

Come—Hither

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Chapter 1

Draco's Unforgivable Predicament

A ring of torches burned weakly around the circular, dungeon-like room, casting a warm glow onto the thirteen dark-cloaked figures below. One of them stood separate from the rest, his unnaturally large, pale, spidery hands twirling his wand. Not a breath of wind stirred their cloaks, nor did the figures seem to want to move. In the middle of the room shivered an ancient man with bulging grey eyes darting about the figures surrounding him.

"I tire of your presence, Ollivander," came a voice so cold, high and unnatural it sounded like a hushed, undying scream, like metal crashing into metal, an accident of nature. "Tell me about the Elder Wand and I may decide to spare your life."

There came a low hiss from somewhere near Voldemort's shoulder, and a smile dragged the corners of his lipless mouth upwards as one of his large hands rose and lovingly caressed a snake of giant proportions which slithered along the top of his throne. "The wandmaker does not cooperate, Nagini... What shall we do?" The chilling smile widened when the snake hissed again and flicked its forked tongue in the air, tasting, its slit eyes fixing upon the shaken, skinny old man on the floor. He lay prostrated upon the grimy dungeon floor, avoiding the piercing stare of Voldemort's red slit eyes.

The cold, high-pitched voice spoke again and cut through the stale silence of the torch-lit room: "Perhaps you need some motivation. Lucius, I believe your son is adequately skilled in the Unforgivables, is he not?"

"Yes, my Lord," Lucius said at once, and gave the figure next to him a slight push forward. His son tentatively stepped forward out of the black ring and drew his wand.

Mr Ollivander's eyes, swollen and white with fear, shot to the instrument in Draco's quaking hands.

"Hawthorn and unicorn hair, ten inches exactly," he stuttered almost absent-mindedly, possibly delving into aspects of his craft to find some calm, and was rewarded with shrill laughter that rang across the dungeon room. Mr Ollivander, however, remained transfixed on the young boy approaching him.

"Crucio!" cried Draco.

More laughter broke through the circle.

"Your son is weak, Lucius."

Draco had no idea whose lips hissed his father's name. Was it his master or his great snake? He could not help give a nervous glance behind him, and under the gaze of the bleak torchlight, he noticed his father held his immaculate composure.

"My Lord, he's young..." Lucius apologized.

"And pretty!" Macnair cut in. He was a tall, bulky Death Eater giving a leering laugh that was echoed by the other Death Eaters. Growling lustfully, he launched himself at Draco as the wandmaker was taken aside. Lucius watched the scene through the slits of his hood with cool grey eyes. The figure standing closest to Voldemort shifted slightly.

Silence returned, punctuated only by Macnair breathing heavily inches above Draco's face. From the shadow of Voldemort's hood glinted a flash of red. He seemed newly inspired.

"Perhaps your son, too, needs a little motivation," Voldemort said. "Macnair, proceed."

"Don't..." Draco whispered feebly at the huge man, his voice cracking horribly with fear.

Macnair licked his lips obscenely and wrestled Draco to the floor, and the boy's screams reverberated off the walls as his silk black robes were torn off his body by powerful and eager hands. The figure on Voldemort's right moved again.

"Would you perhaps like to join Macnair, Severus? I see you can barely contain yourself."

"My Lord," said Snape softly, "I confess I'm far from enthralled with a fifteen-year-old boy whose talent is negligible even in something as trivial as torture."

Meanwhile, the giant snake was wounding itself around Voldemort's neck, brown diamond shapes flickering on its scales as bleak light fell upon them. There was a moment where Voldemort's eyes were fastened upon Snape intensely, but he then smiled at the man and turned his eyes on Lucius.

"My Lord..." stuttered Lucius. Voldemort did not change his expression. It seemed to Lucius his master was not forbidding him from acting, so the blond-haired man swept over to the centre of the ring and pushed his wand into the temple of his son's assailant.

"Get off my son."

The command sliced through the laughter of the other Death Eaters, carried upon a soft hiss that gave pause from even one of the most corrupt of Voldemort's followers. Macnair searched out the eyes of his master for further instruction.

