

# O.o.T.P.

*by dracontia*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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Disclaimer: I have no right to any of these characters, but punishing me for having a bit of not-for-profit fun with them would just be cruel...also unproductive, as I am worth the square root of sod all.

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Arthur Weasley and Narcissa Malfoy arrived at the steps of Kingsley Shacklebolt's home at almost the same instant.

"Good afternoon, Narcissa," Arthur managed after a brief pause, as if realizing that even a mild expression of surprise might seem impolite.

"Good afternoon, Arthur." If Narcissa was likewise surprised, she did not see fit to show it.

Arthur lifted one hesitant hand toward the doorbell. "Shall I?"

"Please do," Narcissa said, inclining her shining head of almost-entirely-still-golden hair toward the door.

They presented a curious spectacle, standing side by side as they listened to the chimes echo faintly beyond the door. Arthur's warm aura of untidy good cheer and Narcissa's dainty air of silky serenity contrasted pronouncedly, albeit not disagreeably. Neither of them was able to entirely contain their surprise (ie., their eyebrows) when the Minister of Magic himself opened the door.

"Minister Shacklebolt, so lovely to see you again," Narcissa favored the Minister with her most charming smile.

"Ah, Narcissa! You are far too young to have difficulty with your memory, yet you still forget to call me Kingsley," he teased. He greeted Narcissa with a kiss on the wrist and Arthur with a warm handshake.

"Must thank you for hosting, Kingsley," Arthur said, giving one last good pump before letting go.

"Not at all, Arthur. I benefit from this as much as any of us."

"Where is your lovely wife, Kingsley?" Narcissa asked.

Kingsley heaved a huge sigh, suddenly looking more like a world-weary blues musician than an equatorial Father Christmas. "Milan. Apparently the Minister's wife is looking hopelessly outdated after taking a three-month break between shopping sprees." Arthur and Narcissa both made appropriately sympathetic noises. "But what sort of host am I, keeping you standing here in the foyer? Come in! Make yourselves comfortable."

The parlor was set up with an assortment of chairs that appeared to have meandered in from all parts of the house, formed little groups, and commenced to catch up on old times. Several tables and the sideboard stood guard around the walls while the somewhat incongruous pairing of an overstuffed armchair and a dainty curule seat with a matching desk presided over the room.

Narcissa glanced about at knee level. "I trust nothing has befallen Shorpish?"

Kingsley shook his head. "He is well enough. I like to send him to help out my sister when we're to have a meeting. It saves him having to slam his hands in a drawer if the missus asks about the goings-on while she was away."

"Good thought," Arthur said absently. Narcissa tugged discreetly on the sleeve of his jumper. He looked down at her in puzzlement. "Hm?"

She mouthed, 'Tea.'

"Oh! You wouldn't happen to need any help with the tea things? Seeing that Shorpish isn't about?"

"I think I have it in hand," Kingsley said. "I've had some luck charming the..."He stopped in mid-sentence, contemplating a floating tea-tray with an air of bemusement. "Though I can't seem to recall if the Warming Charm goes on the teapot *before* the hot water goes in, or *after*." The tray wobbled alarmingly while he tapped the hilt of his wand against his chin.

"Oh, before, I should think," Narcissa said, hastily plucking the tray from the air and coaxing it over to the sideboard.

"Rather," was all Arthur had time to say before a plate of sandwiches began circling the room in search of a landing spot. He guided it safely to a nearby table.

The doorbell rang again, and Kingsley turned toward the sound quite abruptly. Both trays dropped about an inch to their respective horizontal surfaces, but suffered no ill effects. Arthur suppressed a sigh at the near miss.

They were, after all, very tasty-looking sandwiches.

"Shall I just put the tea in order while you get the door, Arthur?" Narcissa said, in a sort of managing but nice way. "I'm sure that Kingsley wants to focus on the refreshments." She only put the slightest, most genteel, emphasis on the word 'focus.'

