

Hanging by a Thread

by hp4freak

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Chapter 1 of 1

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He found his mother in the formal dining room. There was no food before her of course, since they never took meals here unless they were entertaining guests. He had first checked the master suite his parents had shared, but it was obviously empty and hadn't been disturbed in so long. Narcissa had moved out of it and into a guest room down the hall from his own room shortly after the final battle. His mother's change of heart, and presumably his father's, hadn't been enough to absolve him of all of his crimes over the years. It had been enough for Draco and his mother, but Lucius Malfoy had simply been and done too much for the Ministry to 'forgive and forget' as Potter had called it.

Harry Potter, wizard extraordinaire, had whole-heartedly tried to save them all of this fate. He had renewed his faith in the prison of Azkaban, though he had convinced the Ministry of the cruelty of using Dementors as guards. A new department had been created, working closely with the Aurors, where one captured and the other secured. It provided more jobs among the community as well, Potter had said.

The new Minister, the generally well liked and approved of Kingsley Shacklebolt, had immediately hired Potter, his friend Weasley, and even Longbottom to work with and for the Ministry. Draco had yet to figure out if they were working to improve it, right its wrongs, or were simply collecting Gryffindors like they were Chocolate Frog Cards.

Pulling out a chair two down from Narcissa, he sat down heavily, his slight frame dropping like a sack of potatoes. There was no one to hide from now, not in his own home, no one to pretend he was better than. His mother, and his father as well, would have once berated him for it, lectured him on posture and posing, but not now, not for a while now. His mother sat stiffly. She was lost in thought he could see, but even still, she'd had more practice at control and manners than his barely nineteen years had allowed him.

"It's nearly time... to leave, Mother," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. He'd nearly stopped his sentence short, but thought it cruel to either of them to even hint that it was nearly time for anything other than leaving.

She nodded once, and a soft sigh fell from her lips though they barely moved. He only heard it in the silent stillness of the grand room. He lifted himself first, tucking in his chair, then going to stand stiffly by hers. She took the hand he offered and stood as well, then waited while he tucked her chair in. They were both fully dressed, only their cloaks missing, which they would wear even if the heat of mid-June didn't call for them. Even the stiff black coat he wore was too much, but for his father, he would have worn anything.

Cloaks fastened at the neck and the door secured behind them, his mother tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, but whether for support or to make sure he didn't disappear as well, he didn't know. The day was all sunshine and roses, not literally roses, but the heady scent of freshly bloomed flowers in the eastern gardens and blooms on trees around them filled the late spring air. It was the first day practically all spring that hadn't been filled with dreary clouds and cold drizzle. It was more or less the exact opposite than it should have been considering the list of events that day on the Ministry's calendar.

There was more rejoicing in the air, even still, over a year since the Battle at Hogwarts had commenced and ended in a bloody but favorable outcome. It had been so touch and go shortly after that, the Ministry had actually feared exposure. At first, the three Malfoys had rejoiced as well, in their own way. It was a much more private matter that didn't involve silly wand sparking and any Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes products. Instead, they'd relaxed at home, comfortable in the stability and sanctuary of it once again. Though Draco had been at Hogwarts most of the year, he hadn't enjoyed having his home invaded, not even by a man he was once taught to worship.

The trip to the Ministry was short with the aid of magic. The people bustling about surprised Draco in a way he hadn't expected. Surely life didn't carry on this way just a few floors up from madness and hypocrisy.

The ride in the lift had been short, like the trip there, and there weren't nearly enough stairs between levels nine and ten. Before too many more minutes, Draco was staring at his father's face, one he had not seen for many months. Lucius stood there stoically, the mirror image of his wife and son. He spotted them immediately, a flicker of his eyes that lingered just a little longer than they had on the rest of the gathered audience. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking from where Draco and his mother were standing, but the crowd was not so difficult to read. Neither Narcissa nor Draco had attended any of the previous executions, but the lack of gossip and excitement surrounding those events had led Draco to believe that they had been much smaller affairs. Many of the crowd before him was nervous and excited. They twitched in little ways, shifting their feet from one foot to the next and back again. It had never before been difficult to undertake the opinions and stares of people that were directed at his family, but as he stood there, Draco realized that, for once, it did bother him and quite a bit at that. He would rather have all these people gone so that he could watch his father die in the peace and dignity he deserved. Instead, Lucius Malfoy was once again a spectacle to them, the entertainment at his expense so easily obtained.

A sigh escaped from his nose, his lips so tightly drawn that they couldn't even be bothered to part for the satisfaction of despair. His mother's eyes flicked to him, a question directed silently, but he shook his head at her. He wasn't willing to give the people around him the reward of hearing them speak even a word. Instead, he turned his eyes again to the stage. They were in one of the courtrooms on the tenth level. He had known which one once through the visit from Potter they had received to be given the news, but now it escaped his mind. When they had arrived, they had simply followed the cattle herding through the door.

As he stared at his father, the long blond hair so much like his own, he let his mind wander even further. He remembered as a child, having both his parents wrapped around his little finger. It wasn't exactly what he wanted now, but he wanted to go back to that time, back before he'd ever met Potter, before talk of the Dark Lord rising again. During the second war, his father had been one of the biggest supporters for his return to power. He had been so sure that they would win this time, that the world would be changed into something more pure, more powerful, and that they would all step up to their rightful place as rulers of the Muggles. He had bought into it, believed.

