I want, I know I can never have, so it doesn't really matter, does it?"

Harry opened his mouth to say something, but clamped it back down before anything could come out. Draco thought it was just as well. This line of conversation couldn't lead to anything good.

"Don't worry so much, Harry. You'll figure it out. You always do."

TBC

Back to Index

Chapter 10: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 10

"How's the move coming along?"

James looked up from his cauldron, his concentration temporarily broken. It had been two weeks since Harry had visited and James hadn't mentioned his family life at all. It had worried Draco at first. He knew what it was like to have to keep everything inside and pretend life was normal when everything was really crashing down around your feet. But James had been fine with his potion making and Draco had held back on asking any questions until his annoying curiosity would no longer let him.

"We're all moved in. In his rush though, Dad just spelled everything into boxes, so now we can't find anything. He seems to be enjoying the unpacking though. He says it's like Christmas since you never know what will be in the box you open up." James laughed and rolled his eyes. It was obvious he was trying to cover up his uncertainty. "I think it keeps his mind off other things. He's ... he's actually handling

things a lot better now, but it's weird living at Grimmauld Place. It's so gloomy."

"You'll be going to your mother's soon, though, correct? In August, like last year?"

"Yeah, I suppose. I kind of hate to leave Dad alone, though, you know? But I guess he'll be going back to work by then. He misses it, even if he doesn't say as much."

James picked up the last of the anise seeds and placed them carefully onto the scales, weighing them with a precision that made Draco proud. The boy was so close - if he could just make it past this last step, he'd have it.

"Does that look right to you?" James asked, eyeing the measurement carefully.

"It doesn't matter if it looks right to me. It's your potion."

"Yeah, but ... I know I've done everything right this time. I don't want to screw it up."

"Then don't."

James sniggered. "A fat lot of help you are. Thanks."

Draco grinned. Yes, the boy had definitely grown on him. "Do you think it's right?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Then it's right. Confidence, remember? Have faith in your ability, James. That's half the battle."

James nodded, carefully removing the seeds from the scale to sprinkle them into his cauldron. The concoction bubbled and James quickly stirred it three strokes clockwise before picking up his wand to whisper a cooling charm. The bubbling slowed until the liquid smoothed into a perfectly blue, glassy surface. Draco could see James holding his breath, his eyes narrowed in concentration. He tapped the timer with his wand until a large ten floated above it.

"There. Ten minutes, right?"

Draco nodded and they watched together as the surface of the potion rippled and danced as if it had a life of its own. Draco realised that he was holding his breath as well and let it out slowly. He'd forgotten how exciting these moments could be. That exhilaration that comes from doing something you never thought you'd be able to do. He could see the tension in every line of the boy's face.

They watched silently as the timer counted down: five minutes, two minutes, thirty seconds ... the surface bubbled one last time and then sparks went out in all directions. James jerked backwards and Draco laid a hand on his shoulder to hold him steady ... five seconds ... the potion shimmered one last time before turning a deep indigo.

James looked up, his eyes as wide as Draco had ever seen them. "I did it," he whispered, awe permeating the entire room.

"Yes," Draco said, smiling. "You did."

James turned and bounded unexpectedly into Draco's arms, his face lit up as if rays of sunshine were streaming from it. "I did it, Draco," he whispered. Something in Draco's chest cracked at the mixture of disbelief and pride ... of relief and amazement. "I really did it," he repeated, as if saying it made it more solid, more real, more true.

Draco chuckled, prying himself from the boy's tight grip. "I knew you could. Now, fill the vials quickly. Exposure to air will make it lose its effectiveness." Draco held the vials steady as James used the dropper to add the valuable potion without spilling a single drop.

"You realise there are only two wizards alive who can make this potion, don't you?"

James beamed. "You mean three now, right? You, Professor Winklestick, and me."

"No. I mean two. Professor Winklestick has yet to make it correctly."

James' eyes widened again, the enormity of what he'd accomplished finally sinking in.

"Are you positive you want to be an Auror? I'm sure I could use an apprentice by the time you've finished Hogwarts."

"You'd want ... Mr Malfoy I—"

"You can call me Draco, since you already have. Besides, you're no longer my student."