"Leave him be, Lucius," ordered Voldemort, in his thin, cold voice, which was entirely absent of mercy.

"But, my Lord, my son. Perhaps we could make another arrangement," Lucius begged calmly.

The words rang through the silence that had suddenly befallen the dungeon room, again broken only by Draco's erratic panting, and for several moments, Voldemort did not speak. Then finally, with a soft stroke to his snake, he observed, "Your son is not able to cast mere Unforgivables. It is only fitting he be punished."

The words were left to hang in a horrible quiet. But then, with a malevolent smile curving his lipless mouth, Voldemort continued, "Yes, I must confess, young Draco here is quite a sight, wouldn't you agree?"

The Death Eaters agreed wholeheartedly or rather, heartlessly in dark laughter.

On the cold, stone floor, Draco's chest heaved in panic. His face was devoid of colour, paler than usual, as his body was left exposed to the ring of dark-cloaked figures around him, his naked chest and parted legs gleaming in the wan dungeon torchlight. His eyes were fixed past Macnair, straight up at the black ceiling, terrified they might escape his control and stray to the Dark Lord, the Death Eaters, or his father.

Towering above him as though he were not on his knees, Macnair bared his large, yellow teeth at Draco, growling lustfully once more, his one unobstructed eye raking over Draco's pale, innocent flesh lying below him devouring those thin, shell-pink lips, the startled grey eyes widened with horror, and long, platinum-blond hair splayed on the dungeon floor like an angel's halo.

"Until I give him another chance to prove himself again, Draco here will... service us in our chambers." Voldemort's shrill laughter echoed those of his followers, but Lucius' figure moved not an inch.

"My Lord..."

"Never mind, Lucius."

The words were barely stern, yet they silenced Lucius at once. The other Death Eaters fell quiet as well, and their robes rustled uncomfortably in the freshly tense air.

The endless length of the snake, as though sensing the closing, flowed smoothly down Voldemort's throne like the breadth of a wide waterfall, and the rest of its massive body fell to the floor with such a dense thump it seemed to momentarily freeze all the muscles in Draco's body, for Draco went rigid as though he had been stupefied, even though he was used to suffering the snake's accompany for several months.

His reaction, shared by some of the Death Eaters surrounding him, was understandable, for Voldemort was inclined to use the snake as a live weapon, ready to be inflicted upon any of his followers who proved themselves less than infallible in their malevolent endeavours, prepared to suffer the same fate as those very Muggles and half-bloods they hunted. Hence how it grew to such an alarming size was not a mystery to any Death Eater.

"However, you are a most valued servant, Lucius," Voldemort went on, the name of his servant falling from his lips in that horrible hiss. "I will allow your son a little mercy." Voldemort swept his red slit eyes over his men. "He will pleasure only those I deem worthy, and those chosen are never to force themselves on your son. They are to play a passive role only. That should give your son ample room to show his true colours: a pretty whore."

Heading to the grand foyer where the Apparition chamber stood, Voldemort and his Death Eaters among whom the most reluctant was Macnair exited the dungeon in gales of cruel laughter, and bringing up the rear, as though in venomous summary of all the new ills that now bode for father and son, the snake slithered unnervingly slowly out of the room.

Lucius stood rigidly as his eyes followed the tail of Voldemort's snake until the iron door put it out of sight. Then, in the silent wake of the departed, Lucius' emotionless expression coolly took in the lump of gleaming limbs on the floor before heading over to them and lazily waving his wand above his son; Draco's tattered robes repaired themselves around his small form.

"Get up," Lucius ordered dispassionately, and strode to the heavy iron doors after sneering in the direction of an emaciated Mr Ollivander, who was quivering in the corner. His terrified, bulging eyes followed Lucius as one withered, green-veined hand hung onto the bar of his cage.

Draco pulled himself to his feet and followed the taller Malfoy, his breath hitching, and his forehead sweaty. Lucius, for whatever reason, did not open the door but stood in front of it as his distant gaze fell on a random spot on its black surface. It was as though he were waiting for the muffled footfalls beyond the door to disappear completely. Then, a few seconds later, he swept the door open and strode out. In silence, Draco trailed behind his father as they weaved through the vast mansion until minutes later, they stood in the more refined harshness of the master bedroom, and Lucius, after tossing his snake cane onto his pale-gold-quilted duvet, quietly drawled, "You realize exactly what you've gotten yourself into?"

