

Misbehaviour, or, How to Marry a Malfoy

by diabolica

In the wake of her sister's Supreme Betrayal of All Things Pure-blooded, sixteen-year-old Narcissa is left on her own to deal with their parents. Keeping an eye on them is no easy job, and Bella, having married well—meaning rich—is no help at all. Then one evening at a fundraiser dinner, Abraxas Malfoy goes to great lengths to speak to Narcissa about her own recent misbehaviour, and things turn out different—and far better—than Narcissa ever dared to imagine.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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i.

Narcissa sat in the drawing room, pondering the state of things as her father held forth. He spoke in French, merely because he could. Mother called it an absurd affectation. Father said it was for Narcissa's sake, to refresh her language skills over the summer. He was telling the story about the Minister and the doxy eggs. Again. She smiled and nodded in the right places, having heard this story so many times that she need not have heard the words to know when a response was expected. She considered this a good sign. If he was back to telling his stories, that meant he was no longer focussed on her own shortcomings. Sherry glass in hand, he had no idea that she was not listening. It was all she could do not to drum her fingers on the arm of her chair. If Andromeda were here, they would be trying not to look at each other so as not to break into giggles.

The clock in the hall sounded unnaturally loud of a sudden.

Not that Narcissa thought her father ridiculous. It was endearing how he never seemed to notice that his daughters had heard each of his stories more times than they cared to count. As a child she had hung on his every word so that by the time she was ten she could have recited them from memory. Story-telling was a compulsion with him, and Narcissa could certainly think of worse compulsions to have. The story-telling she could forgive, could even indulge. Only at the moment she was restless. Tonight she felt impatient to be away from the house, even though she didn't much care for the thought of where they were going.

A small beaded handbag lay in her lap. She had worn the high-heeled sandals, desperately uncomfortable, that she knew Mother would expect her to wear. She wished she could have brought her book down so she could have at least had something to read while she waited for the axe to fall.

Summer was a dead time in the Black household. The house was cavernous now that she had only her parents to share it with. There was so much to do, but most of it had to wait until Mother was asleep or out of the house. Bella came round less and less frequently, and everyone played coy about it around Narcissa, as if she couldn't guess the reason. Either they thought her still a child or else a hopeless idiot.

She wondered how much longer they would have to wait.

Father paused just long enough to have another sip of sherry (just one to start the evening, to loosen up) and continued his monologue. Had his hair been streaked with so much white last summer? Narcissa could not remember. She chewed the inside of her lip.

Father had switched to English. '... She'll make us late.'

Narcissa resisted the urge to shrug--it was unladylike, as she had been informed. She kept her shoulders level and said what was on her mind. 'She always does.'

'You mustn't tell her that.'

'Have I ever?'

Father sighed. 'How do you expect to get back in her good books with that attitude? *Bénice*, ma petite.'

Narcissa was feeling spiteful. 'I will if she will.'

'Elle est ta mère,' said Father, as if that excused everything.

'Je sais,' she replied, because it did not.

Father looked at the hearth, then at the door. As though he had just remembered something unpleasant, his grey eyes clouded. He leaned forward in his chair. 'Did you owl the bank today?' he asked.

'Yes. I made the transfer.'

'Good girl.' He breathed out and leaned back again, entirely too relieved, considering the situation.

Narcissa made her face stern. Why did he put her in this position? 'It won't help anything,' she told him bluntly. 'She'll burn through it in a week or two. A month if we're lucky. And then what?'

'I just need some time. To decide how to tell her.'

Narcissa could think of nothing else to say except, 'It's your money.'

He nodded. Narcissa wondered if he was reassuring himself of that fact. 'I am lucky to have you, ma petite, to keep track of it.'

He was unbelievably lucky, she wanted to tell him, and while she was at it, she wanted to ask why she, the sixteen-year-old, had to be the adult in this household. From the way Father stared at his hands, Narcissa could tell that he would not be the one to tell Mother that her little problem was going to bankrupt the family. She could almost hear him say, '*Ma petite prendra soin de lui*.'

She kept her silence out of love.

Father opened his mouth, and Narcissa knew he was going to ask her, reluctantly, regretfully, if she would please be a darling and go see if Mother was quite ready yet. Fortunately she was saved by a tread on the stair.

Mother arrived with all the subtlety of a hippogriff. 'I hope you two are ready; we shall be late if we don't leave right now.' She stopped and looked her daughter over. 'Is that what you're wearing, Cissy?'

Following Father's lead, Narcissa stood up. 'Yes, Mother.'

Mother looked at Father for support. 'Do you really think she should wear those?'

Father, bless him, kissed mother's cheek and said, 'Ma petite looks beautiful, just like her mother. Should we wait for Bella and Rodolphus?'

