

Paroled

by phoenix

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Chapter 1

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Disclaimer: Sadly, I am still not making any money off my writing as the characters belong to the incredibly talented JK Rowling. I'm merely borrowing her creations for a little harmless fun.

A/N: This fic was written for the Potter Place Winter Prompt Challenge #12. As I'm not much of a HG/SS shipper, I chose to use a different character. I encourage you to let me know what you think of the story. Your opinions help motivate writers to keep writing and to improve. As always, concrit is welcome.

12.Prompt - The Ministry decides there has been enough bloodshed and wants to give any repentant Death Eaters a chance to re-enter society, but first, they have to live with sponsors who keep tabs on them, making certain they keep a job, do their share for the community (kind of like a probation officer). Who gets to sponsor Snape or any other Death Eaters? What happens? Would prefer Hermione to take Snape in and have romance occur, but it can be any other pairing you'd like.

"Miss Granger?" Lucius asked incredulously.

"You object to being assigned to a Muggle-born?" asked the Chief Warlock.

Realizing that the offer of his freedom was tenuous, he thought quickly and answered, "No, sir. It's just that she is so young. I thought perhaps I might be assigned to someone closer to my age."

"You question our decision? If you do not like the circumstances of your parole..." the elderly wizard's voice trailed off as he implied that Malfoy could just as easily return to prison for all he cared.

"Not at all. I am sure that she is a very competent witch and will be an excellent sponsor." He knew that he would have to learn to tolerate Mudbl...Muggle-borns since they had been accorded places of prominence as never before in the aftermath of the war.

"She is *incredibly* competent. In fact, she has been appointed temporary caretaker of your many business ventures until we determine what reparations are owed."

Lucius did his best to maintain control. The thought of his vast empire being carved up and sold off sickened him. He had worked diligently all of his life to enlarge his family's fortunes. Perhaps he could convince them to allow the companies to remain under his stewardship with the profits going to the Ministry. It wasn't likely, but he knew that if the Ministry were running his businesses, it would, and probably sooner rather than later, run them into the ground.

"And then there is the question of your parole. You are assigned to work at Flourish and Blotts. Mr. Blott will give you your exact work assignment when you report tomorrow morning."

"Understood." Lucius replied. He had known it would be menial labor, but this was even worse than he had anticipated. Especially since he knew he was prohibited from using magic unless it was to save a life.

"Dismissed."

Lucius walked from the courtroom, knowing that *she* would be waiting for him.

"This way, Mr. Malfoy," Hermione said matter-of-factly. She said nothing further as she led him to the Ministry foyer. She stood in line for the Floo and once there, stepped into the fireplace and said, "Granger residence!"

He could tell this was going to be a very complicated relationship. He had belittled her in the past, and he had no illusions that she was likely to have forgotten that. He knew that he wouldn't have. A part of him fleetingly wondered if staying in Azkaban would have been preferable.

When he arrived in her living room, she was waiting for him. He stepped out of the fireplace, brushed off his clothes and glanced around his new 'home'. He supposed it was a rather spacious flat, but nothing like the manor to which he was accustomed. A glance out the window showed the flat was on Diagon Alley, which was a relief. At least he would not be forced to suffer the indignity of traveling by Floo to work.

She cleared her throat to get his attention. "Your room is down the hall on the right." She pointed. "The loo is across the hall. Kitchen is back that way. You will be on your own for food. I won't cook for you. You know the other rules," she said tersely.

Yes, he knew the other rules. He was not to go near Knockturn Alley or to seek out any of his old Death Eater acquaintances. He was also not to venture into Muggle Britain unescorted. It was a small price to pay for his freedom. He was concerned about having to cook for himself. That was not a skill he had ever learned. After all, Malfoys had house-elves. Since she was glaring at him, he decided to retreat to his room for the time being. It was still several hours until dinner. He might at least find out which possessions the Ministry had seen fit to allow him to have.

He was quite disappointed to see his room. It was sparsely furnished with only a small bed, a desk that doubled as a nightstand and an even smaller wardrobe. Sitting on the floor was a box. Opening it, he saw that, in addition to some basic toiletries, it contained several sets of robes and other clothing that were better suited to a Weasley than a Malfoy. Sighing, he collapsed onto the bed, reminding himself that this was still far better than his cold, dank cell in Azkaban.

After a few minutes, he decided he might as well unpack. At least once he started working, he would be able to put his wages toward something more his style, or at least in better condition.