"But I ... I like our lessons. I don't want them to stop."

"I'd be honoured if you would be my assistant during the summer months, but I can no longer accept you as a student. You're well beyond that and we both know it."

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It was past midnight when the pounding on the door woke Draco up. He was tempted to call the MLE, but he knew they wouldn't rush to his aide. Oh, they'd show up eventually, hoping the intruder would have left him in a pool of blood by then. Within seconds, a house-elf popped in, wringing her hands nervously.
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"Master Malfoy, I be trying to stop him but—"

She didn't get any further before the bedroom door burst off its hinges leaving a distraught, angry looking Harry Potter standing in its wake. "Why didn't you tell me?" he bellowed, looking more furious than Draco had seen anyone look in a very long time.

Draco looked down at the house-elf as he climbed out of bed and threw on a dressing gown. "It's all right, Binny. That will be all."

"But Master—"

"That will be all," he repeated more firmly, glaring at the elf, if only to avoid Harry's angry stare.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Harry demanded again as soon as the elf was gone.

Draco tried hard not to panic. Harry could be referring to any number of things. "How dare you burst into my home. I've no idea what you're talking about, but surely it could wait—"

"This!" Harry thrust out an old wooden box full of vials. Ten vials to be exact - one for every week. "I'd finished unpacking and decided to go through my old Hogwarts trunk. I thought maybe there would be something in there the kids would want. Imagine my surprise when I found a box that I couldn't remember ever owning. One that was warded with Dark magic."

"How did you get it open?" Draco's mind was whirling and he had to sit on the bed to keep from passing out. Harry was never supposed to be able to open that box. He'd used magic that Harry would never have heard of.

"I'm an Auror, Draco. We know how to disarm wards." Harry's voice was a sharp as a knife, slicing Draco

in parts that had long since been dormant. "I almost destroyed it," he spat angrily. "I thought maybe it was some leftover artefact from Death Eaters but then I saw the note. "Just in case you ever want to remember." I recognised your handwriting. I couldn't understand why it would be in my trunk. We were never ... at least I thought we were never friends."

"Did you—"

"Yes. I took them to Hogwarts and used Dumbledore's old Pensieve. Why didn't you tell me?" This time Harry's voice sounded more broken and defeated than angry.

Anger would have been preferable. It would have been easier. "You didn't want to know," Draco whispered, his head falling into his hands as he tried to fight off a tsunami of memories.

"How can you even say that?" Harry shouted, his accusing tone making Draco's blood boil.

"Because you told me!" Draco shot up off the bed in an instant, levelling Harry with anger that had been pushed aside for years. Anger that he thought he'd dealt with long ago. "You said you didn't want to remember. You wanted a normal life with a wife and kids and I couldn't give you that."

"Why can't I remember? Even when you take memories out, a ghost of them remains. Why can't I remember anything?"

Draco knew it had been a mistake, even then. He should have just Obliviated him completely and been done with it, but no, Harry hadn't wanted that. He couldn't bear for all those memories to be destroyed; he just hadn't wanted them in his head, and Draco, being the fool he was, had agreed.

"I Obliviated you afterwards," Draco answered, subconsciously crossing his arms over his chest defensively. "It was what you wanted."

"What I wanted? How could I have possibly wanted—"

"If you don't believe me then bring the bloody Pensieve here and you can see for yourself! I still have all my memories. I still live with them every fucking day, so don't you dare look at me as if you're the injured party here! You wanted a normal life, and I agreed because after all you'd been through I thought you deserved that much. I gave you that, so don't you dare try to blame me!"

Harry buckled like a broken sail, the fight in those bright green eyes replaced by regret. "I loved you—"

"No you didn't. You said it was a mistake. That it—"

"But now I'll never know, will I? I can see it in the Pensieve memories, Draco. I can tell from the look on my face that I loved you, but all I can ever do is watch like it's someone else's life. I'll never know how I felt because the link's been broken. I can never put the memories back in, can I?"

Draco turned his head to look at the small vial on his bedside table. He'd convinced himself when he was developing Memoria Adepto that this wasn't the reason. It had taken years to perfect it. He'd stayed up for nights at a time working out all the problems in minute detail and for what? He'd never let himself admit that he wanted Harry to have those memories back because it had been what they had both wanted. He'd been telling himself that for years.

