

Three Options for Draco

by Bettina

Draco's destiny in the summer and autumn after he failed to kill Dumbledore. He gets a new task and fails again. Severus Snape, the man who has stolen Draco's glory, takes up the task to further Draco's development as a Death Eater. They undergo a hard development before they eventually come to an agreement. This stand-alone story is also a prequel to 'Three Options for Ginny'.

Failed

Chapter 1 of 3

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Nothing here is mine but the plot. I'm only taking a few characters out of JKR's sandpit to play with them. No profit made.

Failed

Draco Malfoy and Severus Snape gathered their breath, carefully testing each other, wands drawn. The teacher had just opened his mouth for a snarl when they were summoned to the Dark Lord. He had not assumed it would happen so rapidly, mere minutes after they had left the grounds of Hogwarts school. "Be honest. Do not try any false excuses," he told his charge.

"Not to worry, I will not spoil your great day," Draco replied icily and touched his Dark Mark. His howl of pain covered the pop of Apparition.

Severus swore under his breath, distributing blame on Lucius for the upbringing of this arrogant prat, on Bellatrix for nourishing the boy's eagerness to rise in the Dark Lord's opinion, and himself for what he had done. He did not spare the late headmaster any blame either.

When they arrived, Fenrir Greyback was already reporting the events in the Astronomy tower to their master. "The boy was paralysed, my Lord, although the old fool was already disarmed. Neither of them was pleased to meet me, though." Draco had not the least chance to gloss over his failure.

Even Snape's warm body next to him could not ease Draco's chill. His aunt Bellatrix, standing on their master's right side, glared at Draco and Snape in fury. It was impossible to detect whom she would have killed first, had she been given leave to do so. All through last summer, Bellatrix had listed so many odd encounters concerning the man, that Draco had returned to Hogwarts full of doubts.

Currently, however, his teacher's fate was Draco's least concern. He had botched his own quest, and this night he'd face the music. Here, and right now, it would start.

Without even looking at Draco, their master called out, "Severus, my faithful knight, come stand by my side." Bowing deeply, his former teacher inched forward, leaving Draco shivering in fear. "No, not like that Severus. Stand upright and proud! You truly surprised me, Severus. You have accomplished a difficult deed. I confess, I had not dared to entrust you with it."

wanted him to be. He certainly was not anywhere he himself had ever wanted to be.

At least, Severus was alone as he had always preferred, but had hardly ever been allowed to be. With his new status, no one had dared to suggest he take back the traitor, Wormtail, and Severus had used caustic potions of his own creation to cleanse the house from the stench and memory of the pitiful man.

Whenever he was called, Severus stood upright and proud in the Inner Circle of Death Eaters, next to the Dark Lord, and glowered at the simple men that usually did him the favour of cowering when his glare fell upon them. But here, at Spinner's End, he had no need for glory or grandeur.

Alone. He should be relieved...maybe even glad...but he could not bring himself to it. Too repulsive were the deeds he had encumbered his conscience with, overwhelming was the burden he carried.

A knock at his door kicked him out of his stupor. He should set up more effective wards to keep the Muggle hawkers at bay. Best if he'd render the house invisible for them.

However, this wasn't a salesman going from door to door. When the woman threw back her hood he recognised her as the same woman who had visited him ten months ago, and she was in no better shape now, to say the very least.

Severus was just in the mood for a visitor like her! He opened the door less than a foot wide. Before he could bark a 'What do you want?' at her, she whispered, "Severus, may I speak to you? It's urgent," and made to walk in, although he had not opened the door wider.

"Do I see a pattern here?" he snarled.

The woman on his doorstep halted in bewilderment. "Excuse me?"

"You are repeating yourself, Narcissa. It was oh-so-urgent last time, too."

"Severus," she started again. "May I please come in?"

"If you feel the need," he replied, his thin mouth curling into a mocking smile as he let her pass.

Once again, the elegant, but distressed lady sat down awkwardly in the threadbare armchair, visibly struggling with coming up with words. There was no Wormtail this time and no wine either. Severus Snape did nothing to make her feel welcome, for she was not. "Am I right to assume you wish to speak out of turn again?"

