

The Beginning

by *diabolica*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This piece is meant to be read as a prequel to *Misbehaviour*, or, *How to Marry a Malfoy*, but it can also stand on its own.

He stood in the owery door for a moment too long so that she very nearly blurted out, 'You are blocking my path.' But as it usually did in such situations, Narcissa's voice failed her, and as she could not meet his eye, she was left two steps down in the February air, staring at where she thought his belly button might be (if it weren't covered by a well-cut Leplastrier cloak). The thought made her blush.

Just then Lucius Malfoy stepped back to let her pass. 'Miss Black,' he said.

She hurried up the last two steps, nearly tripping at the top—Merlin, how mortifying would *that* be?—before she heard her mother's voice in her head: *Remember your manners.*

She nodded at his feet. 'Malfoy,' she said quietly. Then she turned away, eyes scanning the owery for Medea, and waited for the sound of his feet on the stairs outside. The letter was already in her hand. Her thoughts were already elsewhere.

'You must be cold,' he drawled a moment later.

Narcissa looked up sharply and, unfortunately, met his eye. She could think of nothing to say to such a ridiculously obvious statement before he clarified, 'Your face is flushed.'

One corner of his mouth turned upward. His gaze moved to slide along the feather-strewn floor.

For a moment she forgot that he was a virtual stranger and a sixth year—and a boy. (The boy, in fact, the one all her roommates had made it their life's ambition to marry.) She saw only an upstart, an arrogant one at that.

Anger at his audacity made her voice sharp. 'Are you making fun of me?'

'Oh, no, Miss Black. That's the last thing I would do.'

She could not discern if he was in earnest—people were so hard to interpret. Unlike numbers, they followed no logic, and though no shortage of rules governed their behaviour, still they acted in unpredictable ways.

Medea had spotted her by this time and flown down to greet her. Narcissa busied herself in feeding her a few owl treats before whispering the destination of her letter. By the time she had attached the parchment to Medea's leg and sent her off, she had quite forgotten Lucius Malfoy, who was, inexplicably, still standing in the doorway, his mouth open as if he were about to say something.

'Are you still here?' Narcissa asked. Immediately she realised how rude that sounded, but she could not retract the words.

He straightened his shoulders and, dimly, she recognised the gesture. It was something she did when she was trying to gather her courage to speak. Something in her softened.

'There's a Hogsmeade visit next weekend,' he said.

Of all the things Lucius Malfoy could have said to her, this was somewhere far down the list, below even 'Were you aware that Antipodean Opaleyes have no pupils?'

Baffled, she told him, 'I know.'

'Will you be going?' he asked, almost as if he were making small talk.

Narcissa shrugged, then wished she hadn't. 'I suppose,' she replied, still confused at the turn of this conversation.

'I see,' he said. 'And will Flint be accompanying you?'

This was something Narcissa had not considered, mostly because she tried never to think of Maximilian Flint if it could possibly be helped. It was understood that one day she would marry him; this had been a given for as long as she could remember. She neither relished the prospect, nor did she see any way around it. The idea that Maximilian would accompany her on a Hogsmeade weekend, as if they were a couple, was almost laughable.

Wondering what he was about, she answered, 'I don't know.' Would it be easier to talk to him, she wondered, if he weren't so good looking?

She felt him scrutinising her expression, as if he could read something there that she did not know herself. The blush returned. Though she did not often have such thoughts, she suddenly wished she were not so shy.

'May I accompany you back to the dormitories?' asked Lucius Malfoy. He gestured through the doorway, his movements somehow lacking their usual certainty. 'The stairs are rather slippery.'

She had no idea why he would want to do such a thing, but she could think of no reason why not.

'All right,' said Narcissa.