It didn't take him long to unpack his meager belongings, and after that was done, he decided he didn't want to remain in his room with nothing to do. Knowing that Hermione was a bookworm, he decided to see what sort of books she had available for him to read.

As he entered the living room, she glanced up from her work, although she said nothing. He could feel her eyes on him as he moved to the bookshelves. These were going to be very tense living conditions. Deciding that he might as well try to do something to break the tension, he asked, "Am I to consider any of these books to be off limits?"

She paused several seconds before answering. "No," she said rather curtly. "Just be sure you put them back where you found them."

"Of course. Thank you." He knew that he was soon to be surrounded by books all day every day, but he had always enjoyed reading, spending hours pouring through the tomes that had been amassed over the centuries by the Malfoy family. He cringed as he thought about what the Ministry would do with that priceless collection. Sooner or later, they would find a way through the protective wards, and he was sure that anything with any sort of Dark connotations would be confiscated and destroyed. The rest would likely be sold off at auction. He tried not to think about that possibility.

A part of him was surprised that they had not demanded he work with the Aurors and other members of the Ministry who wanted to comb through the house for Dark artifacts, but they had seemed very uncomfortable with the idea of allowing him to return to his manor. Perhaps they felt that he would gain some power from the ancient family magic. They were probably right.

After several minutes, he selected a book and returned to his room. Somehow he would have to find a way to warm their relationship. He wasn't sure how long he could endure this sort of living arrangement. His room was far too small for him to spend extended portions of his waking hours there.

The next couple of weeks passed in much the same fashion. Lucius would attempt to initiate conversation with Hermione, but she would essentially ignore him, making the shortest replies possible, and he would eventually retreat to his bedroom.

His first attempts at cooking had been completely abysmal. Fortunately, it was a slow period at the bookstore since the Hogwarts booklists had not come out yet. As he had the time, he would go through some of the cookbooks, hoping to improve his abilities. He had been pleasantly surprised that there seemed to be a niche market for cooking without the use of magic. Unfortunately Hermione's cupboards were quite sparse, and he had precious few ingredients to work with.

When he received his first paycheck, meager as it was, he decided to put some of it toward supplementing the salt and pepper that passed as all the spices Hermione had in her cupboard. He was disheartened that his endeavors at improving his cooking skills were going to result in him having very little money left over for new clothing. There had to be a way for him to regain some measure of control over the vast financial empire that had once been his.

He was reasonably sure that the preponderance of the books Hermione spent each night poring so assiduously over pertained to Malfoy Industries. Knowing how things had been organized, he could imagine her frustration. The bookkeeping had been carefully orchestrated over many years, a system she was unlikely to grasp intuitively. He thought about offering her assistance, but he suspected how poorly that would be received.

Instead, he busied himself in the kitchen, preparing his dinner, and a little extra to boot. He found cooking strangely soothing, something he had not expected. And it only seemed to increase as the succulent aromas wafted from the meal he was preparing.

As he sat at the table to eat, he noticed Hermione watching him. Deciding this would be the perfect opportunity to get her to initiate conversation, he acted as though he had not noticed her sudden interest in him.

Finally her curiosity got the better of her, and she asked, "What is that?"

"My dinner," he answered simply.

She gave him an exasperated look. "Clearly, but what exactly is it?"

Pouring on the charm, he replied, "Ah, my apologies for my curt answer. I know how much you dread conversing with me. It's chicken, marinated in wine and spices, and roasted with vegetables on the side. There is plenty left over, if you would care for some. It would be a shame to waste the rest, and I know that you have not yet eaten."

She was torn. When the Ministry had first approached her about being Malfoy's parole officer, she had been indifferent until she had learned that in the wizarding world that meant that she actually had to share a roof with him. The Ministry had provided a flat that suited her needs well enough. His bedroom was on the far side from hers, but she was still forced to share the common spaces with him. She had done her best to be inhospitable, to encourage him to remain in his room and not speak to her more than absolutely necessary, and it had worked so far.

Now, he was offering her a sumptuous meal, one that smelled much more enticing than anything she would be able to cook, and he had done it without magic. While she excelled in most branches of magic, the domestic spells still seemed to elude her. She had finally resorted to the Muggle manner of cooking, but that had never really improved the results. Yet here was a man who had grown up utterly spoiled, waited on hand and foot, and he had apparently mastered the art of cooking in a matter of weeks. It was unbelievable.

The growling in her stomach made her decision for her. What he had cooked smelled excellent, and it had been a very long time since she had eaten a decent meal. "Well, rather than let it go to waste..."

She was surprised when she walked into the kitchen to discover that most of the cleanup had already been done. All she saw was a neatly prepared plate sitting on the counter, waiting for her.

