

Remnants of Youth

by severed_lies

A three part tale, inspired by a random Tarot card spread. Scorpius' concern for his newly divorced father forces Draco and Severus to examine their deep affection for one another.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I. August 1997

The lesson of the Four of Pentacles is that control is impossible. We stand in the world as in a great ocean. Who could manage or possess such power? The only way to keep from drowning is to ride the currents. The ocean will support us as long as we swim with the flow.

Joan Bunning

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Draco passed the coterie of Death Eaters, hiding his trembling hands within his cloak, screams from the dungeon ringing in his ears. Taking care not to appear unhinged, though he clearly was, he measured his pace until well out of sight of the manor. He wondered if the Dark Lord and his loathsome entourage would ever leave his home. Right now, he was grateful that he had freedom to be out of doors, happy not to hear the continuous jeering and lewd comments from his Lordship's followers.

The fresh air and solitude were a welcome relief, and Draco had just began to relax a bit when rustling from a nearby hedge caught his attention. Drawing his wand from his sleeve, he followed the sound to find Severus kneeling in the dirt and uprooting a sprig of violets. Draco offered his mentor a hand, and Severus grasped the trembling hand as he rose, spreading a bit of soil onto the boy's palm. When Draco did not wipe the dirt away, Severus raised an eyebrow, then beckoned the boy to follow.

Severus led Draco down a graveled path, past the verdant maze and over to the chalk stream that flowed through the property. Draco wistfully remembered this tranquil glade. As a child, he often spent lazy afternoons here, wading through the shallow water and petulantly willing the frogs to leap into his hands. How he fervently wished he could shake off the horrific past year and return to the peace of his childhood.

"Gather kindling," Severus said, displeased when his quiet instruction visibly startled Draco.

Draco, frustrated at his inability to hide his anxiety, stomped off to gather fallen branches.

After carefully setting the violets onto the ground, Severus pulled a silver blade from his cloak and moved to examine a clump of stout yellow herbs. Satisfied with the quality, he cut an armful of stalks, then returned to the bank. Seeing Draco emerge from the canopy, he bid the boy to carefully stack the wood over a ring of stones blackened from millennia of use.

With a flick of his wand, Draco dried the branches and stepped back, vaguely wondering what Severus was up to. He knew from experience that his questions would be

answered, in Severus' own time, and not wanting to disturb the man's good mood, he quietly stood at the bank of the stream and watched as Severus set the wood ablaze.

Severus waited until the wood was burning sufficiently, then placed the large stems of Mullein on the fire. When the stems had blackened and the flowering heads had turned to ash, he crooked his finger at Draco.

"Shallow breaths are best," Severus explained as Draco moved to stand over the smoking herb. "It is a safer remedy than Dreamless Sleep."

Draco closed his eyes against the acrid fumes. Bitter yellow tears streaked his pale cheeks as the herb worked to drain the terror from his mind. Severus leaned over the small pyre and wiped the tears from Draco's soft cheek, noting the boy could not hold back from pressing into his rough palm. Draco opened his eyes, and as he lifted his arm, Severus stepped back three paces, wiping his fingers against his robe. It was a fine line he walked, trying to comfort the boy without encouraging his affections. It would serve no purpose to form an attachment while both their lives were so precariously balanced.

Draco, disappointed at Severus' reaction, shuffled back a few steps and leaned against a shady sycamore. Closing his eyes, he allowed the calming sound of the water to replace the lingering screams. Deep breaths pulled fresh air into his lungs and the tension slowly unwound from his shoulders. He sunk to the ground and pulled his knees to his chest, waiting for oblivion.

Severus turned his attention back to the next task. He retrieved a small silver cauldron and tripod from his bottomless cloak pocket and set the tripod over the dwindling fire. He gently picked up the bundle of violets, knelt over the lip of the creek and washed clumps of rich loam from the velvety leaves and twisting roots. Dipping the tiny cauldron into the water, he allowed the cold liquid to fill the vessel half-way, then stuffed the violets down, pressing until the plant was entirely submerged.

Placing the cauldron handle over the hook of the tripod, he watched as the vessel slowly stopped swinging. Severus conjured a bluebell flame to augment the smoldering wood and gently stirred the infusion. With nothing left to do but wait, he sat down beside Draco, keeping watch as the boy slowly slipped into sleep.

Nearing sunset, Draco awoke abruptly. Smoke drifted over from the river's edge, swirled around him, and he sneezed repeatedly. As he rubbed his eyes, he watched Severus decanting a deep green fluid into a silver flask.

Severus smirked, but refrained from taunting the sneezing boy, concentrating, instead, on levitating the cauldron from the tripod over to the stream where the cold, clear water bubbled up the residue from the interior. With a silent charm, the cauldron was dried. He cooled the metal tripod with a spell, then placed both items back into his cloak.

As Severus banked the fire, a flock of pheasant passed overhead, searching for a place to roost for the evening. Severus watched as Draco steeled himself for the return home. He wished that more could be done to protect the boy, but as the manor was currently housing more than its share of madmen and psychotic women, the danger of tipping his hand in the wrong direction was too great, and nothing less than the final disposition of his remaining master would ensure Draco's safety.

"Come," Severus beckoned as he strode up the embankment, heading back to the manor. Draco's sigh assured Severus that the boy was following. He hoped that this nightmare would end, especially for Draco. He'd never expected to survive this long, and he fervently hoped that when he was no longer able to protect the boy, Lucius and Narcissa would take up their responsibility, as they should have all along.

II. May 1998

The Lovers can indicate moral or ethical crossroads a decision point where you must choose between the high road or the low road. This card can also represent your personal beliefs because to make such a decision you must know where you stand. Following your own path can mean going against those who are urging you in a direction that is wrong for you.

