

Family Obligations

by JackieJLH

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~Sophia Loren

A 'missing scene' set directly prior to the events on Spinner's End in HBP.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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There are far more interesting rooms in this house, and being trapped in this one bores me. Nothing ~~good~~ happens here. It's dull, in a word. But this is where my grandson has seen fit to place me. I'll admit, it was probably my ranting that landed me here. While my husband and his family were always ones that kept up a strong prejudice against those of mixed blood, I never really shared in the belief. And it hardly mattered in those days anyway, for there was no Dark Lord to fight for that particular cause. We had our own Dark wizard, it's true, but his was a different fight. My husband supported Grindelwald as well, come to think of it... but that's a whole other story.

I was always tolerant of my husband's prejudices, and when our daughter shared his beliefs, and then my grandson, I took it in stride. After all, in my day, young ladies were raised to respect their husbands, not question them. But when my grandson began doing more than just disliking, more than just hating, when he started plotting and conning and killing, I was outraged. Of course, by this time I was only able to express my anger from the confines of a frame, but I made myself heard nonetheless. By the time my great grandson was born, I had been relegated to the upstairs sitting room, which was only frequented by the current lady of the house, and then promptly silenced with spells so that I could only glare menacingly. When my stare began making the young Mrs Malfoy uncomfortable, I was covered with drapes. It was only my grandson's sense of familial pride and obligation that kept me from being tossed in the attic, I am certain.

The days were uneventful and boring, and the nights even more so. The lady of the house would come into my room and sit in silence, which was only broken by the sound of a book's turning pages. Sometimes her son would come in, and I would hear his young voice begging his mother to come play with him, and they would leave. As he grew older, I listened to him cry over scraped knees, and then later talk in whispers about a pretty girl at his new school when he was home for the holidays, and still later hear him express worry over his father, my grandson, who had apparently got himself thrown in Azkaban. My heart went out to the boy on many occasions, mostly because he rarely entered this room unless he very much needed to speak with his mother and couldn't wait for her to leave her sanctuary of peacefulness and join him in the other parts of the house. He was the only one that did so; even her psychotic sister waited in the hall and called to her. Not that he wasn't always welcome, as far as I could tell... Mrs Malfoy's love for, and pride in, her son was evident from her voice alone.

So it was with worry that I listened to the tapping on the door one afternoon, the lady inviting someone in, and the sound of footsteps on the carpet approaching the centre of the room, where a sofa and some chairs were set up as if to receive company, though that was a rare, if not unheard of, occurrence. There was shifting and settling, then quiet for a bit before the woman's voice broke the silence.

'What did you do today? I missed you on your way out this morning.'

'I was visiting Pansy.'

'Oh?' his mother asked, sounding surprised. A few moments later, with a smile in her voice, she added, 'Pansy called through the Floo looking for you nearly three hours ago. What were you *really* doing?'

'Nothing important,' he said defensively. I'm sure his mother knew he was lying; I could tell he was lying, and I couldn't even see him.

'Did you hurt your arm?' she asked a few moments later, sounding concerned.

'It's nothing,' he said again, and there was more shifting.

'Draco....' Her voice was louder and not without a warning in its tone.

'I was with Auntie Bella,' he said in way of explanation, and the lady gasped, followed by a great deal of rustling of robes.

'Mum, stop! Let go of my arm, what are you...'

'Why did you do this? Why didn't you talk to me first? Draco, how... are you trying to get yourself killed?! You *know* that the Dark Lord is unbelievably angry with your father.... What if he'd killed you as a way to punish him for his mistakes? What were you thinking?' Mrs Malfoy's voice had grown shrill and panicked and more than a bit angry.

'Auntie Bella said that I wouldn't be harmed. Don't you trust your own sister?' he asked bitterly.

'I'm going to *kill* my own sister....'

'Why? I wanted to go! I asked her to take me!' the boy shouted, and his footsteps, heavy with anger, stomped across the room before the door flung open, squeaking on its hinges and knocking against the wall, shaking me in my frame.

