

A New Deal: Fog Lifts

by *dracontia*

There was that time Scorpius was lost in the fog... Fourth sequel to 'A Credit to Their Houses.'

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I don't own these characters--I merely make unpaid reports on their extracurricular activities.

Scorpius Malfoy should have been perfectly, even deliriously, happy. He was going home for Christmas holidays. He had letters in his pocket promising that Father and Mum were amenable to the idea that Al should visit sometime during that interval, and that promising discussions with the Potters were underway to determine suitable days. Troublesome Fred had been packed off to Hogsmeade to be picked up by his parents without the chance of making mischief on the train. They'd all made the Quidditch team, at least as reserves...and with the injuries that Slytherin took, the line between 'reserve' and 'first string' was written with a fine quill, indeed. There was *SNOW*.

Everything was absolutely smashing, really, except for Rose.

"But... your mum said that it was perfectly fine, your father had only been joking and of course you are to come home," Scorpius tried to quote the letter as best he could recall. Several letters, in fact, all of which had the same gist.

Rose was unmoved from her gloom. "Daddy didn't write so himself," she mourned.

James squeezed her shoulder. "Aw, don't worry, Rosie," he said, clearly not used to giving comfort and feeling somewhat awkward about it. "Uncle Ron's not one much for writing, you know that."

"Look, Rosie, if Dad can cooperate well enough with Scorpius' dad that he's driving all of us, Uncle Ron's sure to be all right by now. You'll see," Al said, confidence radiating from him. Scorpius wished he could sound as reassuring as that. Some days he envied Al so much, it actually sort of hurt.

"Oh, where's the Tea Trolley?" Rose jumped up and ran out the door. Scorpius made as if to follow her, but Al held him back.

"Don't worry," Al said. "Rose'll just drown her sorrows in some fizzy drink without Aunt Hermione to stop her. She'll come to her senses soon enough." There was that maddening certainty again. "If Aunt Hermione is all right with things, Uncle Ron will be. They always agree, sooner or later. Even if they don't, one goes along." He added in a lower voice, "Much as I hate to admit it, James is right. Uncle Ron really isn't a writing sort of bloke."

"I heard that," James said. He was in too good a mood from the snow to make much of it, though. Still, they bickered over it long enough that Scorpius wished he had followed Rose.

Rose did come back with three bottles, recalling that Scorpius liked strawberry. When James asked where his share was, she told him he could just as well get his own

drinks. After the predictable squabble, he, too, departed in search of sugar, which left the compartment relatively peaceful. Scorpius was too excited to do much of anything, and even Rose seemed to perk up a bit. Sweets had that effect on her.

Still, there was a certain tension when London came into view through the windows. They gathered their trunks, not with quite the same nervous excitement as they had when disembarking in Hogsmeade some months ago, but not quite calmly. Scorpius fell into line behind Al and Rose as they made their way to the door.

As soon as he stepped onto the platform, Scorpius found himself enveloped in billowing clouds of steam. He couldn't see his hand in front of his face, never mind tell which direction was toward the train or toward the platform.

"Al? Rosie? Father? Mum? Is anyone there?" Scorpius inched forward, reaching tentatively out in hopes of finding something solid to help him feel his way through the mess. *Why does no one answer? How on earth did this steam get so thick, so quickly?*

He frightened himself rather badly when his hand suddenly touched something solid and covered in fabric. He looked up to see bright blue eyes looming out of the steam at him. The man wore Muggle clothing entirely, and at first, Scorpius feared that he had somehow passed from Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ by accident and was lost somewhere in the King's Cross station. *Oh dear oh dear oh dear, I'm going to say something wrong and get into ever so much trouble, with the Secrecy Statute!* He sighed heavily with relief when he noticed wand in the man's hand.

"Sorry! Sorry, sir," he babbled. "I didn't see you, this steam is terrible. Y-you haven't happened to see my friends? Al is hard to miss, he has quite a head of black hair and his eyes are so very green, and Rosie has such very, very blue eyes, actually rather like..." he trailed off, it having noticed that the man he was addressing had hair so red that it showed up even in the intense fog. There was something not entirely unfamiliar about those eyes, and the man's long, almost beak-like nose, his angular face, and his considerable height...tall enough that Scorpius had to crane his neck to look at him...had surely been in the large photo of the whole Weasley family which Rose sometimes used as a bookmark. Scorpius might have noticed the resemblance even more quickly, but he didn't recall any of the people in the picture having expressions so distressingly stern. "Oh! You wouldn't happen to be one of the Mr. Weasleys?" Scorpius wished he wasn't quite so poor at matching names and faces, though he supposed it didn't matter much; he wasn't about to address an adult by their first name. He was still fighting his instincts uphill to resist giving Mr. Hagrid a title.