"Severus!" she shrieked. "Please listen to me. Draco is in great peril again."

"Did he say so?"

"Ye... no. Lately, he is not sharing his concerns with me. But I am his mother. I can read his face. I do not need Legilimency to know how desperate he is. Severus, please, help him once again. This new plan is bound to fail if Draco is to face the Order alone."

"I assume so," Severus said coldly. He actually hoped so. He would hardly mind being spared the burden that was Draco Malfoy.

A part of his conscience started to protest, but the thought was cut short when Narcissa gabbled on, "Severus, you should know how much you mean to him! He has spoken highly of you all these years. He always adored you. He strove to emulate you, even copied your ways of walking and talking."

His mouth thin as a line, Severus Snape hissed, "He could have striven to copy the way *brew potions*." The woman occupying his chair shivered, but Severus did not feel generous. "During this last school year, he strutted past me as arrogantly as only a pure-blood can."

"It's Bella's fault! This was all her doing. She does not want you near us because she does not trust you. Her inflammatory speeches must have turned Draco against you. But, Severus, you are now closer to the Dark Lord than ever and closer than Bella or anyone else. Will you speak to him, ask him to allow you to help Draco?"

"Why, pray tell, would I do that?"

"Is that all you care? Doesn't Draco mean anything to you?" Her voice dropped, but she did not stop. "What else can I do for you? What do you wish for me to arrange for you? I'll do it. Anything. If you just talk to the Dark Lord!"

Severus was furious now. If she was to help her son, she needed to be her old, strong self. "Just stop to listen to yourself, woman. A Black demeaning herself by begging and bribing a half-blood. Pollux Black's body will be violently sick in its tomb. His spirit might right now commend his *other grandchild*, Sirius, for the backbone the guy displayed." Severus deliberately hit below the belt, and watching her face turn green was a sweet reward. "You're following down Lucius' paths: licking the Minister's arse, paying your way through life. I'm disgusted."

For a long time, Narcissa only stared at him, catching her breath. "I see," she finally whispered and took two-three more deep breaths. Her head higher than ever in these last weeks, she finally stood. Severus liked her better this way, but he would bite his tongue before he said so. "I see I was mistaken, Severus," she said, composed now.

At the door, she turned around and added, "You still do not know your position among those of noble birth."

For good measure, Severus reinforced his wards already the same evening. The tedious task would not have been needed for another three days, but he felt the need to make sure of his own safety measures.

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The following weeks found Draco strolling around Hogsmeade, Hogwarts ground or the McGonagall estate on the Scottish highlands in search for the appointed headmistress.

He spent hours in the Malfoy library perusing books on stealth and disguise, snapping at elves and his mother alike whenever they disturbed him with food or questions. Draco learned how to cover his human odour to pass by the less dangerous beasts that dwelt in the Forbidden Forest. He perfected his aim when noiselessly Apparating until he reached ten yards to any direction or thirty yards back the way he came from.

Ignoring the fact that a huge amount of sheer luck saved his life a few times, he stubbornly followed his quest alone.

The wide-open Scottish highlands made him research in the different Obfuscation Charms for standing still, walking, flying and even swimming, but he did not come far. There was no predatory deviant of the Demiguise and wizards were not closer to achieving this goal in the twentieth century than they had been two thousand years ago.

Draco would have equipped himself with spell reflectors from the Weasleys' shop if he had dared venture there. But he could not do so, and he had no one to ask such a favour from, either.

Time was running out, and he had not seen the headmistress but twice in five weeks, both times hopelessly far away and surrounded by Aurors.

In grim determination, Draco stuck to the request; he had to achieve the impossible or die trying.

He had his favourite foods brought into his room to save the time walking the corridors to the dining hall. He made two elves wash and manicure him while he continued reading and taking notes with his DictaQuill.