It was, after all, a very nice tea service.

"But of course! I remembered your favorite Mazarin Tarts, Narcissa," Kingsley enthused, his good cheer returning as he set out for the kitchen in pursuit of sweets.

Narcissa just finished putting the tea to steep and sorting the sugar and cream when Arthur reappeared with a tall woman whose athletic frame listed slightly against a crutch. They were already engaged in conversation.

"Much better, Arthur, thank you. If only I could convince George of it!" she said.

Arthur chuckled. "I did try to warn you before you married him...you may always be able to tell George, but you can't tell him much." He beamed at Narcissa by way of beckoning. "Narcissa, may I introduce my daughter-in-law Angelina? Angelina, our secretary and co-founder, Narcissa."

To her credit, Narcissa graced Angelina with only a marginally less charming smile than she had the Minister of Magic. "George's wife, yes? Arthur has mentioned you. I am ever so pleased that you could join us."

"I was glad to join once Arthur explained it. It's one thing to be up to my ears in jokes-in-progress during the off season; I'll go spare in another month of Healer-ordered leave without help." Angelina's brows drew together in a pained expression under her neat, black plaits. Neither Arthur nor Narcissa imagined for a moment that it had anything to do with physical discomfort.

"Just as long as you don't abandon us altogether once you're back up in the air. Now, how about tea for you... why Narcissa, this looks just tip-top!" Arthur's effusiveness was interrupted by the doorbell. "Sorry, ladies...I'll just see to that, shall I?"

"Oh, let me," Angelina said, hobbling quickly in the appropriate direction. "I'm supposed to exercise more, but George is driving me' round the twist as much with the coddling and cossetting as he is with the shop."

"Shall have to introduce her to Kingsley later," Arthur said, apparently addressing his teacup. Narcissa, well accustomed to Arthur's conversational quirks, simply smiled into her own cup in amusement.

Two more regulars arrived to offer greetings and take tea. Arthur introduced Angelina around while Narcissa spent a bit of time catching up with Enid, who brought another tale of Algernon's eccentricity along with her nephew's regrets.

"Neville would have come," she said apologetically. "He makes certain to have this Saturday free, even during the term; but Hannah," Enid lowered her voice to the barest whisper, which even her teacup would have been pressed to hear, "wanted...well, to put it delicately..."

"To make another attempt?" Narcissa prompted. She appreciated Enid's sensibilities, but Heaven, Merlin, and all the Society well knew that Hannah's drive to conceive had pushed Neville to join them.

"Quite," Enid sighed. Her eyes and attention wandered. "Oh, is that young Thomas? He and Neville roomed at Hogwarts, you know."

"I believe it is. Why don't you tell him about Algernon and the Crup-breeding concern?"

"Oh my, yes, that's just the sort of thing he'd find amusing. Dean! Dear boy, do let's sit down, you won't believe what Algie's gone and done this time!"

Arthur wandered back. "Did you just pawn off Enid on young Thomas?"

"Well, normally I wouldn't, but she was standing in front of the sugar, and it's so rude to 'Accio' around someone."

Narcissa looked up from the bowl just in time to see Angelina catch a speeding coffee urn with a well-placed spell.

"Young Mrs. Zabini is looking after the door," Angelina explained, apropos of fairly little, before disappearing into the kitchen to rescue the Minister of Magic (and the Shackbolt family china) from Kingsley's culinary talents.

"I've forgotten...is she the second Young Mrs. Zabini, or the third?" Arthur whispered.

"The second, but probably not for long." Narcissa sighed. "I did try to warn the poor girl about Blaise. And she a Ravenclaw, no less...one would think that she would recognize sage advice."

"I expect there's a reason for it," Arthur said. "If we listened to sage advice, we might not have children, and that would be too bad."

"Indeed," Narcissa agreed. "On that subject, how are the grandchild preparations proceeding?"