Joan Bunning

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Draco, enveloped within his parent's protective embrace, blocked out the chaos of the Great Hall. His mother smoothed back the hair from his eyes and straightened his cloak, and for once, Draco did not brush off her fussing.

He felt his father's withdrawal and noted Lucius' gaze following the movement of the Aurors, watching as they slowly walked towards his family. He knew better than to assume someone would vouch for the actions taken by mother, actions which had clearly given Potter time to dispatch the vile monster who had destroyed his family's good name.

"We have little time left before..." Draco began, only to be interrupted by Lucius.

"Allow me to explain the situation to the Aurors, and please, take care not to interrupt, either of you," Lucius said tersely as he scanned the hall.

Narcissa, horrified as the reality of the grievously injured bodies laid out all around penetrated her consciousness, murmured, "Surely they will allow Draco and me to return to our home."

Draco, still shaken from his earlier escapades, and worried about the fate of his mentor, took that moment to declare, "Mother, I have expected to be taken into custody, no matter the outcome today. I have betrayed us all!"

Disturbed by his son's declaration and his wife's emotional state, Lucius wound an arm around Narcissa, then lifted his son's chin with his free hand. "My dearest Draco, you have done nothing what so ever to betray the family. That dishonor belongs solely to me."

Draco pushed aside his trepidation to ask, "Father, do you know... where is Severus?"

Lucius tried hard not to blanch at the expected query. For the past year, he had been all too aware of his son's deepening feelings for Severus. He knew, as well, how hard Severus worked to discourage those feelings in his son. Knowing that it was impossible not to hurt Draco at this moment, he fought for the words to reveal the awful fate of the man who had protected Draco from the day the boy had entered Hogwarts.

"I last saw Severus today as he was entering the Shrieking Shack, gone to meet with His Lordship. I do not know, cannot tell you what happened, but as he had not been seen since... You must understand, it does not bode well that he never emerged to fight." Lucius watched as the color drained from Draco's face.

Draco's breath caught in his throat and his vision blurred. Of all the horrendous events of the day, to lose Severus was beyond comprehension. Draco had dreamt of nothing more than escaping the madness of the manor and going away, just he and Severus, to be Severus' apprentice, and if the man was willing to open his heart, lovers. Now, with his dreams smashed, Draco shook his head and struggled for the strength to hide his devastation.

"Narcissa," Lucius spoke after a brief pause, "I shall try to persuade whomever is in command that you must make arrangements to bury your sister."

A bitter look stole over Narcissa's face at the mention of her traitorous sibling, but the code of the Black family, one which had been honored for centuries, bade that she buried her bad feeling along with the deceased. Narcissa nodded and looked to Draco, wishing that they could just go away, that she could protect her son from further pain.

Lucius hoped that by offering immediate accommodations to the Ministry, he could buy his family some time, time to bury their dead, time for the heated emotions of the Wizarding world to abate. Time to bargain his life for theirs. Time to make right what had so horrible gone wrong.

"Of course, you must have the comfort of your only child at this most troubling of times, and I shall endeavor to persuade the Aurors to allow Draco to assist in the

arrangements," Lucius continued. "I must again insist that you follow my lead, for all of our sakes."

At that moment, six Aurors surrounded the Malfoys, wands pointed at chest-level. To add to the tension, conversations in their immediate area ceased, and several witches and wizards backed away from the group.

A ruddy-faced Auror plucked a scroll from his cloak and read the charges against them aloud, concluding with the chilling pronouncement, "Lucius Malfoy, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Draco Malfoy, you are hereby remanded into the custody of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Surrender your wands at once." With a nod to his fellows, the Aurors closed in, wands sparking and twitching in eager hands.

Narcissa dropped her wand to the floor, and the leader summoned the slender length of hawthorn into his sweaty palm. Draco, following his mother's example, slowly removed his wand and bent slightly to place the wand handle on the stone floor, wincing as the wood clattered to rest among the dust.

"I said, surrender your wand!" the brute shouted as he beckoned Lucius to comply with the order.

Lucius held his arms out and ventured to explain that he had not carried a wand for some months, but the furious Auror (whom no one would fault, to be honest) strode up to the disarmed man and poked his wand into Lucius' chest.

A deep voice interrupted the frustrated Auror, "Whitfield, stand down." Upon hearing the senior Auror's command, Whitfield hesitated for a moment, then backed away, keeping his wand pointed at the failed Death Eater nonetheless.

Kingsley Shacklebolt quickly scanned the Malfoys for any hidden wands or weapons, then satisfied that all had been confiscated, ordered Whitfield and his party to return to the perimeter of the castle to gather discarded wands and weaponry for the safety of the children still wandering around the grounds.

Lucius watched the Aurors leave, and with a glimmer of hope, turned to Auror Shacklebolt to plead for his family's release. "Before you proceed with your duties, I must request that you allow my wife and son two days to see to the proper internment of their sister and aunt, Bellatrix Lestrange, for surely you would wish the same indulgence for one of your own family."

Kingsley narrowed his eyes and stroked his chin, contemplating the furor that granting such a request would generate, not only from his superiors, but also from the Wizarding population in general. In truth, if he did not allow this request, the Lestrange woman's body might be desecrated, and as Bellatrix had tortured and murdered countless wizards and witches, the list for that honor was quite long. Malfoy's words were keenly felt; had the deceased been one of his relatives, he would be quick to plead for the same indulgence, for the opportunity to honor his family's burial customs.

Unbeknownst to Malfoy, Kingsley knew that his son Draco had refused to identify young Potter during their encounter at the Malfoy home earlier that spring. Narcissa had never appeared to have been marked, nor had she ever been reported to be at a Death Eater raid, and given her emotional state, would not be a danger to anyone. He also knew from experience that Lucius Malfoy was a veritable fount of information, and granting this request would make the man more amenable to giving the Ministry the means to locate his missing cohorts.