His mother kept nagging him to please seek out others for help. She started with Snape and the Carrows and continued with Flint and the Parkinsons, who used to hope he might marry their daughter but would not lift a finger for him today. When she would not even stop short at the inflated blockhead Goyle senior, who made the troll that was his son appear a genius, she shattered Draco's nerves. He shouted and swore at his mother as he had never done before. Feeling abashed at his outburst, he soaked for an hour in a hot a fragrant bath and came to admitting to himself that he was in a terrible state of nerves. He avoided his mother for the next days, as she did him.

On a dizzy evening four days before his deadline, Draco finally saw McGonagall in Hogsmeade near the Shrieking Shack. He threw precaution to the wind and broke through all the blocks and barriers that surrounded the building. She seemed quite alone as she approached.

Surprised and relieved, Draco nearly smiled at her. "Mr Malfoy?" she wondered, holding her wand straight ahead, on alert, but gesturing invitingly with her other hand.

Draco shook his shortened, blond mane and ran a rapid succession of a Stunner and a burning spell at her before she would talk him out of it. He Apparated next to a tree before he sent another curse.

He was, however, far too nervous to put enough force and aim into his spells. She twitched as her leg glowed orange, but she had her block up in no time. Draco fired on, noticing too late that she had Apparated to the side. There was a deflector component in the strange wall she had erected, and Draco found his own foot glowing, revealing his new position.

For the next minute or so, they Apparated around each other quite noiselessly until she stumbled and shrieked. Now was the moment, and Draco used it before he would start thinking again. He fired a Stunner at the location, but it did not connect with anything alive. He fired again...nothing.

Suddenly, the woman's voice was only four yards behind him, calling sternly, "Don't move, Mr Malfoy!"

Draco jerked around, ready to hex her, but she had Transfigured a group of big rocks into three formidable tigers. Upon her command, the cats circled around him, each roaring after it left his field of vision on the right and again before it came back into view on Draco's right. Passing through between Draco and the headmistress, each tiger bowed deeply to the woman.

"You are operating alone, aren't you, Mr Malfoy?" she asked. "If you surrender now, we can make a deal."

"I'm not here to make deals with an arrogant Gryffindor," Draco spat. Immediately, the huge felines growled.

"Why don't you drop your wand?" the woman tried again.

Strongly reminded of the disgrace up at the Astronomy tower, Draco swore and cast a Freezing Spell at the bypassing tiger, but the beast turned to him rather than the headmistress, and the spell hit it in the mucous membrane of the mouth. Thick ice crystals cut into the sensitive flesh and immobilised its whiskers. The beast howled and threw itself at him, its mates following suit.

Before the beasts could harm Draco severely, he Apparated as far backwards as he thought he could do silently. He found himself only five yards away, his shoulders bruised, his skin scratched and his heart pounding in his chest.

Together with an embarrassingly loud pop, he had heard the headmistress cancel the spell. When he looked around, covering all sides, there were no tigers anywhere. McGonagall was gone as well.

An eerie sound from the left made Draco do one hasty step to the side, and he lost his footing. His left ankle cracked in a sickening sound. He groaned and applied a weak Freezing Spell on it to get some relief. He had to lean against a tree to catch his breath. Whispering, "*Ferula!*" he stabilised the leg.

While he was distracted, the stones to the left of and below Draco grew to six times their heights, half-encircling him. More stones appeared on top of this first layer until they effectively shielded Draco's view into the town or towards Hogwarts. Similarly, he and any trace of his next spells were invisible from there. He jumped up and saw McGonagall at a few yards' distance, her wand hand steadily describing a concave crescent.

"You're fighting a losing battle, Draco," she reasoned. "Don't you see?"

No, this time he had to carry out his master's orders; he just had to. Otherwise, the name of Malfoy would forever be laughed at. They would get to his mother, and slowly torture her to death. Draco's mind imagined her face distorted in pain, and the vision gave him new strength. "*Expelliarmus!*" he shouted and jerked out his hand to deftly catch what didn't come. The wand in McGonagall's hand had twitched, but nothing more. She wasn't quite ready to set up a block against his second shot, a piercing-curse, but she jumped off and most of the minute-daggers snipped the near-by undergrowth to pieces.

