

Homecoming

by corianderpie

Written as a birthday ficlet for Lady Karelia, to the prompt, 'Lucius has always loved Narcissa. But one day, he finds he actually comprehends his love for her.'

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Chapter 1 of 1

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When Lucius Malfoy's seventeenth parole hearing was scheduled, he didn't tell his family. Why bother? He never got to see them, whether through glass or bars or a veil of Dementors. Not even for a moment.

Why drag them out to this miserable rock in late autumn so they could sit in an anteroom waiting to hear the word again—relayed, no doubt, by some shabby-superior Ministry bureaucrat?

Denied.

Brooding on these thoughts, Lucius nearly missed the fact that the fat little foreman was saying something worth hearing.

'... parole is granted. Mr Malfoy, congratulations. You are a free man—within certain limits, of course. The court hopes that you will make more wholesome choices with the second chance at life afforded you here today.'

In other words, go forth and sin no more In earlier years, Lucius might have met this mealy-mouthed piety with a silky smooth, stiletto-sharp reply. Today he merely bowed formally and said, 'I thank the court.'

'Please follow Jeffers there into the next room. He will explain the terms and conditions of your parole and process you out. This hearing is adjourned.'

* * *

Jeffers—balding yet as gangly as a teenager—accompanied Lucius to London via secure Portkey. 'Only works for prison officials,' he explained as he held Lucius's forearm and reached for the tattered silk top hat.

Horrible, horrible method of travelling. He did *not* want to vomit on the stone floor of the Ministry transport room where they came to land, but it was a close thing. Jeffers gave him a few moments to compose himself. *A decent enough fellow as these people go.*

Then: 'As we discussed, Mr Malfoy, your wand will be returned to you halfway through your parole period. That means, I'm afraid, you have two choices for transport home. I can Side-along you directly to Malfoy Manor, or you can Floo from one of the fireplaces in the Ministry foyer.'

Lucius stiffened. These were demeaning choices, both. Deliberately so, no doubt. Would the convicted Death Eater Lucius Malfoy prefer to be Side-along Apparated home like a child, or to wade through a sea of gawking Ministry drones to one of the public fireplaces?

'Or, I suppose if you had a broomstick, you could fly,' Jeffers was saying. 'Come to think of it, I'm sure I have an old Nimbus in my office if you'd care to borrow it. Awfully cold out, though...' he mused.

Better, thought Lucius. 'Mmm, quite. Thank you. I would not, however, wish to put you out by absconding with your, ehm, broomstick. Could you, instead, take me to Diagon Alley?'

* * *

The Malfoy name—attached, as it still was, to the Malfoy vaults—was good as gold to Monsieur Twilfit. The man had a very acceptable and well-fitting suit of black flying robes in stock, and was happy enough to dispose of the decades-old robes in which Lucius had been taken to Azkaban and which were returned to him upon his release. It was sheer pleasure to see the last of them and to stand in the shop's back room encased in new silk, wool, fur, and leather and gripping a darkly gleaming Firebolt.

Lucius was beginning to feel like a living, breathing man again. *At last*.

* * *

The flight to Wiltshire was freezing cold. Without his wand, Lucius had to keep out of sight using cloud cover and sheer altitude.

He was more than grateful when he dipped below the clouds and saw the rise of a pair of familiar hills in the distance. His heart jumped painfully at this first glimpse of home.

Proves I have one, he thought, then smiled grimly. *A heart? Or a home? Which do I have? Both? Neither?*

So long. He'd been away so long in the dark, stony cold and rusty, stale air of Azkaban. In the post-war regime, the Dementors had been relegated to the perimeter, so they sowed less madness and despair than previously. But it was still a hard, colourless place. An oubliette, it seemed, where his life would wear itself away in a total absence of beauty and love.

Where would she be when he arrived?

He skimmed the shorn fields and brushed his boots in passing against the standing grass in an unmown meadow. Pale, pale yellow like her hair when she was a girl. He remembered the first time he'd seen it down around her shoulders. When she'd allowed him the supreme privilege and luxury of burying his hands in it—a revelation. How many hundreds of times over the years had he threaded his fingers, unthinking, through her hair, as though the gift had lost its value with use? How often had he dreamt of the fall of it over her bare neck, over his pillow, tenting his face as she kissed him and moved over him in their bed—only to wake in his dim tomb of a cell?

Perhaps she would be in the gardens—the weather was dry, if cold. Or the conservatory. Or the kitchens, directing dinner preparations. Or in her music room.

He sped low over the lake, its water the dark, stormy blue of approaching winter, and of his wife's eyes. The Black eyes. When he was young, he'd taken it as a matter of course that this beautiful, refined, intelligent girl—a girl from one of the few acceptable families in Britain—would be his for the asking. That she was wise, resourceful, brave, companionable—as she had turned out to be—well, surely that had been his due. That she loved him, body and soul... Had he actually been fool enough to take that for granted, too?

He would set all the house-elves looking for her. And the portraits. Damn huge bloody house; she could be anywhere, and there was no time to waste. No more time at all to not be touching her.

He touched down at the conservatory door and, leaning his broom up against the outside wall, opened the door and stepped inside. The wards hummed. The master of the house, unexpected but not unwelcome, slipping in through a side door as if he'd just been out for a walk, had returned.

Hearing the click of the door, Narcissa turned from her pot of clivias and froze.

The shock might have felled a lesser woman, but his wife—his *wife*, *his*—just stood quite still for a moment, slim and straight as the poplars his grandfather had planted on the crest of the hill behind the house. Shears and stems fell from her hands to the floor.

Then, both were moving, running the few steps between them, peeling off their gloves and flinging them aside.

'Lucius? I... *how?*'

'Long story. Well, not really long. Rather dull, though, and I don't care to tell it yet. I'm free, though, on parole.'

Unspeakably fine to have her arms around him. Her breath was always this sweet. Always.

'Darling, darling, I didn't *know*, I would have come to you—Lucius, your hands are frozen, and your face... Did you *fly* here? Oh, I must warm you!' She reached for her wand.

He laughed—privately, shockingly, on the verge of crying. 'No, Narcissa. Just you. I'm nearly warm already.'

* * *

A/N: *squishes Lady_Karelia * Thank you for the prompt. :D

*squashes hechicera * Thanks, you, for the beta. :D