"Two days, and they must appear at the Ministry for questioning," Kingsley acquiesced, then, straightening up to his full, imposing height, he addressed mother and son. "However, fail to appear by noon on that day, and you will be incarcerated without redress."

Narcissa sagged visibly against Draco, who looked numb at the prospect of his mother in prison. She placed her hand on Draco's shoulder and watched as the Auror bound her husband's hands in preparation for departure to the Ministry.

Kingsley summoned a pair of patrolling Aurors over and authorized the release of the Lestrange woman's body to her sister. "Escort the family back to their home, set up a perimeter outside and await your relief," Kingsley ordered the pair. "The house and grounds have been cleared by a team, but you must be prepared for any escaped Death Eaters who might seek refuge at the manor."

The Aurors acknowledged their orders and took positions beside Narcissa and Draco.

Lucius bowed his head to Kingsley, saying, "Your kindness is most appreciated, and my family will be present at the Ministry as required. You can be assured of our full cooperation."

Narcissa looked upon her bound husband and took heart from the affection in her beloved husband's eyes. Lucius had survived Azkaban, they had all endured the occupation of their home, and she was most confident in his abilities to protect them now.

"Auror Shacklebolt," Narcissa said in a tremulous voice, "please accept our thanks for your most generous accommodations." She melted into Draco's embrace and gathered her composure, hoping that the task of getting her sister's body released would be over quickly. She fought back tears as she watched her husband's departure.

Kingsley nodded, then turned to grasp Lucius' bound hands. The pair walked out of the hall, through the massive front doors and down the steep path to the gates. The wards still prevented Apparition directly from the castle, and Kingsley's stern and determined look kept Lucius from complaining about the punishing pace. As they reached the Apparition point, Lucius looked back to the castle. With a silent wish that his family remain safe, and a fervent hope that he would not be returning to that frigid place of his nightmares, he was whisked away to the Ministry.

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Draco, increasingly anxious to find some way to escape the guards and search the Shrieking Shack, fidgeted as he accompanied his mother to the make-shift morgue near the staircase in the entrance hall. A flimsy linen partition hid the bodies from view, and Mediwitches and Aurors scurried about, identifying and processing the deceased.

He had heard snippets of conversation earlier about the unexpected prowess of that Weasley woman, about how she had turned almost feral in defense of her only daughter. Draco had not cared much for Bellatrix and had suffered greatly with her attempts at teaching him dark arts. He bore a few well-concealed scars that would forever remind him of his late aunt's thin grip on reality.

Seeing his mother try desperately not to show her distress as she averted her eyes, Draco took Narcissa's arm, and was rewarded with a wan smile. She quickly identified her sister's body, then signed parchment after parchment. A harried Mediwitch quickly conjured an opaque sheet, draped it over Bellatrix's stiff form, then bound the sheet tightly with a few flicks of her wand. One of the Aurors assigned to accompany them to the manor levitated her body while the other Auror bid them to follow.

Draco and Narcissa fell into step behind their fallen relative, closely followed by the second Auror. Keeping their eyes focused on the steep path, mother and son managed not to flinch as they heard the invectives hurled in their direction. Once they had reached the gates, the first Auror roughly up righted Bellatrix's shrouded form, and with a crack, Disapparated to the manor. The second Auror nodded to Narcissa and Draco, waiting for them to follow.

The lengthy Apparation, after such an exhausting day, caused Narcissa to stumble as she landed just outside the ornate entry to the manicured park in front of their home. Draco reached out to steady his mother, squeezing her cold hand in his. The second Auror arrived, then gestured for them to proceed.

Once inside the foyer of the manor, Narcissa called for Bella's house-elf Tussy. The elf knew better than to show any sign of glee at her Mistress' demise and begged Auror Chambers to follow her to the abandoned outdoor kitchen. Narcissa determined that the ancient structure was the one place on the property that was suitable for such a distasteful purpose. The ancient stone building had not been used for almost a century, and, although it was original to the manor, she would gladly see it destroyed as soon as Bella was buried.

Aurors Chambers and Wellston declined her offer of tea and departed from the manor to begin their guard duty. Draco had declined several offerings of food by the kitchen elves, and Narcissa, not having much of an appetite herself, dismissed the elves quite curtly, intending to retreat to her rooms and the comfort of a hot bath and a warm brandy. As the sun set behind a gathering of clouds, she kissed Draco goodnight.

Draco, who had been impatiently waiting for his mother to retire for the evening, listened to Narcissa's retreating footsteps for a few minutes, then strode down to the, thankfully, empty dungeons. The flickering torches lit the corridor, and he entered an old storage room where he gathered bandages, potions and fresh water. It took several tries to locate a camouflaged niche, where he found a cache of unregistered wands. He chose one that he had used before, one that his aunt Bella had given to him for practicing Unforgivables. He hated the sight of it, but it was foolhardy to leave the manor unarmed.

Swallowing back a distasteful rise of bile, he snapped the door closed and returned to gathering supplies. Filling a pouch with these supplies, Draco exited from the room, then paused. He searched his memory for the location of a hidden passage, one that would lead to the stables at the far end of the property.

In the torchlight, he glimpsed a flash of metal on the stone floor. Draco bent to wipe away the layers of hard-packed dirt, then dropped the wards on the hatch. Taking a deep breath, he lifted the small iron ring and peered into the void. With a silent Lumos, and a sneeze, he slung the pouch over one shoulder, descended a few feet, then closed and re-warded the hatch.

Taking longer than expected, Draco emerged from the tunnel and performed multiple cleaning spells on his clothes and person. The fresh smell of hay was a welcome change from the musty odors he had encountered while in transit from the manor. The quiet of the stables was very disturbing, as was the absence of the horses, which had all been released into the countryside by order of the Dark Lord. The empty stable was yet another terrible reminder of the changes that had turned his idyllic home life into a nightmare.