Her wand was up again, and Draco had to jump hither and thither in the deadly fight that developed. Knowing her susceptible for the Stunner, Draco tried it a few times, but she wasn't easy to catch. While her curses were never fatal, and not usually very quick, they were unexpected, attacking Draco's senses. When she conjured a huge, reverberating gong, its deep sound was amplified by the stone-wall behind Draco, but it didn't seem to reach her at all.

Draco had to withstand the noise through the following three exchanges before he had the idea and a second's time to conjure a thick blanket that wrapped itself around the nerve-racking thing.

He turned back to his target to see a strange rope emerge from her wand, a spell she cancelled in time to block his glowing flames. They exploded with green sparks and a deafening sound that, once again, hit Draco's ears twice, thanks to the reflection from the wall.

Draco advanced a step and shouted, "*Aguamenti!*" It was not the most advanced curse, but one that could not be exploded. McGonagall got a drenching. She made, however, short work of her robe and keeping a new block glowing between them, she chucked the wet thing on the soft ground.

Draco stepped back again to gain time, and a sticky tentacle groped its way around his upper left arm. As he jolted to shake it off, it fastened more, and another, equally sticky one twined itself around his ankle. Draco turned and saw five tentacles feeling towards him. Each time the rope McGonagall had conjured had hit the stone wall, it must have split, one part fastening on the solid rock to lead its own life, the other bouncing back to reach the other side of the wall and repeat the process.

When he had burnt the ones on his left side, he was addressed from far atop a tree. "Will you listen now, Mr Malfoy?"

She was sitting and had a good grip on the next branch, pointing her wand down. *She can turn into a cat*, Draco recalled. *Shit!*

Draco used a spell designed to shake apple trees, aiming at the middle between the ground and the Transfiguration teacher. The pine, however, reacted very differently from the fruit trees and the tawny cat simply climbed lower. Draco aimed at the Animagus but missed.

He was to kill her, and if she escaped now, there would not be a second chance!

"Mr Malfoy, listen," she called to him from a lower place, and Draco blasted the tree into smithereens. The noise of the splintering wood and the cloud of dust would be clearly visible in the village. Draco had to hurry now.

McGonagall Transformed back into a cat to survive and steer her fall. She landed with feline grace, and Draco took aim, but as he raised his wand arm, the last tentacles found their target and laced themselves tightly around his fingers.

Draco's struggle with the sticky things gave the cat all time it needed to escape.

"Nice to meet you, laddie," a deep growl greeted him, "although *you* might think of it as a re-union." A scar-covered face with mismatching eyes surrounded by a mane of dark grey hair appeared at the edge of the Shrieking Shack. Draco's heart sank, and he ran head over heels into the forest, caring little for his protesting left leg.

He was nearly felled by a Nerve Twitcher on his good leg, but struggled on into the brush. Another sharp curse from the old Auror must have hit a tree for he swore and stopped following Draco.

Draco hobbled on as long as he could hold himself upright, but eventually he fell and darkness surrounded him.

At dusk, he woke with a start, and every way he looked, his eyes saw shadows moving and eyes glaring. Draco tried to Apparate but could not summon the strength. If he splinched himself here in the wilderness, he would be completely blocked. He sat up, then tried to stand but fell back onto his heels.

A foot kicked Draco square into his breast, and he found himself wrestling with a woolly beast half his own size, but just as strong. As they rolled over yet another time, neither of them gaining or losing, he identified the fermented smell in the beast's breath for what it was: the strange creature was ruminating! It was a herbivore, and thus comparatively harmless. Draco gave up fighting and allowed the beast to kick him some more to make it leave.

He groped along the floor, whispering, "Accio, wand!" in a few directions, but eventually collapsed in exhaustion.

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Draco awoke, strongly bandaged, in the Malfoys' summer house, the only piece of the estate his grandfather had immediately transferred to him, skipping his father as well as registration. Anxiously, Draco observed while two of their elves nursed him, wordlessly, never meeting his eyes, never revealing what they might know.

