

This Is Now

by Hechicera

An encounter in a Ministry office holds surprises for both parties

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: So many thanks to my swift and fabulous Beta/Britpick team, corianderpie and exartemarte.

Draco has been waiting for over an hour when his number is finally called. The mud crusting his boots has dried and begun crumbling onto the floor, and a bite on his neck is itching maddeningly.

Mosquitoes big as fucking hummingbirds down there, he thinks, stepping into the room marked 'Agricultural Quarantine.'

And then, when he sees the clipboard-laden official standing beside his crates, *Sod it. I'm fucked.* He remembers the voice as if it were yesterday instead of three years ago: *'I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy.'*

Neville looks up, surprise writ on his blunt features, then back down at the clipboard. 'Four crates of Nicaraguan coffee beans. "Handful of Beans" is your place?'

'Yeah.' If by 'place' you mean 'reason to get up every morning and put one foot in front of the other.' Or 'reason for my father to sneer at me for "going into trade.'" Or 'excuse to spend every day possible in blessed isolation, tramping through fields in one godforsaken country or another where no one has ever heard the name Malfoy.'

'Holy shit, man, the best coffee ever. Thank god you deliver to the Ministry—now that Hannah's pregnant, I'm not allowed to have the stuff in the house. The smell makes her sick.'

He casts about for a clever response, unexpectedly stung by this evidence of the normality of other people's lives. *Congratulations? Condolences?* 'I didn't know you had it in you, Longbottom.'

The ghost of a grin, pride and embarrassment in equal doses. 'Apparently I do.' Neville takes the top sheet from the clipboard and holds it out, then abruptly pulls it back. 'Look, Malfoy—'

Fuck.

Neville turns the paper over and scribbles an address on the back. 'It's Luna's birthday Saturday, and we're having everyone over. It would make her day if you turned up.'

Draco feels his mouth twist into the familiar bitter grimace. 'No doubt. I'm sure it's her fondest dream to have former Death Eaters popping up unexpectedly to share in her happiness.'

Neville regards him steadily. 'You were a prat,' he says.

Draco offers no argument, having none.

'We were all prats, to one degree or another. Kind of comes with the territory when you're sixteen, doesn't it?'

'I rather think most of your friends would consider "prat" a compliment where I'm concerned.'

Neville stands there with the paper in his hand for a long, awkward moment. Then he takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

'That was then.'

He holds the paper out again. 'You should come.'

Draco blinks hard against the treacherous pricking behind his eyelids, and reaches for the paper.

'Thanks,' he hears himself say. 'What time is it, then?'

Prompt: A determined search for the perfect cup of coffee leads to an even more satisfying discovery.