

In the Matter of the Application of Malfoy, Draco

by *diabolica*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This story was written for [catsintheattic](#), who gave me this prompt: *Draco's return to Britain. Could be that moment when he steps off a ship or plane or out of the Floo network, could be his first dealing with the Ministry to get his papers cleared, could be his first round through Malfoy Manor.*

Much love and appreciation to [AmyLouise](#) for her sharp-eyed beta skills.

This piece can be read as a coda to [Scylla, Charybdis and the Delicate Art of Secret-Keeping](#)

Draco hadn't thought to bring any reading material, as he hadn't realised he would be kept waiting so long, so he sat, impeccably dressed, shoes polished to a high gloss, with a briefcase beside his chair, wishing he had a book. The briefcase contained five thousand Galleons...a Malfoy should never be caught without hard currency...and an application package, including the official decision of the post-war truth-telling commission and a scroll of parchment detailing his N.E.W.T. marks. He looked around the waiting area until his gaze alighted on a chair down the hall where, fortunately, someone had discarded a Daily Prophet. He stood, retrieved the newspaper and sat back down to read.

He had not set foot in his home country in over a year, and now, having been pulled back by a near-invisible thread of longing for it, the strangeness of hearing his own language spoken all around him had caught Draco off guard. He could not filter it out, and so the conversations of every witch and wizard arriving for work had assaulted his brain. He felt fractious and disoriented from the time change, having left in the middle of the night to Floo into the Ministry in time for his appointment. Nor had he expected that everything would look so alien. Standing in the Ministry of Magic's Atrium this morning, it was as if nothing had changed but only stood in sharper relief with harder edges. Or as if perhaps everything had merely shifted an inch to the left.

The wizard at the security desk had registered his wand without comment and directed him to Level Five, where he had been sitting for the last two hours, breathing the institutional smell of lemon floor polish and boredom, contemplating a plain door marked Employment.

As Mother had bluntly informed him, Draco had two options: he could study finance, either with her or elsewhere, with a view to taking over from her or, she said with her temporal smile, 'Do what your Father did, and marry a girl who knows the ropes.' Draco had opted for the former; rather than study with Mother, a need for self-sufficiency in all things had propelled him on this course. He had begun by researching the requirements.

Over a game of chess, he'd informed Severus of his plans and the fact that they would require clearance from the Ministry. They always played with Draco's pieces (owner's advantage), but Severus could direct his troops without speaking a word. Draco had averaged it out and learned that he could win one out of every twelve

games...although his record used to be one in fifteen. Over the last year, he had learned to satisfy himself with slight but discernible progress and subjected himself to these regular thrashings because, as Father had said many times, a blade that cannot be sharpened is worthless.

After a long pause, Severus had said, 'Whatever you do, don't grovel.'

'I wouldn't even know how,' Draco had replied with a smirk.

Severus had nodded as his queen beheaded Draco's bishop. 'Good answer. Check.'

Draco had announced his decision to his parents at dinner that night, his conversation with Severus having strengthened his resolve.

'Will you be all right on your own?' Mother had asked.

'Of course he will,' said Father, reaching across the table to squeeze Mother's hand. 'You mustn't worry so, darling.'

At that point, Mother and Father had exchanged a look, reminding Draco of one reason he wanted to undertake this journey. Something about the careful way his parents treated each other since the end of the war...tender, but with a kind of strangeness between them, as if they were relearning each other's secret selves...made him feel like a voyeur.

To cover his discomfort, Draco had said, 'I'll be fine, Mother. I'm looking forward to it.'

And he was. He had never lived alone before, and he felt it was well past time he did. If everything had gone to plan as originally intended, he'd have had his own flat in the City for over a year now. Draco wanted his life to begin.

The first step on his journey, however, had already presented a test, in that he was obliged to wait for a Ministry of Magic bureaucrat to see him. Reviewing all his childhood excursions to the Ministry, Draco could not recall a single occasion on which Lucius Malfoy and all that he represented had not been immediately granted admittance to whatever office he had come to visit. Of course he knew that the war had changed matters, but Draco had still been astounded to learn that, despite his having received confirmation of a nine o'clock appointment, he was still expected to remove a small queue ticket from the mouth of the gargoyle which presided over the waiting area and sit until he was called. The gargoyle, having explained this process more than once apparently, was unsympathetic. As there were no humans to whom Draco could appeal this bit of madness (at least, no humans who were not in the exact same situation as he), and as at least two other people had spoken up at this point to say that they, too, had nine o'clock appointments and had been obliged to take a ticket, Draco had sat down to wait.