Rather than join Malfoy at the table, she took her plate back to her desk. If she hadn't been so determined not to talk to him, she would have told him that the meal was indeed very good. A part of her felt that she should at least say something. After all, she wasn't completely devoid of manners. "Thank you for dinner," she said.

"My pleasure," he replied smoothly. "If you would like, I can take over cooking duties; consider it my contribution to our living arrangement."

She was taken aback by this offer. Spontaneous kindness was not a trait she expected from Malfoy. Immediately she became suspicious that he was after something in return, but she didn't want to bring that up just yet. Besides, this was not a chore she enjoyed, and it would free up more time for her to unravel the Malfoy Industries finances. "Fine."

Over the course of the next few weeks, Lucius found that he was becoming quite proficient in the kitchen. And it was an enjoyable diversion from his otherwise miserable existence. Hermione had given him complete control of the food budget, and by supplementing it with some of his income, he was able to ensure that they ate well every night.

While their relationship was not cozy, it had warmed somewhat. She was now taking meals at the table with him, though she would still not engage in anything approaching personal conversation. Most of her questions pertained to asking him about his day to day activities and whether or not he had encountered any of his old Death Eater brethren or violated other terms of his parole.

In her collection of books, he had managed to find a couple of Muggle cookbooks, presumably given to her by her parents, and they gave him something else to experiment with. How he longed to be able to use his wand. He had seen several recipes in the books at the store that looked truly amazing, but absolutely impossible without the use of magic. He sighed, knowing it would still be several months before his restrictions on using magic were eased.

Since it was his day off, he had decided to roast a lamb shank for dinner. Hermione had been gone most of the day; she had muttered something about a factory before leaving. He wished she would just ask for his assistance. He would gladly give it, knowing that if she was unable to sort through everything and effectively manage his empire, then it would eventually just be carved up and run into the ground by the Ministry. While he had inherited much, he had also made several key acquisitions through his own hard work and dedication, vastly increasing his wealth and power. He was justifiably proud that Malfoy Industries owned these assets.

"How is it that someone who has never done a domestic chore in his life can turn out to be such a good cook?"

Turning around, he saw her leaning against the door. "I excelled at Potions, and cooking is after all, very much like Potions."

She guffawed at his comment. "I find it nothing like Potions. The ingredients are hardly as precise, and the same can be said for cooking times."

He knew not to insult her. Many times he had heard from Draco about how unfair it was that she was excelling in her classes, how she was a know-it-all, so he knew she prided her intellect and insulting it would surely undo his attempts to warm their relationship. "Well, perhaps it has to do with how we perceive Potions. I have always seen Potions as art as much as science." He hoped that was sufficiently neutral.

"Could be." She frowned at him as she contemplated his words before turning and leaving.

He longed to initiate conversation with her. She was quite intelligent, and he was finding that he longed for intelligent conversation with someone, anyone. His fellow worker at the bookstore, Edward something-or-other, was not very bright. And as well read as Blott was, he wasn't much of a conversationalist, preferring his books to people.

Putting the finishing touches on the meal, he carried the serving platter out to the table and was surprised to find Hermione already seated.

"So, is reading cookbooks what you do at work all day?" she asked, but there was no sarcasm in her voice.

"Hardly. I am kept quite busy, especially now that we are preparing for the start of the school year. It's how I amuse myself on my breaks."

"Why cooking?"

"It seems to be the one contribution I can make here. After all, it is a daily necessity, yet it can be done without magic. And I find it strangely relaxing."

"Really?" she asked skeptically.

"Oh, I was quite as shocked as you to learn that. If you would like, I could try to teach you, though I will admit my skills are not really all that good..."

"Not that good? I haven't eaten this well since Hogwarts. While Molly's cooking is good, she tends to go for simpler fare. This..." She gestured at the table, unable to find the words to continue.

He smiled softly. "Thank you for your compliment. I suppose that perhaps I am somewhat biased with respect to food, having grown up with house-elves."

The warmth left her face. "Yes..."

He suddenly remembered... "Ah, forgive me. I know that you are quite concerned about elfish welfare. I know that my past treatment of elves... Well, it is not something to be proud of." Contritely, he looked away from her gaze.

She eyed him critically, examining every word he uttered and the nuances of his expression. "Are you serious?"

"Quite. In fact, I daresay I have learned my lesson from my mistreatment of Dobby. Had I treated him better, I would not have had the problems I eventually had with him. Though, for everyone's sake, I think it actually worked out for the best that I had treated him so poorly." When she did nothing more than stare at him, he asked, "Have I said something to upset you?"