Shaking off the memories of the last year, Draco activated an unauthorized fireplace, scooped a handful of sparkling green powder from the bottom of an old trophy perched upon the mantle, then Flooed to Hogsmeade and a cottage owned by a sympathizer of the Dark Lord. The man, who had been unwilling to take the mark, had disappeared in the spring, and Draco hoped that there would be no one there to witness his arrival. He cast a Disillusionment Spell as he landed, and quickly exited the tiny dwelling. He gathered his cloak hem off the ground as he picked his way through the muddy remains of the abandoned garden.

The steady rain quickly soaked through his fine wool cloak as Draco trod down the winding cobbled streets. As he drew closer to the Shack, he could feel his heart pounding in his chest. Approaching the dilapidated structure, he paused to make sure no one was on guard. Satisfied that he was alone, he crept up to the door, startled to see it blasted off the hinges.

Testing for wards, and finding none in place, Draco stepped over the threshold and stopped, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the dark. He lit his wand with the weakest Lumos, then searched the room for Severus. All that he found were dusty footprints, all leading to the treacherous looking staircase to the right.

As a rumbling of thunder shook the structure, Draco fought back his trepidation and began to ascend the rickety stairs. He brushed away cobwebs with his wand, all the while steeling himself for whatever he might find of Severus. The wind wailed through the cracked walls and through the corridor as he stepped upon the landing.

Listening for any movement, and hearing only the wind, Draco forged ahead. He could see shadows on the walls and, there, in the center of the floor, was a crumpled figure shrouded within a cloak. He turned around, closed his eyes and fought to keep from hyperventilating. He had come this far, and he told himself he must see this through. As a flash of lightning brightened the room, he turned and shuffled over to the figure, chanting to himself, "I can do this." Again and again he repeated this phrase.

He fell to the floor on hands and knees, strengthened his Lumos and gasped. It was only then that he felt the stickiness of the floor beneath his hands. Merde, the amount of blood he could now see caused him to stop breathing for a minute as he felt the ground shaking. He realized that it was he, not the ground, that was so violently shaking. As a wave of nausea came over him, he remembered his duty. Conjuring a bluebell flame above Severus' inert form, he blanched as he saw the extent of injury.

With a firm shake of his head, he reached out to Severus and brushed the man's long hair away from his face. Two large wounds, with surprisingly well-formed scabs, were at the front of Severus' throat. Draco ran a life-scan over the neck and chest, detected faint signs of respiration, then mouthed "Thank Merlin." He fumbled with the pouch that was draped across his shoulder, located the Blood-Replenishing Potion, then halted. He puzzled for a moment, trying to work how to get this urgently needed elixir into an unconscious man.

Finally, he positioned his wand between Severus' blue-tinged lips and spelled the lips open. He uncorked the vial with his teeth, spitting the cork with a turn of his head, then slowly poured the viscous liquid down Severus' throat. The blood-soaked cloak covering Severus had to be moved, and Draco gingerly peeled the offensive garment away.

There were no further signs of injury, and Draco realized that the blood loss had to be only from the neck wounds. A second vial of the blood replenisher would be needed, and Draco wondered if that would be enough to stabilize the injured man. Feeling woefully unprepared, he wished that he had been taught more than the application of potions. All that time wasted on learning Unforgivables would not help him now.

After draining the second vial into Severus' mouth, Draco was pleased to see a slight improvement of the grayish skin tone. Taking heart that what little he had done was obviously working, he sat back and observed Severus' chest. His breathing was stronger and his body seemed more relaxed. "Yes," Draco thought, "his hands are not as clenched as before."

With the adrenaline surge wearing off, the smell of dust and blood was beginning to make Draco sick. He Evanescoed the dirt and blood from Severus body, grateful that the man was unconscious. The strength of the spell he used would have brought even a stolid man like Severus to tears as it burned away detritus and removed a fair bit of epidermis in its wake.

After wrapping a strip of linen around Severus' throat, Draco removed his cloak, dried it, and activated a warming charm. He levitated Severus from the floor and bundled the man into the warmth of the fine wool. The storm had chilled the air significantly since sundown, and Draco knew that he had to get Severus home as quickly as possible.

Physically, and emotionally drained by his efforts, Draco pulled a flask of strengthening potion out of the pouch for himself. It would be needed if he was to return home safely with Severus in tow. Instantly, he felt refreshed and unaffected by the cold, damp air.

With a flick of his wand, he sent all of the supplies back into the pouch, then, with a look of pure disgust, shrunk Severus' filthy cloak and stuffed that in as well. Searching the floor, he found Severus' wand. It was broken into two pieces. Draco reverently gathered the pieces in his hand and placed them into the pouch as well. He made a sweep of the area, not wanting to leave anything behind, then slung the pouch over his head.

Draco gently maneuvered Severus down the stairs, pausing to Disillusion them both. He added an Impervious Charm to ensure that Severus would be protected from the sheeting rain and brisk wind, then carefully stepped over the fallen front floor and into the storm. The trip back to the cottage took seemingly forever, and his heart was again pounding in his chest from the exertion of holding his levitation spell.

Once again, he paused to observe the cottage to ensure no one was watching, then trudged through the muddy path to the entrance. Flagging strength caused him to lean Severus against the doorjamb for a few moments as he dug into a pocket to retrieve a silver box filled with Floo powder. Eager to get them out of Hogsmeade, he cradled Severus in his straining arms, entered the floo, and called out his destination.

To his dismay, Draco stumbled out of the fireplace, stumbled and fell backwards. Unbalanced by Severus' weight, Draco dropped like a stone, hitting his tailbone, then his head. Stunned and exhausted, he laid on the dirt and straw, then hoarsely called for Mingy, his personal elf. Mingy snapped into the stable and, with a wail, cried, "Master Draco, what has happened?"