Draco squinted down at the Axminster in shame.

"I'm sorry, Father. I'll try harder to master the Unforgivables," he mumbled, his shaky voice thick with contrition. And the distance between him and the snake cane resting innocently on the bed behind his father did little to comfort him. But a part of him was sure punishment would no longer come in the form of a beating with a cane. Not after tonight.

Lucius continued, as though uninterrupted, "You've managed to make yourself a whore for the entire body, Draco." The name was spoken with a soft, icy politeness as steely, silver eyes stared down at the younger man. "Do you realize what damage this dealt to the Malfoy name? To me?"

Draco's throat worked for several moments, but he did not answer. Apart from the chilling silence that spiralled around them, the elegance of his father's room with its striking silver finishes scattered about it, its almost unforgiving spotlessness, and the masculine, scant presence of embellishing ornaments or possession made his father's words register so much more cold and piercing.

"Look at yourself..." said Lucius, with the slightest note of a sneer in his voice, but the background of the room beyond him somehow seemed to nevertheless reinforce it. Draco gazed up into his father's damning eyes after he was roughly pushed forward in front of a tall, ornate mirror. "Long hair..." Lucius weaved his hand viciously through Draco's soft, platinum-blond locks, glaring at him in the mirror. "...Your height, lips..." He stretched Draco's lips with his fingers so they formed two thin, white strips. "...Hands..." Lucius flapped Draco's small, delicate hands in derision. "These are not hands of a man!" he growled.

By this time Draco was shaking from hair to toe, tears stinging the backs of his eyes, but he refused them away and pursed his lips in defiance.

Lucius faced his son with glaring scrutiny for a moment before hauling up himself to his full, rather impressive height. He composed himself and took a deep breath.

"Perhaps you could have done with that scar across your cheek I promised you, hm?" he said, glaring a hole into the top of Draco's head. "But if I dared to be honest with myself, I would admit your looks are partly my fault your hair is undoubtedly from me. But your lamentable... pettiness is decidedly from Narcissa's line. Curse your beautiful mother..."

Draco was looking down at his boots as a silent, treacherous tear finally dropped down his pale cheek, twinkling like a golden diamond in the soft light. His offended hands were not even clenched in indignation but resigned to their judgement as un-masculine and left to hang limply at his sides.

The voice that he so treasured and respected, heavy with pitiless disapproval, obliterated the minute pride he held for his hands that had stemmed from the compliment they were paid when he had been helping Severus brew one of his many potions for the first time. Severus had held up his hand and had taken them in with his eyes. Draco had not known why he had been doing this, and so had kept silent. A tiny smile, but a smile nonetheless, had curled those usually stoic lips upwards, and Severus had said, "*At least there's one thing right about you: the hands of a potion-maker long, thin, deft, and precise.*"

Now that fondness was annihilated by this man, whom he held so dear, all because he was not strong or powerful enough to cast an Unforgivable, which had led to the Dark Lord making him a rent pet for his sycophants to enjoy. He already knew that the Macnair animal had had it in for him since he was as young as eight; that haggard face had always been secretly leering and raking him from top down lustfully when no one was watching. Tonight, he had nearly gotten his longstanding wish; that one eye bearing malicious lust enough to compensate for the patched one made his skin crawl. He loathed Macnair, and he had vowed not to find himself in his repulsive company without either of his parents or Severus with him, lest he found himself in a horrific situation.

He loved his father, but how could he ridicule him and hurt him so deeply? It was true he cut a cold figure; it was true Draco should have been used to the dispassionate demeanour by now, but this could not help stave off the stabbing betrayal he felt. And now to be judged and thrown aside like this, to be whored out to a horde of Death Eaters... When Macnair had launched himself upon him, he had not searched out his father's eyes, for he had learned that every time he did so, he would only be met with glassy, grey slates, so much like his own and yet so different. He did not think he could achieve such coldness as his father had, but he was required to do so. Required to be the spitting image of him. To be as cold, calculating, commanding, powerful, and effortlessly elegant. And he was most certainly required to be able to cast any of the Unforgivables at will.