"No. I'm just considering..."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" Could he finally be making a breakthrough that would lead to a friendship?

"I'm not sure. You have changed, haven't you?"

"Indeed I have. One does not go through everything that I have and not change." Losing one's family, one's livelihood and nearly one's life most definitely has the propensity to change one. In his case, it was a change for the better.

"For the better?" she asked tentatively.

"Most definitely for the better. I have seen, and now experienced first hand, what sort of misery my behavior brought upon others." It was a realization he had come to the first time he had been imprisoned in Azkaban, and it had led him to turn traitor in the Final Battle, betting that Potter would defeat Voldemort. He had done his best to defend Potter and his friends, but had failed to fully protect them. Weasley had lost his life, but in the end, he had guessed correctly. Potter had indeed prevailed.

Lucius had found himself returned to Azkaban, but the mitigating circumstances of his behavior at the end had led him to be nominated as a candidate for the Death Eater rehabilitation project. He still had no idea who had sponsored him for the project, but he would be eternally grateful to that person.

"I suppose that you have," she replied sadly, clearly recalling the losses of the war.

He reached across the table and placed his hand on hers. "I am truly sorry that I was unable to do anything to help Weasley."

She looked first at his hand and then into his eyes. "Thank you for what you did accomplish. You did save other people's lives, even if Ron..."

He knew that those words had to have been hard for her to say. He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze before she hastily slipped it out from under his. "Well, then. I suppose I shall clean up the dishes." He rose from his seat and was in the midst of collecting the dishes from the table when she stopped him.

"I'll do it," she said and with a few flicks of her wand, the dishes were banished to the kitchen for washing, which she accomplished with a few more flicks.

This was definitely a step in the right direction. "If there is anything else I can do to be of assistance..." He trailed off, hoping she would pick up on the subtle hint.

She contemplated him for several long seconds. "Well... I have been going through the books from your businesses. They don't make much sense. How on earth did you have any idea what your assets were? We are still uncovering things we never suspected."

"Ah, yes. The books. I did offer my assistance to the Ministry, but they seemed to feel I couldn't be trusted with information about my own business ventures. For those not well versed in the corporate world, the information can be quite daunting. If you are sure they wouldn't mind me helping...?"

"Well, they did appoint me as your parole officer, which means I am in the position to make decisions about what you can and cannot do, I think it would be in everyone's best interest if you did help. I fear I'm not making much headway, and the Ministry will want a report soon."

They sat at the table and worked late into the night as he gave her lessons in corporate finance. It was a difficult concept for her to grasp, as much of it seemed counter-intuitive at first. He exhibited a great deal of patience in his explanations to her.

She slammed shut one of the ledgers. "This is so... *illogical*! I don't know how anyone can possibly understand this.

Rising and moving to stand behind her, he began rubbing her shoulders. "It's been a long night. I think that perhaps we could both use some rest before continuing. This is not something that is intuitive or easy to assimilate."

She leaned back into his touch and sighed. "I suppose you're right. It is late, isn't it?"

"Very late. And this will all still be here tomorrow."

"That feels so good," she murmured.

"I hope that it has helped you relax so that you can get some rest. I'll see you in the morning." He did not really want to go to bed. He wanted to dive back into his... well, assets that he hoped to recover control of someday. Now that she was letting him look at the ledgers, he hoped that she would be open to taking some business advice from him.

As he readied for bed, he mused that she was not a bad person, even if she was Muggle-born. When she wanted to, she could actually be quite pleasant. He never would have thought that he could see her the way he was seeing her now, as an intelligent and attractive woman. And the way she had reacted to his touch indicated that she was finally seeing him as something more than the Death Eater who had tormented her and her friends, and looked down upon her because of the circumstances of her birth.

Just thinking about her reaction to his touch awakened long dormant feelings. He shifted as he felt a familiar, though long absent, tightening in his groin. She had the potential to be a very beautiful woman if she would just devote some time to her appearance, but that did not appear to be high among her priorities.

If their relationship continued to warm up, he would have to prepare a special dinner from her. But he could not do so too soon. He didn't want to scare her off. Surely she would find her feelings as surprising as he had found his.

With the approach of the new school year, Lucius found himself working longer hours as Flourish and Blotts continually stocked and restocked the shelves with books for the upcoming term. He was gaining an entirely new appreciation for what went on behind the scenes of a business.

He thought he had been prepared for the stares and whispers, thought that the few weeks he had already been working there would have lessened them, but it had not.