Malfoys were never obliged to wait, and they were, therefore, not very good at it. Yet here he was, like a common immigrant. He desperately needed a cup of coffee, preferably strong and sweet, but there was apparently none to be had in the building...none that would have met his requirements, anyway. The door marked Employment opened, and a number was called that was not his. Draco put aside the Prophet and sat with his hands folded to keep from biting his fingernails; he suppressed a frustrated sigh.

The door opened several times, and other numbers were called. Sometime after eleven o'clock, as Draco was contemplating whether to give the entire enterprise up as a bad job, the door opened again, this time for him. The bureaucrat who stood on the other side was singularly nondescript; the only remarkable thing about him was his uniform greyness, down to the pallor of his skin and his wind-dried mud-puddle eyes. Wordlessly, like a Dementor, he beckoned for Draco to follow him down another long hall to a drably furnished office with a ludicrous view of palm trees, turquoise sea and white sand from a charmed window. Draco wondered whether this was Magical Maintenance's idea of a joke or an indication of the grey bureaucrat's secret longings.

The nameplate on the desk said G. Harkiss, a name Draco recognised only vaguely.

'Mr Malfoy?' asked G. Harkiss. Even his voice was flat, colourless.

'Yes.'

'Have a seat.'

Draco sat.

'Application?'

Draco opened his briefcase and laid the carefully prepared package on the desk. G. Harkiss shuffled through the leaves of parchment.

After a moment: 'These are your N.E.W.T. marks?'

'Yes.'

G. Harkiss's lower lip jutted out in a passable semblance of appreciation. 'Exceptional.'

Don't sound so fucking surprised, Draco wanted to say. Instead, he said, 'Thank you.'

G. Harkiss examined Draco's documents for a long, silent moment, then:

'There's nothing here about your prior experience.'

'Experience?'

'Work experience,' said G. Harkiss.

'I'm here to look for my first position,' Draco explained.

The grey bureaucrat made a quiet, non-committal noise and marked something down on the parchment. Draco's sense of dysphoria increased; this man was passing judgement on him.

'Well, this all seems to be in order,' the functionary said finally. 'If you would roll up your sleeve, please.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'The only people who qualify for this particular permit are former Death Eaters.'

Draco could not help himself. 'Have people been fighting for the privilege?' he asked, incredulous.

'You'd be surprised at the people we get in here,' the man remarked humourlessly.

Draco narrowed his eyes, knowing he was looking at someone who had never stood before a leviathan and struggled not to be consumed. He could see no other recourse, however. Feeling suddenly defiant, he rolled up his sleeve. He did not feel the heady rush he'd once experienced baring his arm in a Knockturn Alley shop, but he had come to accept that this mark was part of his past and thus part of him, and he refused to pretend it didn't exist.

The outline of Draco's Mark, once burnt black, had faded so that now it only appeared as a white-on-white scar, as if once, long ago, someone had carved a skull and serpent into his arm with a thin, lethally sharp razor. His father's Mark was still pink and raw-looking, the colour of a wound reopened over and over, even more than a year after the Dark Lord's defeat. Though he knew it was absurd, Draco could not shake the feeling that, even in this, he could not measure up to Father's example, which was one more reason why he could not go back.

Inscrutable, G. Harkiss examined the Mark then made another note on the parchment Draco had handed him. Another long silence unfolded itself over the grey bureaucrat's desk, just long enough for Draco to begin to panic that this man would not grant his permit. Draco tugged his sleeve down and waited.

Without looking up: 'Your permit will be sent by owl post to the address listed in your application.'

'I would need it by tomorrow morning,' Draco said, then amended, 'if that's possible.'

'You'll have it by close of business today.'

G. Harkiss did not stand or shake hands; he did not say goodbye. Yet it was nevertheless clear to Draco that he had been dismissed. 'Thank you,' he said as he stood. G. Harkiss glanced up and nodded. Draco left.

After retrieving his wand from the security desk, Draco stood in the Atrium for a moment, deciding what to do next. The blank afternoon lay before him, and, untethered as he was, he could do anything he chose with it. He could Floo directly back to the Manor, where at least two house-elves would be bursting with joy that young master was home at last, and remove the dust sheets while he waited for the Ministry's owl. He could lose himself in the unsettling familiarity of London; he could confront it, stare it down and study it until it resembled the home country he remembered. He could pop into that Thai restaurant where he'd once eaten with Pansy. He could drop in on Zabini or Nott. He could finally track down a decent cup of coffee. A thread of possibility, taut and red, extended itself; tomorrow morning he had an interview with a firm called Greengrass & Associates, but until then, he was free.

Draco stepped into the Floo and named his destination.