Months of studying, months of fervent fascination with the Unforgivables, but now they turn on him! Why had the curse not sprung from his wand? He had prepared for so long...!

It was too late now. He had to carry his fate. What made the situation just slightly better was that he would not be hurt badly: his father's good standing with the Dark Lord afforded him the mercy of not being forcibly taken; it was he who would do the doing. But this did not make Draco feel any better about it. In fact, *au contraire*, it broke his pride only more: he would be forced to act on his own volition worse on top of feeling a fundamental and acute sense of betrayal by his very own body.

"I'm sorry, Father," Draco mumbled feebly, and felt as though the very air on which his words floated seemed to jeer at them.

For a moment Lucius merely looked down at his only son. His expression shifted from an inscrutable emotion to a frosty temper before he turned on the heel of his dragon-hide boot and swept out the room.

A thousand kilometres away Harry jerked awake from a fitful, terrifying sleep. A pair of green eyes peeked out and idly studied the ceiling. It was part of the daily routine: wake, exist, go to sleep an endless monotony of living unembellished, grey, and apathetic. Reflexively his hand came up to his brow and rubbed his scar... It had been throbbing dully throughout his summer, heralding Voldemort's return and signifying his preparations for the domination of anything that so much as hopped happily.

He was back, Cedric was dead, and everything seemed bleaker than the very room in which Harry slept at number four, Privet Drive. He opened his eyes fully, stretched, and turned his blank stare towards the outside of his window, into the bright, sunlit afternoon the day before his birthday.

Hedwig was out hunting and doing whatever owls did in the open world while he was left here in this ordinary house to endure the torture of the Dursleys. At least they never changed and he could rely on their insults, forcing him do tedious chores, and near starvation to console his need of constancy and balance after going through his tumultuous fourth year at Hogwarts. He allowed the mundaneness of the Muggle world to embrace him as he returned from school. A quiet, ordinary peace, no more than that.

Seldom was he content these days. He would either be scrubbing the floor and dishes or doing his summer schoolwork, never wanting to give his mind a moment to rest on the things that tormented him. But come night, those demons took free reign of his mind: they wrapped around him and squeezed like a diabolical anaconda until he burst in a sweaty daze, sourly flavoured with fear, guilt, and revulsion, never granted the mercy of being swallowed whole into reprieveable insanity.

Shaking off his sluggishness from sleep, Harry lazily rose out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom. Later, like clockwork, he did his chores and pushed through some of his essays while intermittently striding over to the window and staring out of it just to clear his mind and try not to think, sweeping his gaze on the surrounding matchbox houses, the spartan streets, and the rolling, forget-me-not peaceful sky. How he wished he could be as innocent as these bleak sights were, wished he never witnessed the resurrection of the darkest wizard of the century, wished he never witnessed the death of a dear friend. He knew he should not dwell on these thoughts; they would do him no good. He trudged back to his desk and continued his studies.

Close to ten o'clock Harry's eyelids started drooping, and his backside had grown sore from sitting on the chair for so long. He was reading something to do with the third

class of enhancement potions, or something like that. He decided to call it a night right then, realizing his mind was absorbing the text in rations which did not make sense; Harry was quite sure potions were not related to pangas, even remotely. Thus, giving in to the lull of sleep, he closed *Post-Moderne Potions* by Perkus Naelblume and went to settle in his bed. The sky was dark and peaceful outside, and the streets eerily quiet. Resolving to catch a few Z's before the strike of midnight his birthday Harry shut his eyes and sighed deeply into the rough, unwelcoming covers.

Just three seconds later the green numbers of his alarm clock proclaimed the time 11:58 two minutes before he would turn fifteen. He would celebrate it cautiously, quietly, in solitude; never allowed to let his joy go beyond his room, never allowed just a modicum of happiness beyond it. As he lay there, he thought about Ron and Hermione, his two best friends in the whole world, thought about all the other wonderful things for which he could be grateful: Sirius, his godfather, whom he had only discovered a year ago. He wanted to be with Sirius, so much at times it caused him physical ache.