Draco, wet, cold and in considerable pain, ordered Mingy to "get Severus off me, now!" Mingy raised the unconscious man into the air, conjured a pallet, then lowered Severus onto the thick down mattress.

Knowing that he had done just the bare minimum needed to ensure that Severus was stable enough to be moved, he debated calling on his already distraught mother to help. Neither he nor his mother were schooled in Mediwizardry, but Draco was at a loss at this juncture.

Draco stood and rubbed his *derrière*, then limped over to the pallet. Mingy had removed Severus' clothes and had placed a soft nightshirt in its stead. Severus was still breathing, and his skin was no longer ashen, but there was no way Draco could perform the elaborate diagnostics that would show him what was preventing the man from coming back to consciousness. The wounds on Severus' neck looked a bit smaller in size, so there was internal healing, but Draco was not convinced that he had done enough.

Mingy interrupted his contemplation with a tug on Draco's wrist. "Master Snape is not being awake, Master Draco, his heart beating most slow," Mingy said with a plaintive wail.

Draco shook the elf's spindly fingers off, shuddering at being touched by the creature. With a scowl, he ordered the elf to wake his mother and bring her to the stables. Mingy disappeared, eager to fetch a human who would be more help in getting Master Snape to awaken.

Dropping to his knees, Draco placed a hand upon Severus' chest. Though the chill that had gripped the injured man had dissipated, Draco conjured a silk duvet and settled it over the still body, smoothing the edge below Severus' chin. His mother appeared at that instant, dragged through the air by an increasingly panicked Mingy.

"Unhand me you insolent beast!" Narcissa exclaimed as she struggled to remove the elf's gnarled fingers from her arm. Draco strode over to the elf, grabbed its neck and squeezed. Mingy gasped and released her Mistress, and Draco, hand still about Mingy's neck, flung the elf into the corner.

The moaning elf was silenced with a flick of her wand, then Narcissa rounded on Draco to complain about his elf rousing her from bed. The figure on the pallet came into view, and she rushed to Severus.

"Severus, oh Merlin, we thought you were gone from this world!" she murmured. "Severus?"

When Severus failed to open his eyes, she spun and pinned Draco with a look, that look unique to mothers the world around, that demanded an explanation.

Draco, with a gentle touch, pulled Narcissa from the pallet. He told her a quick and incomplete version of his rescue of Severus from the Shack, imploring her to find medical attention for their injured friend.

A delayed reaction to the knowledge that her son had risked capture and worse for leaving the manor turned her blood to ice. She knew that Draco had developed a tendre for their dour friend, and, finally, understanding just how much Draco had risked to find Severus, she nodded and pulled her son into a light embrace.

"I shall contact Nigel Greengrass at once, Severus will be just fine," she said, then Apparated back to the manor to contact the Healer. Draco experienced a burst of anxiety, hoping that the Aurors, who were patrolling the estate would not be able to detect the activity at the stables. Surely they had determined that the structure was empty of horses and would not bother to return.

Draco glared at Mingy, who was cowering in the corner still. She had always been fond of Severus, and she had brought his mother immediately. With a sigh, he lifted the *Silencio* and ordered the cowering elf to bring broth and tea back from the kitchens. Mingy sobbed and wrung her hands, peered around Draco to check on Severus, then winked out to fetch the requested tea tray.

With nothing else to do but wait, Draco conjured a plush cushion, levitating it to rest near the pallet, then settled down next to Severus. He knew that Mr. Greengrass was a good Healer, as his father would never engage a substandard practitioner to care for his beloved family.

The stress and exhaustion hit Draco as he struggled to stay awake. He always had this reaction to overindulgence of strengthening potions and had sworn off their use after a particularly rough OWL week just two years ago.

As a lingering soreness from his earlier tumble throbbed, Draco lost his battle with his overtaxed body and fell asleep with his hands entwined with Severus'.

III. July, August 2017

The Page of Wands can also stand for a child or young-at-heart adult whose interactions with you involve independence, high energy, risky behavior, or shared enthusiasms. Sometimes the Page of Wands implies that your entire situation is suffused with the spirit of excitement and adventure. At such times, feel free to express your individuality and power with light-hearted abandon.

Joan Bunning

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Severus leaned over a small copper cauldron, scrutinizing the rings etched into the metal, as he waited for his pupil. Silently cursing the boy's over-indulgent family, he realized that his left foot was tapping against the tiled floor of the lab, and ignoring the twinge of pain, he pressed the offending appendage firmly down.

It had become all too familiar, this waiting for Scorpius to arrive for his lesson. They had been in the forest the day before gathering herbs. Scorpius was rambunctious and had not followed Severus' explicit instructions. Severus sent him home early in frustration at this unaccustomed behavior.

The boy had been agitated because he had expected to be on holiday with his mother, but Astoria's new husband refused to have the boy in his house. Astoria, bowing to the brutish fop's wishes, canceled the plans, and the boy had been uncontrollably restless for the past week.

A shadow at the window startled Severus, and he swore under his breath at his foolish reaction. Unlocking the door with a flick of his wand, he rubbed his strained neck and nodded to his visitor. A visibly irritated Lucius pulled a stool up to the worktable, then reached into his cloak to retrieve a bottle of honey meade.

"Has young Scorpius finally been allowed to visit his mother?" Severus asked as he conjured a pair of tumblers.

"Unfortunately not," Lucius replied as he uncorked the flask and poured out generous measures of the sweet liquor.

Severus lifted the glass with his left hand, then transferred it to the right with a slight grimace. Lucius frowned at his old friend, but refrained from making a comment. Those conversations never ended well, and he was here to indulge in a bit of whinging, well away from the furor that has descended upon his household.

"My dear wife has taken Scorpius for a fitting, hoping to distract the boy for a few hours. We all know that chit was never particularly maternal, still, I fail to understand why she refused to make her apologies in person."

Lucius drained his tumbler, then stroked the flask. Severus used his wand to refill both their glasses and settled back with an indulgent smirk.