"About as you'd expect...except possibly more loudly." It was Arthur's turn to sigh. "I felt as if I was being driven from the house at the point of a knitting needle. At least I didn't need an excuse to get away today."

"Alas, neither did I."

"Oh, dear. Why did Lucius lock himself in his room this time?"

"A stoat evaded the Repelling Charms and savaged a pea hen."

"Good heavens!"

"Quite. I'm so glad that Astoria is trained as a Healer; I do believe that I would be with him at St. Mungo's this very minute had she not been able to save it." Narcissa took a fortifying bite of Mazarin tart. "On the subject of Healing, I'm pleased that Angelina has finally come to us, though of course it's a shame that it was an injury that forced the issue. I find it rather remarkable, really; with all your children and their spouses, no one else seems inclined to join."

"Er, yes... Charlie is still happily a bachelor. As for the rest of the lot... well, I never know quite which to invite. What about... that is to say..." Arthur contemplated a jam sandwich as if he couldn't quite recall how it came to be in his hand.

"It would seem, Arthur, that you and I are once again on the same flying carpet. I wouldn't know whether to invite my son or my daughter-in-law," Narcissa said, with a sigh of deep feeling.

By now the room was well-filled with a variety of wizards and witches and the quiet sounds of their conversations. A few cast *Tempus* charms, but most seemed too engrossed in either tea or socializing to mind the time. The doorbell chimed again, but it seemed to go unnoticed. "I expect it's my turn again," Arthur said. He returned in a minute with a plump wizard in somewhat haphazardly donned robes who was sweating almost as profusely as he was apologizing.

"Sorry I'm a bit late. Sybil was adamant that I not leave the flat; something about impending doom. It sounded very messy. My broom was all the way in the shed in the back garden and I'm pants at charms and Apparation both, you know. There was nothing for it but to slip out as soon as I could and take the stairs," the roundish wizard babbled.

"No worries, Robert. We'll make certain you get back to her in one piece," Arthur said. He also cast a discreet Drying Charm.

Narcissa whispered to Angelina, who quickly Summoned coffee to offer instead of tea.

"Arthur...or more properly, Mr. Chairman...I believe it's past time to call the meeting to order." Narcissa interrupted Arthur's search for his teacup, mislaid in the process of answering the door.

"Is that strictly necessary? After all, once we call roll and set a date for the next meeting, we just keep on as we start, with the tea and chat." Arthur looked up from their sotto voce exchange to smile across the room at young Mrs. Wood, who appeared particularly frazzled given that it was the height of the Quidditch season. She smiled tiredly back.

"True, but it is best follow procedure and put that all in order before we continue," Narcissa said, tilting her head to whisper behind the one curl left loose for that express purpose, "We must set an example for the young ones by upholding the dignity of the Society."

"Yes, quite right, quite right...Madam Secretary."

Narcissa proceeded to the curule chair. Arthur followed, making himself comfortable in the armchair and casting a light *Sonorus* on himself, "Hello everyone...Could I have your attention? Thank you."

Everyone found a seat more or less facing the armchair and the desk while Narcissa penned 'Minutes' and the date across the top of her parchment with an elegant flourish.

"*Finite*," Arthur whispered before continuing in a normal voice, "The monthly meeting and tea of the Support Group for Partners of Overly Dramatic or Flamboyant Spouses will now come to order."

FIN

Author's note: Have you ever had fandom friends post links to HP actor interviews on Facebook? Have you ever followed such links just for a lark? Have you subsequently found yourself wondering **why** Helen McCrory (Narcissa) and Mark Williams (Arthur) were being interviewed together?

Have you ever wondered where fanfic writers get their ideas?

Oh, and the title? That's the informal name for the group that Arthur and Narcissa founded. Maybe you've heard of them? The Order of the Put-upon?

*Author ducks and runs*

Thank you to Rose otW for the beta-read... and be nice, people. Don't blame her for encouraging this sort of thing. ^\_^