"It was the right thing to do at the time," Draco said weakly. "We both agreed that it was—"

"And now? What's the right thing to do now?"

"I–" Draco looked up, realising he'd been lost in thought and sure that he'd missed part of the conversation. "What do you mean?"

Harry had been inching closer and Draco hadn't noticed. By the time he did, he realised the back of his thighs were against the edge of his bed and there was no way to escape from Harry's intense stare. He'd

never thought he'd have to revisit these feelings. It had been the right thing to do. Harry had wanted a normal life, and being in love with a former Death Eater was far from normal. Draco had wanted a son, an heir to the Malfoy name and fortune. It was the only thing they could have done. But now? Now everything was different. Harry had married, but that was over. Draco had his son. And even more importantly, he and Harry had become friends. Something they'd lacked even back then. Something that meant more to him than ten weeks of shagging and broken promises. Draco finally admitted to himself that he'd never forgotten those ten weeks. Finally let himself remember that they weren't about shagging at all. That he had loved Harry Potter. That a part of him had never stopped loving Harry Potter.

"I mean ... maybe I was wrong back then," Harry said softly, closing the last few inches between them. "Maybe I've finally figured out what I want. Maybe this is it. Maybe it's you."

"But you don't remember—"

"I don't need to remember. If I'd never found those vials I would have ended up here eventually. I wanted to tell you that the other night when you asked me what I wanted, but I didn't know how. I didn't think you'd ever ... Draco, even without my memories of the past, this is still what I want."

They stood toe to toe for a long minute until Draco could no longer resist the temptation of those pouty lips and leaned in to kiss him. It was just as he'd remembered and Draco hated himself all over again for his weakness. He'd never been able to resist Harry. Whether it had been goading him, hexing him, or kissing him, when it came to Harry Potter, Draco was hopelessly short on self-control. He held back a whimper when Harry pulled away, but when Harry smiled, it was the same smile he remembered from years ago. Warm and full of promise.

"Can we start over?"

"If you don't ruin it by talking," Draco answered with a slight smile. Harry responded just as Draco knew he would, with all the eagerness of a lion cub, jumping in where he probably had no business being, without a care as to where it would lead. Draco closed his eyes and let the sensation of Harry's arms around him replace the old battered memories he'd tried so hard to bury. He thought about the potion on his bedside table and realised it wasn't as important as he'd once thought it was. Harry could take it if he wanted. He could remember if he wanted. But even if he didn't, they were still here. Right where they both belonged.

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Back to Index

Chapter 11: Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned – Part 11

Nineteen Years Later

When Draco looked back on his life, he often wondered how it could possibly have ended up like this. He never would have dreamt he could come to look upon a red-headed half Weasley with as much pride as he did his own son, but when James stepped up to the podium and shook the Minister's hand, there was no doubt in his mind that he did.

"Thank you, Minister," James began, his face the portrait of strength and confidence. All signs of the insecure boy Draco had met that first day in his office were erased forever.

"It's my greatest pleasure to have been asked to speak this evening. I still can't quite understand why, of all the brilliant wizards in this room, you would choose me for the coveted title of Wizard of the Year, but

I feel deeply honoured."

Draco listened with only half an ear to James' speech about his career and his hopes for the wizarding world. He'd heard it a dozen times by now, as James had been rehearsing it for anyone who would listen over the last two weeks. Draco took the opportunity to look round the large hall filled with the best and brightest witches and wizards in Europe. He turned to his right to see Harry beaming like the proud father that he was. The years had been good to him. Even the slight greying at his temples looked good on him; it made him look regal and wise instead of old.

The young woman who sat next to him looked as much like Harry now as she did her mother. Her long, flowing red hair was all Weasley, as much as Harry liked to think it came from his mother. The eyes though, even though they were the deep brown of her mother's, were constantly twinkling with laughter, just like Harry's. Her expressions, and her eternal youthfulness and optimism, were all Harry. It had been fun watching her grow up. Watching her change from the skinny tomboy she was at twelve to the graceful, beautiful woman she was now.