"It is for the best that she departed, and the boy has to learn that not everything in life will be as he wishes." Severus watched as Lucius frowned. The Malfoy grandchild had been spoiled far more than Draco, unbelievably so. Draco still held on stubbornly to selfishness, even though it had been tempered in fatherhood.

"Care to join me for lunch in the solarium?" Lucius asked as he stood and pocketed the bottle.

Severus, feeling a bit less stiff and sore, thanks to the meade, rose from his chair and summoned his walking stick. He gestured for Lucius to proceed, then followed him out, pausing to ward his lab. He turned to see a carriage in front of the cottage, grateful for the transport even as he shook his head at Lucius.

"I can make it on my own, as you well know," Severus scolded.

"Yes, I know," said Lucius. "But the invitation was for lunch, not dinner," he teased.

Lucius knew quite well when to indulge his friend's independence, but the damp weather of late was more than enough reason to coddle Severus. The lasting effects of Severus' encounter with Nagini's venom were most prominent when it rained. Trying to get the stubborn man to move to a sunnier climate had been impossible. Draco and Severus were slowly building their publishing concern, and Lucius suspected that once his friend had acquired enough funds to purchase his own domicile, convincing Severus of the merits of the Mediterranean would be easy.

Severus swallowed a grunt as he stepped into the low carriage, then shifted his weight to settle more comfortably on the bench. The ride to the manor, ridiculously short, was enlivened by the sight of a goose chasing one of Lucius' prized albino peacocks. Predictably, Lucius reacted before there was any damage inflicted upon his precious fowl, and a quick Stunner and an Accio ensured that there would be roast goose for dinner that evening.

Chuckling at the sight of the floating goose, Severus entered the vestibule of the manor and followed Lucius to the solarium. On the way, Lucius summoned a kitchen elf and ordered lunch, then gave specific instruction on how to prepare the poor goose for dinner. His friend, though reformed in the eyes of the world, still carried a sadistic streak. Severus hoped that he would not be able to hear the honking as the unfortunate goose awoke in the pot.

"Hello, Father, Severus," came a greeting from Draco, who had commandeered a table near the open French doors of the solarium. He had a precariously stacked pile of scrolls near his elbow and a steady application of ink scattered across his ledger. Severus stood over Draco's shoulder and peered at the stack of scrolls, plucked the latest scheduling report from the table, and walked to his favorite chair as he read.

Lucius returned the greeting, then strode over to the sideboard to choose a wine to accompany their luncheon. Severus sunk into a cushy chair, then glanced at the open doors. Draco, worried about the draft's affects upon his partner and friend, spelled the doors closed, and received a grateful nod from Severus.

Lucius sent several bottles of wine gliding through the air to the dining table set up in front of the hearth. In deference to Severus, he lit a small fire, then opened the bottles. As he poured out the wine, an enormous tray floated in beside an elf, and Lucius bade his two companions to break from their work and come to the table.

There was little conversation as the gentlemen consumed their meal. The break from the tension revolving around the former Mrs. Draco Malfoy was appreciated, and no one dared to broach the subject. Once Scorpius and Narcissa returned from their shopping expedition, the peacefulness of the afternoon would be a fond memory.

Lucius knew that his son and friend had refrained from discussing their business during lunch, and he excused himself so that they could continue their work. He paused at the door, turned to look back at the table, and smiled as he saw their heads bent over a scroll. Draco and Severus spent too much time working, and he wondered how he could persuade the two to join Narcissa and him for a weekend of relaxation in Corsica. Their Mediterranean villa would be home for the next few months, and he could organize an estate agent to find a suitable property for his dear friend. Right now, however, he was quite anxious to walk his property and speak to the games keeper about those damned geese.

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When Narcissa and Scorpius returned to the manor, the boy was drooping with sleepiness. Narcissa was noted for her judicious application of ice cream to childhood disappointments, to Severus' recollection. Draco excused himself and escorted his son out of the solarium and up to his rooms for a nap. Narcissa settled upon one of the overstuffed chairs and removed her gloves. She noticed the scrolls, some of which had tumbled to the floor, and asked Severus.

A tea tray quickly arrived from the kitchens, and as Narcissa handed a delicate cup of Darjeeling to Severus, she invited him to stay for dinner.

"I can never resist a crisp goose," Severus replied. A look of surprise stole over Narcissa's face, and Severus explained about the incident with the bloody peacock. As he finished his tale, Lucius entered through the French doors, eyebrow raised at the sight of Severus smirking and Narcissa chuckling.

"Frivolity, Severus?" Lucius quipped. "What is this world coming to."

Knowing how sensitive her husband was on the subject of those damnable peacocks, she made up a tale about the trip to Diagon Alley.

"I was just relaying to Severus how Madam Malkin's niece, at the outset, mistook Scorpius to be a girl, then had the audacity to suggest that he should not be forced to wear such formal attire. You should be happy to hear that our grandson behaved admirably. He only tripped her once throughout the entire ordeal."

Lucius, affronted that a member of his family was treated so shabbily, inquired, "Did she mean to sell you those horrible dungarees?"

Narcissa nodded. "Indeed, and I can assure you that she will never question my choice of the child's wardrobe again."

Lucius, mollified that his dear wife had handled the situation, asked, "And what of the boy? Has his demeanor improved since this morning?"

"He refused to discuss his mother, which is a concern," Narcissa said, "but you know that he is always well behaved when promised a trip to the ice cream parlor."

"Ah, he must be sleeping off the effects of your indulgence," Lucius replied with a fond remembrance. Whenever Draco threw a tantrum as a child, a promise of ice cream never failed to calm him.

Draco returned and thanked his mother for her patience. Scorpius was sleeping peacefully for the first time in a week. He had detected the faint aroma of mint and chocolate, and marveled that his son and he were so much alike. His mother could calm most childhood storms with a trip to Fortescue's.