"I would," the man said gravely. "Are you Scorpius Malfoy?"

"Yes, sir," Scorpius answered. He pulled a lock of his own hair in front of his face and sighed at it. "I guess everyone who knows who my father is can figure that out straight away." He wondered if this was Louis' father. Victoire, Dominique, and Louis were all on the tall side. Dominique was quite sober, when not being emotional.

"Hm. Does that happen a lot at school?" Mr. Weasley asked.

"More than I should like," Scorpius admitted.

"Children can be a bit rough," Mr. Weasley said. He was giving Scorpius a calculating sort of look now, as if he was interested in the answer in a way that Scorpius couldn't quite understand.

"They can," Scorpius agreed, "but they mostly make fun of my old things." Scorpius shrugged that off. "Though not many of them do that, especially in my House. Lots of the old families don't have much anymore, and," he couldn't help tilting his chin up in defiance of the mocking ones who weren't even about, "I'm not less of a wizard for wearing second hand robes."

"I don't suppose any wizard is," Mr. Weasley said. The calculating look was, if anything, sharper.

"Begging your pardon, sir, it's the grownups that are hardest to take. I don't know which is worse...when they look at me as if they expect I shall do something horrid any moment, or that they look so surprised when I don't!" It all came out in a bit of a rush, and Scorpius feared it might be a little rude to speak so freely. But he was just so weary of it, and this Mr. Weasley's expression was not so far removed from that suspicious stare of anticipation he had come to dread.

All at once, Mr. Weasley's face went almost blank, it was so still. Then it relaxed into something that was almost a smile. "Doesn't help that they pay so much attention to your best mate either, does it?"

"No, sir," Scorpius said with a sigh. "I keep telling myself that he didn't ask for any of it, and he's a very good friend. But there are some days... he just has so much, and it seems like he gets more just by rolling out of bed." Scorpius sighed again, and he could have sworn he heard Mr. Weasley echo the sound. "Speaking of whom...I really need to find Al and Rosie, especially since she was so worried before. Could you help me, Mr. Weasley?"

"They'll be fine," Mr. Weasley reassured him. "There are spells on the edge of the platform to keep anyone from falling. It takes some time for the steam to clear in the winter cold, that's all. Why don't we sit down for a moment and wait it out? It's better to stay in one place and let people inch their way toward you." Mr. Weasley conjured a sort of bench and sat down.

"Well... all right." Scorpius hauled himself up beside Mr. Weasley. The bench was a little too tall for him; his toes barely touched the ground and he couldn't quite keep himself from swinging his legs. Conversely, Mr. Weasley's legs were so long, his knees poked up oddly when he sat, and he put his elbows on them as if that would somehow keep them from popping up any higher.

"You're good friends, then, with Albus and Rosie?"

Scorpius forgot his 'sirs' in his excitement. "Oh, absolutely! Al is my best mate ever, well, actually, I didn't even have a best mate 'til I met him, and he says we're God-cousins because of Cousin Teddy!" Scorpius was on a roll now. "Really, he says the most remarkable things all of the time...and I don't always know what they mean because I think some of them are Muggle, or maybe he makes them up...but they're all brilliant. He shares Agate with me and, oh, just too many things to even tell about. That's why I can't be too upset with him, you see, even if," Scorpius sighed, "he does have a brother and sister and an Invisibility Cloak and...it's all a bit much sometimes. He means well, at least to me, and I was told it simply won't do to be jealous of your best mate," Scorpius explained solemnly.

Mr. Weasley had a very curious expression on his face, almost sad. He cleared his throat. "That's... that's not bad advice. So, you're friends with Rosie as well?"

"Yes, she's ace...I learned that from Al, too, it means 'brilliant,'" Scorpius said. "Although now that I think of it, I'm not sure which brilliant it is...well, she's both kinds, so I don't suppose it matters much."

"All kinds of brilliant, eh?" There seemed to be a smile lurking around the edges of Mr. Weasley's eyes. "She doesn't wear you out, reminding you to do your homework and such?"

"She could give Grandmother lessons at it," Scorpius said gravely. "But when I got better marks on my Defense Against Dark Arts exam than she did, she went straight off keeping Al and me on a study schedule."