'Draco, don't you walk away from me. We aren't finished. Get in here and sit down,' his mother ordered, and surprisingly, he obeyed. The door slammed shut, and he stomped back to the centre of the room, the springs of the sofa whining as he sat down heavily.

Again there was silence, but this time the tension in the air was almost a tangible thing. The sofa whined again as Mrs Malfoy sat down, and finally she spoke.

'Did he say anything to you? Anything at all?'

'No....'

'Draco, stop lying to me.'

More shuffling, more silence.

'Damn it, Draco! I am your mother, and you will tell me what is going on. If you don't, your Aunt Bellatrix will, if I have to hold you both at wand point. Merlin help me, if you don't start talking, I will...'

'*He gave me an assignment, okay?*' the boy hissed, and I had the distinct impression that he regretted the words even as they were coming out of his mouth.

'What sort of "assignment"?' she asked softly, warily, having lost all the anger in her voice.

'I have to... do something to... to prove my loyalty. He says that if I succeed, he will forgive Father's failures, and I will be rewarded even beyond that....' But Draco knew that what he was saying sounded foolish. I could hear the doubt in his words, in the way his voice trailed off.

'What... does he want?' And when there was no answer, she asked again, 'Draco, what does he want you to do?'

'I can't tell you,' he said shortly. 'You'll be upset.'

'I'm already upset! Tell me, Draco. Now.'

'I have to... take care of someone.'

'You have to kill someone...' his mother said knowingly, horror in her voice. 'Oh, Draco... who does he want you to... to kill?' The words came out of her mouth slowly, as though she didn't quite know how to form the question she'd just asked.

There was a pause, and then his answer came so quickly and so softly that I had to strain to hear it.

'Dumbledore.'

My grandson's wife must have had the same problem, because she repeated, only slightly louder, 'Dumbledore?' There was a note of incredulosity in her voice. *Albus Dumbledore?!*

'Told you... you're upset...' her son mumbled miserably.

'No, I don't think "upset" quite covers it,' she said softly, her voice sounding almost far away. But her next words were spoken in a stronger, firmer, and far more worried tone. 'Draco, you can't kill Dumbledore.'

'Why not?' he snapped. 'He's a bumbling fool. You hate him, Father hates him, I ha...'

'You CAN'T kill Dumbledore!' she all but screamed, and I heard her rise from the sofa and begin pacing across the room. 'You're a child, Draco. *A child*. If the Dark Lord himself can't kill him, how do you think you're going to do it? Please, tell me, because to me this sounds like a suicide mission. How can you possibly think that you'll succeed? How can *he* possibly think you'll succeed?'

I couldn't help but agree with her.

'Mum, would you stop?' Draco groaned angrily. 'I don't know, okay?! I don't know how to do it; I don't know how I'm going to keep from getting caught; I don't know! But if I *don't* do it, the Dark Lord will kill...'

'He won't kill you. We'll hide you; we'll think of something,' his mother assured him, picking up the speed of her pacing, her robes audibly swishing around her as she moved.

'No, Mum, you're not listening!' her son exclaimed, and he jumped from his seat, bringing a halt to her footsteps. 'He'll kill you and Father. I won't let him do that!'

'Don't worry about us, Draco. We'll get by; we always do. We'll hide you,' she repeated, sounding desperate.

'NO! I can do this! Auntie Bella thinks I can, why don't you?'

And then, as if on cue, Mrs Malfoy's sister's voice rang through the door.

'Cissy? Are you in there?' Footsteps sped across the floor, and the door was thrown open with a bang, nearly causing me to fall off the wall. I let out a silent cry of surprise as my frame tilted, leaving me on my side, but then quickly found something else to occupy my interest. With the frame sideways, I could slide all the way to the bottom and peek out where the drapes no longer concealed the corner of the portrait. For the first time in years, I could see Mrs Malfoy and her son, and the first thought that I had was that it was quite possible I would see a murder as well.