Tuning out the drone of conversation, Draco drifted back to his ledger. He and Severus were slowly building a catalog of Wizarding textbooks, all which were edited by Severus. After Astoria walked away from their marriage two years before, Draco left his mind-numbing Ministry position and convinced Severus to stop complaining about the state of Wizarding education and become his partner in a textbook publishing company.

Severus, more for Draco's sake than his own, agreed to the partnership, and Tarquin Publishing House was born. Draco was proud that their small company was improving the quality of education in the Isles, especially since Scorpius would benefit from their efforts. The long hours spent with Severus had been a balm for his wounded pride. Despite the years of bickering and the total incompatibility with Astoria, Draco would never have changed the circumstance that had brought Severus back to health, and he could not imagine a life without Scorpius.

Scorpius would soon be swept up in the excitement of his first year at Hogwarts and the pain of his mother's rejection would fade. Severus had been insistent upon supplementing the boy's education and Draco expected that Scorpius would be at the top of his class.

Draco looked over his shoulder, watching Severus interact with his parents. No matter how hard he tried, his reclusive partner refused to socialize outside the manor. After 19 years, he still used a full glamour when he made rare trips to the alley. Severus had been skeptical about the publishing idea, and Draco suspected that the man had agreed to the scheme out of a sense of obligation. Severus was family, in ways that Astoria never had been.

A pang of regret still lingered in Draco's mind. His ill-fated marriage was performed before Severus had recovered enough to attend. The adolescent dreams of being under Severus' protection tinged on their head, and Draco spent more time with his recovering mentor than with his new wife. Getting Severus to agree to occupy the gardener's cottage on the estate made Draco very happy. Visiting the little cottage every evening before dinner was the subject of the bride's first tirade.

Until their last argument, Draco never understood that his wife had always felt that she was an afterthought to the entire family. And, thinking back to the day he rescued Severus from the Shack, Draco had to admit that she was correct. Even so, shutting off all contact with Scorpius, regardless of their failings, was unconscionable. He hoped, for Scorpius' sake, that she kept her promise to him to see him off to Hogwarts. Shaking off his melancholy, he flicked his wand, and the parchments and scrolls packed themselves into his briefcase.

Joining the others for an aperitif, he listened indulgently as his father went on and on about the measures being taken to keep the geese from landing on the estate. Narcissa, Severus and Draco were quite relieved when the dinner hour arrived, hoping that consuming the delicious goose would prevent Lucius from continuing his

diatribe.

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On the afternoon of August 31st, Narcissa sent an owl to remind Severus that he should dress formally for Scorpius' farewell dinner. Draco smirked at Severus' scowl, knowing that the collars of formal robes irritated the delicate skin around the man's old wounds. Severus refused to wear a modern, open necked style of the robe, and Draco had long since given up convincing Severus to purchase the more comfortable garment.

"Laughing at an old man, how terribly mature of you, Draco," Severus said with a sneer.

"Laughing at your pig-headed refusal to step into the 21st century," Draco retorted, "and you are not an old man."

Severus cocked an eyebrow at that last remark, then dismissed it as mere familiarity. He and Draco spent more hours working together than they did apart. Surely, now that the Greengrass girl was a distant, bitter memory, perhaps he should encourage Draco to work fewer hours and to get out into society. He often puzzled as to why Narcissa had not started parading eligible women before her son.

Severus did not want to admit that he enjoyed the long hours with Draco. He knew it was selfishness on his part and had grown too accustomed to having a companion about these last few years. Still, with young Scorpius leaving for Hogwarts, the time had come to shove the young man out of their cozy nest.

"Have you received the latest draft from Conifer?" Severus asked, trying to get his mind back on their work.

Draco dug through his over-stuffed case and pulled the manuscript out. He handed it to Severus, apologizing for the mangled state of the manuscript's cover.

Severus took the copy with a disdainful look, then dipped his quill into the ever-present red ink and quickly became absorbed with the needed corrections. As he dipped his quill into the ink pot, he could not help noticing that Draco was watching a pair of squirrels cavorting in the trees just outside the cottage. Merlin, the son's bad habits must be rubbing off on the father.

Scorpius had calmed down considerably as August passed, then, the building excitement of the first day of school eclipsed their routine, and Scorpius had taken to daydreaming during their sessions. Severus relented and dismissed Scorpius earlier that week from further tutoring, knowing that it would be a waste of time to stuff any more knowledge into that ebullient head.

Draco, trying not to stare at Severus' elegant but perpetually stained fingers, forced his eyes away from the increasingly erotic display and turned his attention to the garden. He fondly remembered the summer before he started at Hogwarts. The long walks as Severus quizzed him on rare potions ingredients, moments when he was bursting with pride and the knowledge that he would be brilliant at the subject taught by his idol.

Draco was startled out of his reverie by an ink-stained hand on his arm.

"If you cannot concentrate, you might as well spend the afternoon with your son," Severus suggested.

"Yes, I... I'll see you at dinner," Draco stammered.

Severus bent his head and resumed his corrections as Draco packed up his case. He watched as Draco walked out the door, then returned to take his forgotten bag. Shaking his head, he watched Draco walk down the path to the formal garden. Yes, Severus mused, it was time to let go. Draco needed to start afresh, and Severus would just have to resign himself to being alone yet again.

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Draco was standing at the window, watching the shadows lengthen as the sun set behind the maze. He saw Severus' reflection as he approached.

"Ten or twelve," Severus said quietly as he watched a flock of pheasant searching for their evening roost.

"Eleven," Draco confirmed with an inelegant snort. "I'm afraid the Galleons will be slipped into Scorpius' pocket by his grandfather, since none of us won the bet."

"And how many trunks will he actually be allowed to take?" Severus asked.