Draco felt a quick jab to his ribs and turned to his left to see both his own son and Albus grinning like two-year-olds, their prospective spouses rolling their eyes at their childishness. "You haven't heard this part of the speech, Dad. He wanted it to be a surprise," Scorpius whispered, his smile widening.

Draco still found it hard to believe his son had grown into a man, although he sometimes wondered if it was simply his body that had matured, as his personality seemed to have digressed over the years. He was quite sure he had Harry's sons to thank for that. They had become quite the trio over the years. It hadn't really surprised Draco when Scorpius had announced that he would be apprenticing with Professor Winklestick after completing Hogwarts. He'd always enjoyed telling people what to do, so teaching came as naturally to him as breathing. However, when Albus made a similar announcement that he would be apprenticing to take over Charms, Draco and Harry both feared for future generations of Hogwarts students. It turned out that it was the rest of the staff for whom they should have feared, as both men seemed to behave more like their students than their peers. Their current sniggering over Merlin only knew what was evidence enough of that.

"Shh," Lily hissed from next to Harry. "We're supposed to be listening!"

Harry chuckled as he casually draped an arm around the back of Draco's chair, resting a hand softly on

his shoulder. Draco felt a grin slide across his face, and he glanced across the large, round table to where his mother was sniffling most un-aristocratically. It had surprised Draco when he'd found out James had sent her a personal invitation, but what had surprised him even more was her jubilant reply. When Draco had questioned her about it she'd simply shrugged and offered an explanation that made Draco love her more than he ever thought he could. "He's family, Draco. What did you expect?"

Draco looked up at the podium just in time to see James' cheerful, open expression become suddenly grave.

"Over the last week I've been overwhelmed with reporters asking me questions that I'd not thought about in a very long time. I've had to give a lot of thought to how I could possibly have come to earn so great an honour, and many of the answers were exactly what one would expect." James looked out at the table where his mother and most of the Weasley crowd sat, looking as proud as a family could be. "My mother, grandparents, aunts, and uncles have all been a constant source of support and inspiration. We haven't always seen eye to eye, but they've always been there for me. Much of the credit for any successes I've had belongs to them."

He glanced in Harry's direction, giving a slight nod of respect to his father. "No doubt you all know my dad." There were a few chuckles throughout the room, and James grinned mischievously. "Having such a legendary man for a father hasn't always been easy, but I can't think of a better man in whose footsteps to follow."

The next words were enough to make even Albus and Scorpius blush. "I have to admit, some of the credit must go to my siblings as well. To my sister, who has always been a bright light regardless of how dark or stormy the day was, and to my brothers, yes, that would be plural, who've always set the competitive bar as high as it could possibly get."

James paused to take a drink of water; he suddenly seemed younger and surprisingly nervous.

"However, there is someone else that I would like to thank publicly. A man who had very few reasons to help me at the beginning of my journey, but who was there for me at a pivotal time in my life, when it seemed I needed him the most. As my childhood tutor, he taught me how to brew a perfect potion, but he also taught me so much more. He taught me about life and the importance of understanding the things around you, about trusting your instincts and believing in yourself, about overcoming challenges

and never giving up on your dreams. I never would have made it into the Auror program without his help, and I certainly wouldn't be standing before you all today accepting such a prestigious award."

James paused, looking round the room to meet the eyes of almost every person in the hall. "Over the years he's continued to teach me many things, but he's become more than a tutor or even a friend; he's become family." James looked out into the audience and directly into Draco's eyes. "Thank you, Draco. For everything."

There were murmurs and whispers all around him, then clapping as James left the podium, but Draco didn't really hear any of it. All he heard was Harry's voice as he leant over and whispered, "He's right, you know."

"He does know that I'm not above using Crucio doesn't he?"

Harry laughed. "Draco, he's the most talented Auror in a hundred years. I doubt you'd get the chance."

Draco was just about to make a clever rebuttal when Harry placed a hand on his jaw and tilted his face for a gentle kiss. No, Draco never would have dreamt in a thousand years that his life would have turned out quite like this. But for once, he wasn't complaining.

~fin~

Back to Index