'No,' Mother said impatiently, swatting at Father. 'You'll ruin my makeup. Bella owed to say they'd meet us at the Bulstrodes.' She then turned and asked Narcissa, 'Why don't you wear the blue robes I bought you last week? They match your eyes so nicely.'

Narcissa smiled, tightly. If she'd worn the blue robes, Mother would have asked why she wasn't wearing the green. She kept her voice even when she replied, 'That's true, Mother, but if I change now, we'll definitely be late. And look, I'm wearing the shoes.'

'Oh, those do suit you. Fine, I suppose you're right about the robes. Well, come on then.'

ii.

Keeping her eyes on the evening sky outside the window, Narcissa remained quiet in the carriage. (Mother refused to Floo or Apparate, as she deemed them undignified modes of travel.) Not that she had much choice. Mother talked enough for four people, so there was hardly any need for her to do much more than nod or utter the odd, 'Yes, Mother.' Her father had adopted the same tactic with surprising success over the years. Bella had a theory that Father talked so much in Mother's absence because in her presence, there was no way he could get a word in edgewise.

Mother addressed him warningly now. 'And if your sister says the first thing about Andromeda, I swear I will leave.'

Father, who did not understand female politics, patted her hand distractedly and assured her, 'No one will say a word, chère.'

Not to our faces, thought Narcissa.

Gone more than half a year and Andromeda--the blood traitor, Narcissa mentally amended--was still conspicuous, though now only by her absence. Though she hated to admit it, Narcissa missed her, if only because these fundraiser evenings were far less tedious when she could spend them in the company of someone who understood their tediousness (Bella always found them great fun and so was no help at all). Intellectually, Narcissa knew she should hate her sister for her Supreme Betrayal of all Things Pure-Blooded, but it was difficult to find the hate under the rubble of her anger at being abandoned to deal with their parents on her own (again, Bella, having married well, meaning rich, and having her various 'commitments', was no help).

The desire to escape was not difficult to understand (Narcissa entertained her own fantasies of getting out from under the same roof as Mother), but Andromeda might have had a care for someone other than herself. How was Narcissa alone supposed to monitor Father's alcohol consumption (invariably overmuch) *and* keep an eye on Mother? Her stomach knotted itself around the knowledge that she would end this evening by finding one of them in a back room, either sleeping off the drink or wagering an average apothecary's yearly salary at cards.

'Cissy, I would really like you to make an effort *total* to some people at the Bulstrodes' and not just shadow your sister all night,' Mother was saying. 'After that mess with the Flints, we'll need to find another way to get you sorted, which we shall never manage if people never hear you speak.'

Mother regarded shyness as a disease which could be treated with regular doses of badgering. It embarrassed her, having a daughter who found it difficult to speak in

company. Narcissa wondered if her mother realised the irony of exhorting her to speak when her speech generally netted her nothing but criticism.

Getting Cissy Sorted was another of Mother's new favourite topics in the wake of the blood traitor's Supreme Betrayal. Narcissa had not given much thought to the issue of Getting Sorted, until her off-the-record engagement to Maximilian Flint was unofficially (regrettably, lamentably, under the circumstances, well, we think it best) broken, which was the moment she realised that she hadn't wanted to be engaged to him in the first place and that, in point of fact, no one had ever asked her opinion on the subject. Given a choice, she would never have (unofficially) accepted him anyway. It was all so thirteenth century, but of course, voicing that sentiment would undoubtedly have earned her a 'Why can't you be more like Bella?'

Because arguing was pointless and other concerns were occupying her mind, Narcissa muttered an absent, 'I shall do my best, Mother.'

iii.

Narcissa breathed a sigh of relief that the ride over had not included another lecture on her own recent misbehaviour. If both Mother and Father could make it through this one evening without *that* being mentioned, Narcissa felt she might have a chance of spending the rest of the summer in relative peace.

It seemed they were not terribly late after all. Narcissa spotted Bella in the Bulstrodes' parlour, chatting with the Notts. She looked gorgeous, damn her: shining dark hair perfectly arranged, black eyes blazing, impossibly chic red robes flawlessly tailored. With a flash of white teeth and a harmlessly flirtatious hand on the arm of Theodore Nott, Bella looked exactly like those photos of Mother from the late 1940s, the ones Father kept on his desk. Her husband looked on indulgently. Nott's scandalously young second wife looked murderous.

On glancing towards the doorway and noting her family standing there, Bella excused herself and came to greet them. She air-kissed Mother's cheek first, then Narcissa's, then Father's. Within a moment, Rodolphus was also there shaking hands.

While they were exchanging pleasantries, Father glanced up and noted the Malfoys had entered. 'Oh look. Les nouveaux riches sont arrivés.' Narcissa wondered if that was contempt or admiration she heard in her father's voice.