A few of his social circle had not been Death Eaters, and they all refused to even speak to him. That actually suited him just fine as there was really nothing he could say to them. Most of the others treated him as they would any other store clerk. But a few decided that they would take retribution for the way he had once treated them. They were either Muggle-born or those who had lost close friends or relatives during the war. While he longed to lash back at them, he knew that was not the answer. It would only serve to get him in trouble.

As much as possible, he tried to spend his time in the back room, pulling books out of boxes to restock the shelves. For once, he found himself thankful that he was not allowed to work the till.

What little free time he had in the evenings, he spent with Hermione, instructing her on the finer points of business accounting. She was slowly starting to understand the system he had employed and admired the brilliance of it. Several of his assets were sheltered and, she was quite surprised to learn, utterly hidden from the Ministry.

What surprised him more was that she had not yet told the Ministry about these assets. She had told him that once she knew the exact standings of Malfoy Industries, she would make her decision. Could she possibly be willing to help him begin his financial recovery?

By August thirtieth he was mentally and physically exhausted. Between the long hours at the bookstore and the community service at St. Mungo's, he could definitely use a vacation. Unfortunately, he knew that was not forthcoming. The terms of his parole were quite clear. He was to remain in London, work a full-time job of the Ministry's choosing, and report to St. Mungo's three times a week to tend to patients in the long-term resident ward. That was particularly demeaning as several residents were victims of Death Eaters and took great pleasure in giving him humiliating requests, even though he had been imprisoned when most of them had been injured or he had already decided to defect from Voldemort's service. Of course, most of the victims had taken the "Once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater" stance, even though Voldemort was well and truly destroyed this time. Not to mention the fact that the only reason Lucius had returned to Voldemort's service was because he knew he had no choice other than death, which had hardly seemed a choice at all to him.

Trudging up the stairs to the flat, he did not relish the idea of preparing dinner tonight. If he weren't so hungry, he would just go to bed. But to his surprise, as soon as he opened the door, the most enticing aroma met him. Inhaling deeply, he could feel the saliva forming in his mouth and the rumble in his stomach to remind him of how

hungry he was. He saw Hermione proudly standing by the table.

"I thought you might like dinner to be waiting for you today," she said warmly.

"Thank you. Did you...?" He knew that despite his lessons, her cooking still was not very good.

She sheepishly looked at her feet. "Not exactly. I had my mum come over and help out. I tried, but well... You know how my cooking always seems to turn out."

At that point he wanted nothing more than to sweep her into his arms, kiss her and tell her that he could care less if she could cook, but he didn't feel their relationship was at that point yet. Still, this act of kindness was a breakthrough, something no one else had ever done for him.

As they were sitting at the table, he noticed that she was eating sparingly, more pushing her food around than eating. It was not because the food was not any good, so there had to be another explanation. "Is something bothering you?" he asked gently.

"No." After several seconds, she put down her fork. "Not exactly. Well..."

When she didn't continue, he put down his own fork, suddenly nervous that he had done something wrong and was about to be returned to Azkaban. "Hermione? What is it?" Reaching out, he placed his hand on hers and gave a gentle squeeze.

She finally looked up into his eyes. "I know what you've been through lately. How tough it's been for you." She paused again until he gave her hand another reassuring squeeze. "I talked to the Ministry and got them to agree to give you some time off."

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Surely he was hearing it wrong. "I beg your pardon?"

"I got you some time off. I thought you might like a little holiday. Nothing special, just down to the shore..."

He didn't let her finish. He was so overjoyed that he swept her into his arms and impulsively gave her a kiss. At first she stiffened in shock, but she quickly relaxed and returned his kiss. After several seconds, she pushed him away, but with just a bit of reluctance, he thought.

Noticing the look of confusion on her face, he released her and apologized. "Forgive me. I was overcome by the moment."

"No. It's alright. You just... caught me by surprise." She took a small step closer to him and said softly, "That's all." Reaching out tentatively, she placed her hand on his chest.

Placing his hand on the small of her back, he replied, "I still should have controlled my reaction."

Pressing herself against him, she replied, "I think it was a rather nice surprise." Standing on tiptoes, she encouraged him to kiss her again.

This time the kiss was much longer and more passionate. "How long did you say this vacation was?"

"Only four days."

"Well then, we'll just have to make the most of those four days, won't we?" He had never imagined that he would feel this way about Hermione, let alone that she would return those feelings. He no longer regretted the circumstances of his parole. In fact, he mused that they could hardly have turned out better.