His eyes were hurting too much to read, and so he was left to brood over his destiny, his options and lost chances. Odd thoughts kept playing in his mind. Dumbledore's strange, last offer to help Draco. As he considered it further, he even saw that the man had been generally rather fair to all houses. McGonagall's strict but fair handling of all pupils. Primitive prejudices within Slytherin against everybody else and in Gryffindor against all Slytherins.

On a warm evening, when he had been lying limply on the sunny terrace, the mute elves thrust a Portkey into his hand. The jerking feeling upon its activation sent new stabs of pain through his damaged body, and, once again, he passed out.

Draco jolted to full awareness and found himself alone in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but light clothes. Too weak to go exploring, he fell victim to his own thoughts again. For the whole night, Draco's thoughts circled around Hogwarts or his father. The expectations others had of him and his own wishes and hopes didn't fit together. They clashed more strikingly the longer and harder he tried to match them.

His second shock came when Severus Snape arrived and Portkeyed him to a wrecked and very Muggle house at the poorest of outskirts of a small Muggle town. The man pushed him through the house and into a bathroom that was as cold as as the night outside.

With uncaring hands the dark, brooding man ripped the drenched, silken nightgown with the Malfoy crest apart and tossed it into the bin. He attended to Draco's wounds expertly, but silently, before he threw a bundle of formerly black, but now bleached, soft clothes at Draco's feet and left the bathroom.

Having no other choice and shivering from cold, Draco donned the worn and bulky Muggle things, which hardly deserved the only names Draco could give them: trouser and jumper. They had no clasps at all, only a string to keep the trouser-like piece up. No wonder they had to be unbecomingly wide and shapeless. However, they were dry and felt so soft that they did not irritate his tender skin.

He emerged from the cold room and saw his host levitating a huge steaming pot onto the table that was laid with two mismatching, chipped bowls. Draco fought the aversion to touch the thin, spotty and dented spoon at his place-setting, gulped and sat down. Silently, they ladled the tasteless, thick, lentil soup.

Draco's stomach welcomed the Spartan meal anyhow, and the hooded sweatshirt especially warmed him.

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Draco had to face the Dark Lord with empty hands. This had to be the end. Doomsday.

Yet, his desperate mother had already offered to support their master's cause most generously. Professing to visit their estates in France to see that everything is all right, she had travelled France and Spain for rare, exotic woods as wand material. In the wizard enclaves of the Pyrenees, she rummaged through the shady or outright Dark shops. Returning, she showed Draco a large crate filled with wood from various southern trees. She had also got hold of several expensive potion ingredients of Latin American origin and a few other rare objects with what she called 'interesting properties', but Draco could not find the energy to pay attention to.

While her haul looked paltry to Draco, she must have pleased their master enough to save Draco.

Severus Snape was assigned the task to teach Draco. He proposed it himself, in a style he had reserved to treat pupils after blowing up the second cauldron in a week. In class or in a well-populated corridor if they were Gryffindors, in the Slytherin common room if they belonged there. Snape's malevolent look reduced the last resistance in Draco.

Together they returned to the ruin his teacher might call a house, Draco heaving the bulk of pickled or dried plants and beasts. For an undetermined time, Draco was to live there.

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I'm forever grateful that Pennfana made the effort of commenting the draft of this story. I'd never have elaborated it without her encouragement. Once it was restructured and filled with flesh, Greengecko and cnjstout polished some scenes and certainly my language up to what you find here. A big hug to them!

From Frustration to Trust

Chapter 2 of 3

At Spinner's End, Draco works and lives under humiliating conditions. He reconsiders his place among the Death Eater society. When he is given an especially heinous task, he comes to the life-threatening conclusion that he is not a Death Eater. For both, Draco and Severus, the path to reach each other is one of trial and tribulation, but they come to collaborate.

From Frustration to Trust

Severus Snape's malevolent look when he had first been assigned the task of teaching him set Draco on his guard. Slytherin house would not protect him. Cold sweat running down his spine, Draco prepared himself for what he knew the man was capable of.

His new guard might easily approach the task in a style he had reserved to treat pupils after they blew up the second cauldron in a week. At Hogwarts, such reprimands had always taken place in public if the victims were Gryffindors. Snape had treated his Slytherins almost as harshly, but had at least moved the scene back into the Slytherin common room.