'It's the riche that matters to this crowd,' Mother said archly and sipped at her champagne.

'Sadly true, chère,' Father conceded, 'but you can tell so much by their manners.'

Puzzled, Narcissa said, 'But the Malfoys made their money over a hundred years ago.'

Immediately, she wished she hadn't.

For an interminable moment, Bella and Mother regarded her with identical raised eyebrows. Father contemplated the ceiling. Rodolphus merely smirked.

'One hears things,' Narcissa mumbled sheepishly. She also found the younger Malfoy's manners impeccable, but she dared not say so in this company.

Bella, who had always been more forgiving than Mother of Narcissa's social shortcomings, elaborated: 'Their son was also in Slytherin, if I remember correctly.' She looked at Narcissa for confirmation; Narcissa nodded.

Because this latest interjection came from Bella, Mother nodded sagely. 'That's as nouveau as one can get and still be invited to these gatherings,' she said dismissively.

'I know exactly what you mean, Druella,' began Rodolphus, launching into an anecdote about another family who had been invited this evening. His story diverted everyone's attention, but it was far too late. Narcissa could feel that her face was scarlet.

In the more rational part of her mind, Narcissa supposed it would have been imprudent to ask if every social group needed a few members to look down on in order to increase their own sense of superiority. Probably half the people in this room frowned on her family due to Andromeda, and the other half frowned on the Malfoys for the shine on the galleons in their pockets. *I shall never become like them*, she thought.

Father barely had time to say, 'Oh, they're coming this way,' before Abraxas Malfoy sighted them, waved and began making his way over. Nouveau riche or not, the man was imposing, with shoulders broader than Father's and sharp, hawk-like eyes. As the Malfoys moved closer, Narcissa was surprised to note that the father was slightly shorter than his son.

Abraxas Malfoy extended a hand. 'Evening, Cygnus, Druella. Girls. Lestrangle, how are things? I'm sure you all remember my wife, Marcia, my son, Lucius.' As greetings were exchanged, Malfoy motioned to his son and said, 'Finished school this year. Ten NEWTs. Pity he isn't better at Arithmancy or he might have managed eleven.'

Lucius cast his eyes down deferentially, but Narcissa noted how his hands balled themselves into fists. *He's marking time, just as I am*, Narcissa thought. She felt a twinge of sympathy.

Malfoy Senior looked first at Narcissa and then at Lucius. 'You're still at Hogwarts, aren't you, Narcissa? I imagine you two know each other.'

Lucius smiled coolly. 'We are acquainted, Father. How nice to see you again, Narcissa.' He nodded to her.

'Likewise,' she answered quietly, her throat tight with the weight of so many eyes.

Fortunately, at that point Abraxas Malfoy excused himself and his family, asking where he could find their hosts so as to greet them.

'Climbers,' Mother snorted once they had melted into the crowd. She turned her eyes to Narcissa. 'He seemed to pay *you* quite a bit of attention, Cissy. Now what do you suppose that was all about?'

'Perhaps he has delusions of marrying his son into our family,' Bella quipped. Mother made a small derisive noise, but smiled. Father chuckled.

Mother and Father were soon distracted by Uncle Orion and Aunt Wallberga's arrival. They all managed to get through a few moments' civil conversation before they were bid to be seated for dinner. Both Narcissa and her father were right: neither of them mentioned Andromeda to her parents, although later that evening, Narcissa overheard Aunt Wallberga remarking pointedly to Lucretia Prewett that a proper education in one's obligations to family should, of course, begin at home.

iv.

Mother's lips turned white as she scanned the seating chart. 'We're being punished. I know it,' she whispered furiously. Narcissa looked over her shoulder and noticed at once that she and her parents had been seated near the Malfoys. Bella and Rodolphus were seated slightly further up the table, and Uncle Orion and Aunt Wallberga were seated nearer the head. Mother would be livid in the carriage on the way home.

Narcissa found her seat and waited for the others to find theirs. Lucius Malfoy was seated directly across from her, Abraxas Malfoy on her right. Mother was seated to the elder Malfoy's right, across from a tiny ancient warlock whose name Narcissa could never remember. Father was seated beside Marcia Malfoy, which was fortunate, as this meant he would have someone to converse with in French. Mother would be likely to keep her ear on that conversation. Narcissa sensed something was afoot.

The elder Malfoy pulled out Narcissa's chair for her once everyone had arrived at the table and made certain she was comfortably seated before seating himself. Narcissa noted that his son did the same for the woman seated on his left, a Ministry departmental head of something. Lucius Malfoy made polite small talk with her and the ancient warlock as the appetizer was served.