The prisoners were usually granted private time with their families before the execution took place, but Draco's father had opted out of that. They had said their goodbyes when talk first began of previously pardoned Death Eaters being rounded up once again. They had not only said goodbye to his father, but to each other as well, for each of them had taken part in the war and most definitely on the wrong side at that. But when the group of Aurors came, it was only Lucius they sought; he had gone willingly enough. That had been when his mother had moved from the room she'd shared for so long with her once again incarcerated husband. It was interesting that the thought of running had never crossed any of their minds, so tired as they were from fighting.

It had seemed like an eternity before they received any news. Some of the executions had even started by then, and they had already been sure Lucius was slated for the same fate. Potter had shown up alone, uninvited, but not completely unwelcome. He had been responsible, after all, for the original pardon of Draco and his parents, and even Draco had heard how hard the boy was working even now to exonerate his father again, a man who had personally wronged him many times over. It couldn't be said that Draco's opinion changed completely, let alone did anything near a 'one-eighty,' but there was no denying that he was already indebted.

The trials had all been held, the Wizengamot voted. They had all been closed. Only people willing to speak for or against the accused had been welcome, family not included. It was regular practice that they discredit and exclude anyone that might be persuaded or tempted to lie for the witch or wizard on trial. Potter had spoken for Lucius, but the number of wrongs were simply too great to overcome even by a few, however important, hours of turning coat. The reasons hadn't been important.

Scanning the crowd, unable to continue staring at blond hair and seemingly untroubled eyes, Draco found the Minister of Magic. Very little changed in Draco's expression, but his eyes became cold, tight around the edges. Minister Shacklebolt turned, and for a moment Draco could see an apology forming in his own dark eyes. He didn't want to see it, though, because frankly he didn't believe it for a second, not truly. He had grown up, at least from the first time he had really started to notice things like this, seeing his father manipulate and work Minister Fudge. It had been almost a joke around their house. He wondered who was controlling this famed wizard now.

In turning he again found something he didn't want to see, this time in the form of still messy black hair and round spectacles. Another time he might have sneered in their direction, but now it meant almost nothing to him. For all his thoughts on the debts he owed Potter, he still couldn't manage much more than apathy when looking at him. The scowl on his face neither delighted nor bewildered him, not even when he noticed how it was aimed at the Minister. It didn't matter now.

The clock above the stage chimed, and he closed his eyes briefly at the way his mother's finger's tightened in his. He couldn't recall when she had moved her hand from his elbow.

He had noticed earlier the two men just in front of them, and now he clearly heard one say to the other in a stage whisper, "Off with his head!" The other snickered, and it was all Draco could do to keep his mouth shut. Several people around them that had noticed they were so near turned to gauge their reaction, but neither he nor Narcissa gave one. Even in this time and place, the actions of those men were beneath them. It was interesting how much Draco had grown in the last year.

There were several movements near the front of the room that drew everyone's attention again. Two men whose names he didn't know had brought his father to his knees in front of Gawain Robards, Head Auror at the Ministry. He had a look of distaste on his face, but whether it was for the act that he was about to perform or for the man kneeling before him, Draco couldn't say.

"Lucius Malfoy," his voice boomed, ricocheting off the walls all around the large room. It was difficult to tell if it was magically enhanced or not. "You have been brought before the court in several hearings that have determined your guilt in crimes too numerous to name here. You have had ample opportunity to appeal these claims and speak out against them. They have all been overthrown. It has been determined by the Wizengamot that the only punishment fitting enough is death." He seemed to pause, waiting for the sudden chatter to die down. Draco wondered why people should sound so surprised; after all weren't they here to watch exactly that?

When the hush fell, Robards started again, "Have you anything to say?"

It was a surprising question to Draco. It seemed to surprise his father as well, but the man shook his head in a negative answer. He could have said goodbye, he could have pleaded for his life, but none of that would have been the father Draco knew so well. He had spent years in servitude, yet still above the reach of the Ministry of Magic, and even now it seemed he couldn't make himself beg anything of them. Draco knew that it wouldn't have mattered.

Lucius' face was pointed toward the executioner, but his eyes traveled back to Narcissa and Draco. He spared his son little more than a glance, though his head moved in the barest of nods. This was their official goodbye. For his wife, Lucius' eyes turned to longing. Without his choices in life, would she watch him die now? Would this be the end of their marriage, the end of fatherhood, the end of life? How could he have survived both wars only to die by the hands of justice?

Draco's eyes were drawn to his mother's face. She had stared, if not boldly, bravely at least into his father's a moment ago, but now she stared down. She had closed up, and he could feel her rocking back and forth ever so slightly. She had a look of intense prayer though no religion had ever touched their household before. Taking her hand in his left now, he wrapped his right around her smaller frame, just below her shoulders. He didn't know how much more of this either of them could take.

Again, he looked up through the hush of the room only to realize why the hush had fallen so completely and so suddenly. Robards' wand was raised, and distaste filled him so completely now that it would have to be enough for the spell to function properly. It didn't appear to be true hatred, but one could so easily flow into the other, especially for a man who had dedicated his life so fully to stopping crime.

A whisper, "AVADA KEDAVRA!" A flash of green so bright you couldn't directly look at it. And Draco's mother collapsed along with her husband's body. Only Draco was there to catch her, though no one had bothered to catch Lucius.