Scorpius didn't know what to make of Mr. Weasley's expression, but perhaps he was suppressing a sneeze. He certainly made the most peculiar noise into his handkerchief, and wiped his face. Scorpius thought he heard him say, "Should've thought of that."

"Sir, you must know Rose's father. Would he really disown her? Al and I told her that it must be all right since her mum said so, but Rose is so very afraid that he's terribly angry and her mum is only covering," Scorpius dared put his hand on the fluffy sleeve of Mr. Weasley's jumper (really, he ought to have known right away they were related; Rose, Al, and all of their cousins had knitted clothes just like it.) "I mean... if that happened, it would all be my fault."

"How d'you reckon?" Mr. Weasley gave him a hard look. Scorpius mustered his courage. The Hat had said he might do well in Gryffindor, after all.

"We...Al, Rose, and I...all promised to be in the same House, but I didn't realize I would be Sorted first. Rose made me promise not to pick an easy House, or she'd never

forgive me. The Hat offered me Hufflepuff first, and I liked that idea, but I didn't want Rose not to forgive me. Then the Hat said I would do well in Gryffindor, but we'd all decided beforehand we didn't want Gryffindor, because Rose wanted to make the Quidditch team first year, and Al and I didn't want to be anywhere near Fred. And... well... I couldn't bear the thought of all the studying I'd have to do in Ravenclaw." Scorpius hung his head. "So I went to Slytherin and they followed. I promised her she could live at my house if she was thrown out. As much as I should like to have one of my best friends stay with me, Rose loves her mum and father and brother very, very, much, and she would miss them terribly."

Mr. Weasley blew his nose again. Scorpius wondered if he was getting a cold. "I can tell you now, Rose's mum always knows what she's talking about," Mr. Weasley said. His voice was a bit rough, so he cleared his throat. "She wanted to make the Quidditch team first year, eh?"

"Yes, sir! I never saw anyone so keen. She tried for Keeper, and really, she's a natural; but she's just too small to make a go of it competitively. She's regular ripping Beater, though," Scorpius asserted. "I feel bad for Kent being out for the season, but I won't miss him as a Beater. I might be able to concentrate on the Snitch next game, knowing that Rosie will have my back."

"How's that working for you, being moved up from reserve Seeker?" The calculating look was back, but only a little.

"I wish Al hadn't been injured. I can't even eat the morning before a game when I'm just a reserve...I don't know how I'll manage, starting," Scorpius said. He felt a twinge of nausea just thinking about it. "I wish even more that he would TELL me if he's got some mad scheme before..." and it just then occurred to Scorpius that perhaps he should not share with Mr. Weasley anything that might get back to Mr. Potter.

"Mad scheme?" Scorpius could just tell by the look in Mr. Weasley's eyes that he was not getting away without spilling the rest.

"Al... flew into a Bludger at the end of the game versus Hufflepuff... on purpose. He told the Captain that he'd be out with the injury the rest of the season and I might as well make use of his broom...and he might have got away with no one knowing he'd done it deliberately, except he couldn't help making a dig against the Captain's season opening speech, by saying, 'My name won't win you the game, but the best Seeker on the best broom will.' Captain was mad enough to eat nails and shit spikes," Scorpius said, recalling the moment with such awe that he forgot he wasn't to use such language. He clapped both hands over his mouth and dared not remove them, even to apologize.

He needn't have worried. Mr. Weasley was laughing so hard, he was bent double. When he finally got himself under control, wiping his eyes and quite pink in the face, all he said was, "Hm. Fancy that, the fog's clearing. Shall we?" Mr. Weasley stood up and brandished his wand. Scorpius got to his feet just before the bench disappeared from under him. Mr. Weasley put his hand on Scorpius' shoulder and steered him forward, out of the cloud which now seemed to lift so very obligingly.

Almost that exact moment, Scorpius heard a familiar voice. "Daddy?"

He looked over to find Rose staring up at the man whose hand was on Scorpius' shoulder. Her blue eyes were like saucers as she looked first at him, then at Scorpius, and back again. Father and Mr. Potter stood behind her, and Scorpius had never seen two grownups with more shocked, wrong-footed, and frankly silly expressions. James looked completely puzzled. Only Al seemed unbothered, giving his trademark whoop of joy when he spotted Scorpius and charging forward.

"Where were you, mate? Thought you'd nicked the Cloak there!" He slung his arm around Scorpius' shoulder and took a moment to smile up at Mr. Weasley. "Hi, Uncle Ron!"