Once the appetizers had been cleared away and the first course served, while everyone else was engaged in eating and chatting, Abraxas Malfoy exchanged a look with his son, one Narcissa couldn't fathom. Lucius engaged the Ministry witch in conversation. The elder Malfoy turned to Narcissa. 'I've heard,' he said quietly, 'that you had a small business venture at school this year.'

Mortified, Narcissa blushed. This was the last subject that she had expected to arise at this table. "I--I assure you, sir," she stammered, glancing quickly towards her mother to ensure she had not heard, 'I've been reprimanded at school and by my family. It won't happen again.'

Abraxas Malfoy regarded her with interest. 'I should be very disappointed indeed if that were true. From what I hear, you were running quite a successful enterprise until Dumbledore decided to interfere. What I'm interested in are the details.'

Narcissa was glad she had not yet taken a bite of her fish; she would have choked. 'Sir?' she managed.

'How did you come up with the idea?'

Narcissa could not take her eyes off her mother. 'I'm not sure I know what you mean, sir,' she said, wishing desperately for this conversation to end.

With an artful gesture (she could not be certain she had seen the wand in his hand) and a whisper that she did not quite catch, Abraxas Malfoy said, 'We won't be overheard. Now, if I promise not to breathe a word of this conversation to your family, may we dispense with the coyness?'

She thought for a moment, then answered honestly. 'One of my housemates asked me for a loan before a Hogsmeade weekend. I never use all of my pocket money, so I had a small amount to lend. We made an agreement. After that, word got around.'

'What was your going interest rate?'

'Thirty percent,' she said without hesitation. In saying the words, she was surprised to find it liberating, almost thrilling, to discuss this with someone who wasn't either frowning or screaming at her for it. 'It went up ten percent for every day repayment was late.'

'That is absolutely usurious,' he said. He looked delighted. 'How did you manage it?'

Narcissa allowed herself a tiny, satisfied smile. 'I learned a useful contract charm. I was never short of business.'

'Did you ever have any trouble collecting on your loans?'

'No. Well, not until someone told the headmaster. I made a point of not loaning to people I thought overly risky.' She paused for a moment before adding, 'And people know who my sister is.'

He nodded. 'What was your profit margin?'

She gave him the figure, again without hesitation, and watched him try to suppress his amazement. 'It would have been higher,' she said, 'only Dumbledore found out and gave me a month's detention. It stopped me from collecting on three outstanding loans.'

'Do you know where you made your mistake?'

Her face fell. This was what she had been waiting for, the censure. 'I engaged in commerce, an activity not befitting of my class,' she said flatly.

'No, my dear girl. I didn't ask what your mother thinks you did wrong. I asked where you made a mistake, as in: why did you get caught?'

Having asked herself the same question many times, Narcissa answered him with the conclusion that she had come to. 'I grew too quickly. And I underestimated the Hufflepuff who tipped off Professor Dumbledore.'

'You loaned money to a Hufflepuff?' Again, he seemed surprised but not displeased.

She nodded. 'From a purely financial standpoint, it was a good risk, but I should have been more cautious.'

'Indeed, you should. Do you see why now?'

'I should have kept it within my own house, where my family name still commands respect, where people have a sense of honour about these things.'

His smile was thoughtful, paternal, shrewd. 'That is precisely what I wanted to know.'

v.

Narcissa was awoken by a familiar owl at her bedroom window. She threw off the covers and opened the window so the owl could alight on her desk. Once she had untied the parchment from its leg, the owl took off again immediately, knowing better than to linger lest it be seen.

Before opening the letter, Narcissa breathed deeply. The parchment in her hand either contained very good or very bad news.

N,

I don't know what you said to my father last night, but you said it well. He was completely charmed. He's going to owl your parents to request a meeting. (Do try to act surprised, sweet.) It will be a long process, I'm sure, but he was even talking about getting you an apprenticeship in the investment division of Gringotts when you finish school, which would be excellent training. Well done.

All my love,

L.

Narcissa read the letter three times, barely able to contain her excitement. This was better than she had hoped, far better. She closed her eyes and tried to slow her racing heart. This was as unexpected as it was exhilarating, but there was still so much that could go wrong. She mustn't get ahead of herself. First she would let them set up the meeting; then she could worry about whether Abraxas Malfoy was persuasive enough to convince her parents to let her apprentice at Gringotts. Then ... well, then she would see.

Lucius had said: I know what I want. I want you.

He had said: Your sister's mistake makes no difference to me.

He had said: Trust me.

Narcissa held the parchment by one corner and set it alight with her wand. Within seconds it was gone, leaving only the barest whiff of smoke, which would disappear in a moment.

It was too early yet to dress for breakfast, so although she was so full of energy she could have flown without a broom, Narcissa crawled back into bed to wait for the

house-elf who normally woke her at 8:00. She would use the time between now and then to calm herself so that, when she arrived at the breakfast table, her parents would not know anything was different.