Mrs Malfoy glared at her sister, opening her mouth to say something, but was cut off.

'Did you hear?' her sister asked in an almost excited tone, smiling. 'Draco joined us today. Aren't you proud, Cissy?'

'Proud?! Are you insane? How could you let him do this, Bella?'

Bellatrix looked confused, and glanced at Draco for answers.

'I told her about the... task,' he mumbled as an explanation, looking at the floor. His aunt didn't seem to understand his point, and just grinned.

'Yes, isn't it wonderful? You're going to win yourself great favour in the Dark Lord's eyes with this, Draco. You should be honoured to be given such an assign-' But before she could finish the sentence, Mrs Malfoy slapped her across the face. Bellatrix fell silent, her eyes wide and furious.

'Draco, go to bed,' his mother ordered softly, her tone firm.

'It's barely dark outside,' he argued. 'Besides, I'm old enough to decide when to go to...'

'Now!' she interrupted, glaring at him. He opened his mouth to say something, but upon taking in her stern expression, he must have decided not to push his luck, because he quickly left the room, albeit with much foot-stomping and grumbling under his breath. It was only once they heard his bedroom door slam shut down the hall that the two women spoke.

'Narcissa, I don't see...'

'DON'T. Don't you dare try to tell me that you don't know why I'm angry. He's my son, Bella, my only child... and you've brought him to his death. I will never forgive you for that. Now leave. I need to find some way to save my son's life, and I can't deal with you right now.'

'Cissy!' the dark-haired woman gasped. 'I... you can't. This is Draco's task. The Dark Lord ordered it; you can't go against that.'

'Watch me,' her sister hissed, spinning around and walking back to the sofa, sitting on the edge of the cushion and holding her head in her hands.

'There has to be some way... someone that can stop this. Someone who will know what to do,' she said almost to herself. Bellatrix just stood in the doorway, looking uncomfortable. It was rapidly becoming apparent that dealing with emotions was not her forte.

'You can't tell anyone else,' she finally said. 'The Dark Lord wishes this to be kept a secret. There are only a few in his Inner Circle that know. Draco shouldn't have even told you.'

'His inner circle...' Mrs Malfoy repeated, looking thoughtful. 'Severus!'

Without another word, she stood from her seat and walked towards the door, attempting to nudge past her sister, but Bellatrix held her back.

'No, not Snape. He doesn't know... and besides, he's a traitor. He'll go to Dumbledore and his precious 'Order' with whatever you tell him.'

'Severus has to know. He's the Dark Lord's favourite, and he's Lucius's friend.... He'll help us. I know he will. Now get out of my way.'

'I'm the Dark Lord's favourite,' Bellatrix interjected, folding her arms across her chest and looking haughty. 'And Snape won't help anyone. You'd be a fool to trust him.'

Narcissa drew her wand from her robes and pointed it at her sister, narrowing her eyes. 'Move, Bella. Now. I won't ask again.'

'This is Draco's assignment. Have faith in your son, Cissy; let him do this! Why are you trying to hold him back from his destiny?'

'Why are you trying to get him killed?' the blonde bit back, tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. 'I will not lose my son for some stupid cause. Now MOVE!'

When Bellatrix refused to step aside, Mrs Malfoy simply shook her head, gripped her wand tightly, and Apparated away with a soft crack.

'Damn...' her sister muttered, raising her wand and whispering something that I couldn't hear. I could tell by her wand movement that she was trying to trace the Apparition trail. A moment later, with a look of triumph on her face, she disappeared from the house.

Unable to say a word and frustrated by my own silence, I just watched her go. Settling into the corner of my frame, I waited for the next time the lady of the house would enter my room, wondering if I would ever find out where my great grandson's choices had led him, and hoping, in a way, that I wouldn't. Sometimes, I've found, it's easier not to know.

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