"Hi yourself, Al," Mr. Weasley said, amused. He squinted at Al appraisingly. "I dunno, green may go with your eyes, but it makes you look washed out. Get out of those dungeons and up on a broom once in a while."

"Nah, I'm on injured reserve. Snidge is bringing in the Snitch now," Al bragged. That was the thing that made it hard to stay mad at Al, Scorpius thought. He always seemed more excited about his friends' successes than his own.

"Ron? What?" It seemed to Scorpius that someone ought to check Mr. Potter for a hex or some such. It had taken him an awfully long time to say anything, and he looked entirely dazed. Really, it all seemed a bit much in the way of shock just for Rose's dad to have shown up at the station. Perhaps he'd simply forgotten that Mr. Potter was bringing Rose home? Or maybe he just couldn't wait to see her?

Scorpius looked up with considerable puzzlement at the Mr. Weasley who, it turned out, was Rose's particular one. "Are they all right, sir? They look Confused."

Mr. Weasley smiled at Scorpius. There was something a little bit like mischief in his expression. "Do you know, how you mentioned earlier, that you weren't sure which was worse?" It took Scorpius a moment to recall that bit of their conversation, but once he did, he nodded. "Well," Mr. Weasley said, with a significant glance at Father, Rose, and Mr. Potter, "I personally don't fancy the look of surprise."

"It's certainly more confusing," Scorpius agreed.

Mr. Weasley gave a little chuckle at that. "Well, now all that's done, don't I get a hug from my Rosie?"

Rose's eyes lit up the way that always made Scorpius catch his breath, and she charged forward and crashed right into Mr. Weasley, who swung her up in the air and laughed properly. "There, now I know that's my girl," he said quite tenderly. He grabbed the end of her green scarf and pulled an exaggerated face at it. "This, though..." he flicked it off her neck with one quick motion and held it between two fingers like some noxious thing before he tossed it away. "I don't need to look at *that* all through the hols." He pulled another face, even sillier than the last. Scorpius wondered whatever Rose was on about, all those months. Mr. Weasley was clearly the kindest sort of grownup, one who could never do anything so grim as disowning his child.

"Oh, Daddy," Rose shoved at his shoulder. Her voice was the one she used when she disapproved of something Al or Scorpius did but found it funny anyway. "Write to me sometimes," she said. It was so low, Scorpius almost didn't catch it.

"Sorry, Rosie," Mr. Weasley said, equally low. "I read all of your letters. I'll at least tack something on the end of mum's next time, yeah?"

Scorpius didn't hear the rest, because now Father was in front of him. All the homesickness that he'd been too busy to feel during the term welled up, and Scorpius understood why all the Potters and Weasleys were so partial to hugs. He had to wrap his arms around Father, just to feel that he was real. It must not have been too indecorous, because Father held him in return. He even tucked Scorpius' head under his chin and held it there with one hand. Father pulled away and looked at Scorpius for a long time. His hands were warm on either side of Scorpius' face and his smile softened his eyes. Scorpius wished they weren't always so... not sad, quite, but wistful. "Welcome back, son. It appears that school agrees with you." He let his hands drop, but kept one on Scorpius' shoulder.

"I have my friends, and we're doing very well," Scorpius really didn't want to talk about school right now. He'd covered it all in his letters and had far more pressing matters to address. "Father, d-did you talk to Mr. Potter? When can James and Al visit us?"

"Christmas Eve they are at home, and Christmas Day they spend with their grandparents. But I have it on good authority that they've no particular plans from Boxing Day until the New Year."

"We're going to bring our brooms, and you can show me all the places you told me about!" Al's eyes were twin beams of excitement.

Scorpius was so happy he couldn't speak. He flung his arms around Father, surprising a little huff of breath from him. It wasn't a Weasley hug, but Scorpius put a great deal of feeling into it.

"I take it you approve." Father's voice had a laugh just under the surface.

"Thank you, thank you Father, so much," Scorpius whispered into the lapels of Father's long coat. It was almost like a robe. The Muggle world wasn't always a hardship to

accommodate.

He realized that someone else must have had to agree to this plan. He pulled away to turn his smile on Mr. Potter, only to find him looking right back, with the half-smile that Rose averred he, Al, and Mr. Potter all shared. "Thank you, Mr. Potter." He would have hugged Mr. Potter, except he was too shy to be so familiar with a grown-up like that, even one who was as kind as Mr. Potter.