Spinner's End, as the place was called, was just as his mother had described it. What had she told him a year before? "Simple and clean, but without love. The place could use a woman's hand." When Bellatrix had snorted, her sister had added with an edge in her voice, "Oh, not your hands, Bella. Hands of a truly feminine woman."

Hours later, Draco noticed, he had been utterly mistaken. Snape didn't treat him like a student at fault, he treated him like vermin. It was worse than anything Longbottom ever had to endure. Although... it wasn't nearly as awful as an elf was treated at the Malfoys'.

Draco used up a dozen toothbrushes in cleaning the floor and kitchen carpets. He heaved tiles up the roof, then repaired it, and he tended to the garden.

If his warder was not satisfied, he sent Draco to bed without dinner after a whole day's work. Growing two inches in three months, Draco was quick in complying with the requests well enough to not run hungry.

The menial tasks of the first week rubbed Draco's soft, delicate, aristocratic skin raw until it grew harder with calluses. On every place of his body, Draco discovered muscles he had never known. He noticed within a short time that he grew physically stronger.

Severus Snape considered that he best receive his charge with the attitude he had always shown towards Gryffindors during detention. He needed to learn not to strut around and expect that his name open all doors for him. As it was unclear how much time the Dark Lord would give Severus, he needed to work quickly. Thus, he exchanged water with a thin solution of muscle growing potion that would resolve the lactic acid and help the body adapt to physical work.

He saw to it that the boy didn't suffer injuries or parch, but otherwise the boy would not thrive with pampering. Who had ever pampered Severus Snape?

Three weeks in, Draco was more in the rhythm and had even time to reflect about himself. He came to realise that he most likely survived this second failure because his family was a noble pure-blood breed. Riddle was surrounded with wizards obsessed with pure-bloodedness.

Enraged as the Dark Lord had been, he had known very well that both tasks for Draco had been unrealistic. He didn't have enough young, fertile pure-bloods to lose one for such a reason. A living, beaten-down Malfoy demoted to the lowest ranks of his army was incomparably more useful to him than a dead Malfoy could ever be.

He still felt like a house-elf except that the mornings were packed with lessons. He was to deepen and expand his knowledge in Potions and Duelling, but they also covered tricks for secretive operations, guerilla-style fighting techniques, sabotage and hiding traces. In a strict teacher-pupil relationship, Draco's lessons on survival techniques contained obscuring tracks, laying false tracks, detecting operation patterns, wordless spell casting and the elementary training in wandless magic.

In the beginning, Narcissa could be counted on to send an owl every day, providing sweets and chocolate as she had done during the school years. With equal precision, Severus Snape sent the bird off again with the complete load, except if there was fruit among the treats. As the weeks passed, the owl-exchange became more reasonable, and Draco was allowed to even add small wishes under the list of books, stationery or potions ingredients his teacher sent to Narcissa.

Five weeks into his personal training, his mother was allowed to visit them upon Snape's explicit invitation. Draco nipped her attempts to make his life more comfortable in the bud, and she soon accepted the conditions. While her anxious eyes tried to catch every detail of his environment, she finally conceded, "You're alive. That is all I need to know."

When his teacher's task allowed it, Draco went to field work with him; otherwise, he stayed at the house alone and cleaned or revised his lessons. He was in bed by ten every evening and out again at seven.

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They had their first long conversation when Death Eaters denounced to the Dark Lord that Severus Snape was possibly not as active as he should be. Consequently, he received a task to kill two young, Muggle-born wizards.

Together they observed the family life of the little boys. For the first time, Draco needed to know a lot about Muggles to see the patterns in their behaviour.

It was then that Draco understood that his idol of the first school years was not the proud pure-blood he had imagined and only educated later in the Muggle way. No, Severus Snape had a Muggle father. For the disgust on his face, Draco received yet another toothbrush and the command to clean the grout in the bathroom. "It helps to keep you focused. I'm speaking from experience," his supervisor added.