But he would be able to see him and spend time with him when he went back to Hogwarts. Professor Lupin, Sirius' friend and another person who came from his parents' time, and somebody to whom Harry felt close, comfortable with, and thought him almost as a mentor even. And Professor Dumbledore. He knew Dumbledore cared for and was fond of him very much. He had people that loved him, and he could look forward to those wonderful moments with them, away from the Dursleys.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Harry smiled wanly. "Happy birthday, Harry," he murmured to himself in the dark stillness. He closed his eyes. Nothing changed the silence remained unyielding, and the loneliness refused leave.

But almost immediately following the screeching announcement of the alarm clock that it was midnight was the sound of flapping wings. His sleepiness suddenly gone, Harry threw off the quilt excitedly and greeted the four owls as they swooped inside one by one through the window he had left open in anticipation for their arrival. One of them, a large, grey one, keeled over on his bed after a rather unceremonious landing, dragging down its partner, little Pigwidgeon, with him. Hedwig, conversely, landed gracefully on his headboard as always and surveyed the unconscious bird on the bed with disdain clearly written all over her body. She flapped her feathers regally, hooted, and rearranged herself on the headboard with what one would call dignity.

"Hey, girl," Harry said softly as he patted her with a smile, and she nipped at his hand affectionately before ruffling her feathers again, a gesture which clearly told him she had had enough.

Harry assented with a wry smile, withdrew his apparently offensive hand and went over to the large heap of feathers on his bed. He tried to rouse it into life; one large yellow eye peeked out and a shaking leg was offered, prompting him to show mercy and remove the baggage. Harry obliged with an amused shake of his head: he untied the large box and proceeded to the smaller box Pigwidgeon was carrying.

Inside the boxes were strawberry cake, a dozen mince pies, and another green sweater with a big, red 'H' on the front. Without prompt Harry was munching, fingering his cake, and quietly thanking Mrs Weasley profusely as he went over to Hedwig to relieve her of her package. Sirius had sent him an ornate dagger with silver intricate carvings that ran seamlessly from the hilt to the tip of the blade on either sides. Upon further scrutiny the markings seemed to have some sort of order, but one Harry could not discern at that moment. The edge, very sharp, looking as though it could give him a cut if he so much as neared his skin to it, was delicately serrated. And for a moment, Harry thought that the grooves were miniscule extensions of the intricate carvings. No note came with the dagger, which only added to its mystery. Harry grew a little frustrated at it, as though it were a present he had not already unpackaged, as though it were still locked. But Sirius gave it to him, and he decided he loved it.

He then moved on to the handsome tawny owl he knew came from Hogwarts. As usual, it carried the usual Hogwarts letter informing him that school started on the first of September, it had a list of his new school books, and it went on to remind him of the school rules for the fifth time in as many years.

He removed a copy of the *Daily Prophet* from Hermione's package, as well as most predictably a large, mercifully thin tome entitled, *Useless Magic: A Collection of the Most Marginal, Mundane Magic Imaginable*.

Well, that's... helpful...

He idly flicked through it, finding that it had no trouble in living up to its name: it was indeed useless; there were many trivial spells that did very common things and tricks, such as the Pimple-Vanishing Charm, Shoelace-Tying Charm, the Impervius Charm Hermione had used to dry his glasses in a Quidditch match in third year, and Harry even came across a Vomit-Inducing Charm; if only Muggle models knew of this one...

Every now and then, however, Harry discovered a spell that seemed relatively useful in its own right and rather did not belong in the book; some spells stood out, but blended in somehow. Admittedly, these were not complex, high-rated spells such as an Impediment Hex or an Unforgivable Curse, but they were somewhat useful, despite the title. Harry put the book down, undecided as to how to feel about it, but he was nevertheless thankful to Hermione. At the very least it could serve as a shield against any hex-happy Slytherins feeling a little bolder this year knowing Voldemort was back.

Harry stepped back and stared at the presents on his bed from his loved ones the food, the dagger, the literature. Not long after, he rested his head on his pillow and closed his eyes with a smile to bid farewell to his fifteenth birthday, feeling so much more loved than when he had awoken.