Some of that feeling must have shown in his expression, for the corners of Mr. Potter's eyes crinkled even more behind his glasses, and he extended an arm toward Scorpius, who let himself be pulled into the sort of half-hug Al and James seemed to favor. That was just right, and Scorpius was reminded of how he'd liked Mr. Potter quite instantly, from the moment he'd first met him at Great-Aunt Andromeda's house. "As far as I'm concerned, I ought to be thanking you for being such a friend to Al," Mr. Potter said. "You couldn't be more welcome in our home if you were born there, and if there's something I can do for you, just ask."

Sometimes, Scorpius knew, grown-ups said that as a matter of form. He could tell that Mr. Potter meant it wholeheartedly, and he had a very good idea by now that Mr. Potter was the sort of fellow that could make more than just 'something' happen. "I think the only thing I could really want is for Rose to visit me, too," Scorpius said, equally wholeheartedly. "Everything else is just perfect."

Mr. Potter looked very pointedly between Father and Mr. Weasley. Scorpius knew that expression. He didn't quite know what it meant, but really, even Mum couldn't have done it better.

Father straightened his coat. Mr. Weasley set Rose down and cleared his throat. They almost, but not quite, looked at each other.

"Weasley."

"Malfoy."

Everyone was holding their breath, Scorpius included. He wasn't entirely certain why, except that there was something about the way Mr. Weasley and Father weren't quite looking at each other that reminded him of the Hippogriffs in the pen behind Mr. Hagrid's house. There was a sort of horrified fascination in perching at some safe distance and watching the big males approach each other, never quite knowing if they were going to bow formally and stalk away or if feathers would start flying.

"I understand that your son and my Rosie are friends." Scorpius would never have guessed that Mr. Weasley could speak so formally.

"Scorpius speaks very highly of your daughter in his letters." Father sounded even more formal. If Mum had been there, she would elbow him and whisper that he ought to stop being priggish. "If she wished to visit during the holidays, she would be welcome." Father tilted his chin up as if he were issuing a challenge rather than an invitation. "The entire family would be welcome, in fact."

Mr. Weasley tipped his chin up as well, and it looked a bit more impressive, what with his height and his nose and all. "We would not wish to impose," he said. Scorpius was reminded most emphatically of Mr. Hagrid's Hippogriffs. He could picture the neck feathers raised and horse-hooves stomping on the rangy chestnut and the dappled gray with the white face feathers... His imaginings were interrupted by a soft smacking sound, and he looked up to see that Mr. Potter's face was hidden behind his hand.

Father and Mr. Weasley continued as if oblivious to that. "It would be no imposition," Father said. "Perhaps for the day, if staying over would be inconvenient?" Really, Scorpius was surprised at Father. His speech was practically stilted.

"That might be possible. I shall speak to my wife about it," Mr. Weasley replied.

"OR," Mr. Potter sounded more impatient than Scorpius could ever have imagined, based on their limited acquaintance, "I could drive all the children out to Wiltshire NOW, since the car will hold everyone and they're all packed, and we could call Hermione to arrange Christmas and work out the details after."

Neither Father nor Mr. Weasley looked as if they quite knew what to make of that, though the idea appealed immensely to Scorpius.

"It's all right, Uncle Harry...I really want to see Mum and Hugo first," Rose said. "But I'd like very much to visit." She was using that tone of voice again, the one that had first clued Scorpius in to the fact that Al was not the only member of that family to know how to get around a grownup. He gave a little leap of joy inside, knowing Rose would get to visit for at least one day.

"Yeah, and she needs to get her **broom**, Dad...we all do," Al said, in a 'what were you thinking?' tone of voice. James shook his head as well. Scorpius fully sympathized. Grownups had rather confused priorities.

"Blimey, mate, where's your head?" Mr. Weasley was back to being informal and funny again. Scorpius decided he preferred him that way. Even Father gave that little cough that Scorpius knew was hiding a laugh.

"I claim forgetfulness in my old age," Mr. Potter said dryly. "Come on, let's get to the car before I lose track of it as well." As they walked down the platform together, trunks rattling and Rose and James battling to talk the most, with Al jamming a word in edgewise whenever possible, Scorpius felt entirely happy.

"Hey," Al shook Scorpius' arm a little, "you never did say where you were."

"The steam was so thick that I got turned around. Mr. Weasley found me, and we talked a bit while it cleared up," Scorpius explained.

"What did you talk about?" Father was so surprised he forgot to be formal.

"Oh, this and that," Mr. Weasley said airily. "Turns out," and he glanced between Mr. Potter and himself, and between Al and Scorpius so quickly that Scorpius wasn't entirely sure he'd seen it, "we understand each other."

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