Draco turned to Severus, then admitted, "Despite much whinging, by both my son and my father, there is still only one trunk allowed per student."

Severus suspected that he would be hearing much more on the subject of the unfairness of Hogwarts regulations during the course of the evening. He recalled a similar discussion some twenty-six years before, and Lucius had railed about those particular rules until he retained a seat on the governor's board.

Lucius and Scorpius entered the study, both clearly put out by the trunk debacle, yet surprisingly refrained from continuing their tirade in favor of refreshments. Scorpius requested a butterbeer, which was quickly dispensed before Narcissa entered the room. Lucius offered a round of sherry to the adults, cleverly assuaging Narcissa's suspicions of her grandson's beverage by claiming it was an innocuous and alcohol free American concoction called cream ale. Luckily, Narcissa missed the winks that passed between grandfather and grandson.

As the party adjourned to the dining hall, Severus unconsciously plucked at his collar. Draco discreetly directed a loosening charm to the garment, then plastered an innocent look on his face as Severus stopped and turned to glare. Draco gestured for Severus to enter the hall, and quickly took his place at the table. Severus followed, irritated to admit that whatever Draco had done to his collar, it made the irritation disappear.

After innumerable courses and copious refills of wine and illicit butterbeer, everyone at the table was replete. Talk inevitably turned to plans for the next morning, and Narcissa confirmed that Draco should take Scorpius to the station alone. The adults knew of Astoria's promise to be there, but they had agreed not to tell the boy.

Lucius visibly chuffed at the news, and Severus realized that he had been maneuvered by his dear wife into staying behind. Knowing the man, Lucius would find some excuse to visit the school much more frequently than was allowed. Lucius retrieved a small pouch from his breast pocket and presented it to Scorpius. The adults twittered as Scorpius carefully laid the bag of Galleons beside his glass, thanked his grandfather, and promising not to lose the money.

Gratefully, there had not been a word spoken that evening on the subject of trunks. Severus was feeling quite relaxed, and thanked Narcissa for a lovely repast. Conversation was at a lull, and everyone was smiling, most likely reminiscing about their first trip on the Hogwarts Express, when, flush with the butter beer, Scorpius asked if Severus would be moving into the manor.

"Whatever for?" asked Severus, wondering why the boy would expect that the living arrangements, in place since before he was born, would change once that Scorpius left for school.

"Well, Grandmother and Grandfather are going to the villa in Corsica for the winter, and Father will be here all alone."

The three adults were rendered speechless by too much food, overindulgence of the finest wines, and a long-ingrained habit of not prying into each other's privacy. Both Narcissa and Lucius remembered the budding, romantic feelings Draco had harbored for Severus when he was a youth. The necessity of the arranged marriage to Astoria, and the subsequent birth of Scorpius had convinced Draco's parents that their son had grown out of his infatuation.

Severus, too, had suspected that Draco's puerile affections had melted away with maturity. He rationalized Draco's attentiveness throughout the years as the result of a familial bond. Draco had never strayed from his marriage vows and had not shown the slightest romantic interest in Severus for the past twenty-one years. Although..., no, it was just the fanciful meanderings of an old recluse.

Draco, pleased that his son was worried for his well-being, tried to reassure Scorpius that he would be too busy working with to feel lonely.

"Then, you can stay in the cottage with Severus," Scorpius replied.

Draco looked at Severus, dismayed that the man seemed reluctant to want to share quarters. All week, Draco had been planning to ask Severus to take up residence at the manor, at least for the winter. The cottage was warm, that was, when Severus remembered to light the fireplaces. The elves never let any fire burn down at the manor, and they would never let Severus forget a meal.

Severus addressed Scorpius, "We shall endeavor to survive your absence, Master Malfoy, and do allay your worries about your father. Instead, turn your attention to the coming school year, for I shall expect full marks from you at the end of the winter term."

Lucius, magnanimous as usual, sincerely offered a suite of rooms in the East wing, should Severus change his mind, then nodded to Narcissa, who bundled a sleepy Scorpius out of his chair. After saying goodnight to Severus, and giving a hug to his father and grandfather, Narcissa escorted her grandson to bed. With a vague reference to a contract that needed review before the next day, Lucius excused himself and retreated to his study, leaving a perplexed Severus and a sullen Draco at the table.

"That was... strange," Draco said as Lucius closed the door. "I apologize if Scorpius caused you any embarrassment with his outburst."

"Think nothing of it, and remind me to send over a mild sobering potion for the boy," Severus said.

Running his finger over his lower lip, Severus wondered how much pressure Lucius would exert on him to move into the manor. The incessant badgering about relocating to a warmer clime was wearing him down. Maybe this small concession would deter his friend from proffering an endless supply of photographs of sunny villas and olive groves and the like. Of course, he could agree to the move and shock Lucius by his unexpected acquiescence. Yes, the idea brought a smirk to his face, and then he turned to Draco to accept the offer of accommodations.

Draco, captivated by Severus' finger caressing that full bottom lip, blushed when Severus caught his attention. The smirk on Severus' face turned into a rare smile, and that never bode well for the recipient.

"I believe I shall accept your gracious invitation, please send a competent elf to the cottage before you leave in the morning, as it is much too late to pack my belongings this evening."

Draco nodded, then his eyes widened as he comprehended Severus' meaning. "You'll move into the manor?" Draco asked, as if he had misheard.

"We've already established that. Now, would you call for the carriage," Severus said. "I think that I might fall asleep on the path if I try to walk."

As Draco waited for the carriage to be brought to the front door, he felt giddy. Not the mild intoxication one felt after several glasses of wine, but the floating-on-air feeling that he had forgotten about. He watched Severus slowly climb into the carriage and waved as the horses pulled away from the portico. The scent of fresh hay triggered an old memory and Draco laughed as he entered the vestibule. It had taken half a lifetime, but he had the feeling that his world would be put to rights and all would be well.