Hours later, the cold room was shiny clean. To Draco's relief, his guardian was satisfied. The lukewarm shower and dinner that evening could not have been more welcome if they had been up to Hogwarts standards. "You will not allow your emotions to show to your superiors," Snape ordered. "You cannot know what you reveal to them. Do I assume right that your arrogant father failed to inform you that his master, our master, is not a pure-blood himself? That he had a Muggle father? Close your mouth, Draco, before you catch a fly." It was the first time Snape addressed him with his first name.

The next day, Draco's stomach revolted as they developed a trick to lure the children away. He avoided giving himself away and tried to speak in a detached and cold manners as his mentor did, but he was slipping.

Severus killed one of the little boys indirectly, making a car speed up and hit him straight. Muggle police swarmed around as the two left the scene. The mother's desperate cry and the father's bleak face followed Draco into his dreams. Since he was sleeping on the Transfigured sofa next door to the ever-cold and calculating Snape, he fled into the icy bathroom every so often to calm down. The man had nerves of steel, and where there should be a heart he probably had a dark rock!

Draco gladly let Snape handle the other child alone. The boy, who was about eight years old, disappeared and was not seen again. In the Death Eater meeting, Snape declared he had dumped his body into the sea. "My Lord, I considered that the tasks were very similar, and even the locations close to each other. I understand that we still wish to leave parts of our activities opaque. Plotting two such very different courses of events should not cause suspicion at the Ministry. It also gave me ample opportunity to introduce techniques to my apprentice."

The Dark Lord agreed to this thought, albeit hesitantly. "You involved Malfoy in the planning and execution, Severus?"

"Yes, my Lord, we arranged units of field training around the quest, although you will not find a trace of his magic at the places, since it was my honour to serve you yet again."

"Very well. Malfoy? Recognise that I've been lenient with you. I have a third task for you that will determine your future. As your journeyman's piece, you will rid the earth of another Mudblood before her feet besmirch the sacred halls of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. If you cannot prove yourself worthy this time, it will be your end."

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At Draco's first confrontation with the blonde girl, he stiffened. He detested himself as much as the path he had to follow. He left the girl alive and unharmed. The look of her grey-blue eyes smiling at him followed him back to Spinner's End.

"Sir," he addressed his mentor, "I'm failing again. I cannot detach myself enough even from this little Mudblood to end her life. I don't understand how to do it, sir."

"Pathetic, Malfoy. Where is all the arrogance of your great name, the pure-blood family that is beyond the law and the Ministry?"

"I still cannot seem to master it. Even if she is a Mudblood and deserves death, I cannot do it, for she hasn't done anything to me."

"Get it over with a few times, and it will become easier," Snape noted, showing little concern. "You could start with imagining your victim as someone else, someone you loath. There would be such a person in your life, I trust."

"Yes, sir."

Upon his second confrontation with the girl, Draco met her all alone and lured her into a clutch of trees close to her home. Thinking of Potter, he aimed, but she reached out and asked curiously, "Hi again. What's that stick there, can I see it?" and he lowered his wand. The emotions had not been strong enough.

Remembering his own father made his blood boil, and he silenced her babble. Half-heartedly, he inflicted some pain on her, imagining she was Lucius. However, this image didn't hold: the girl wasn't a man, and her eyes not nearly as cold. His curse faded. She got up, panting and staring at Draco in utter disbelief. She even resembled Draco. She looked like...

When Draco realised that she looked like a little sister of his could look, his knees gave way, and he nearly dropped his wand. "Go, girl. Go!"

She was like the little sister he had been waiting for, the baby girl Lucius had killed on her fourth day because she had not appeared in the book of applicants for Hogwarts. She had been a Squib...a Muggle, born into the wizard world. Possibly she could have been a playmate of this little girl? Both of them were born to parents from a world they could not share forever. Did that justify their death?

As Draco turned to leave, Severus Snape appeared between the trees. They injured the girl severely to make an appearance, but they did not kill her. Snape changed her memory and sent another curse Draco had not recognised.

The next day, they saw a report in the Muggle newspaper: unexplainable injuries, coma, parents in shock.

The report in the *Daily Prophet* announced a brutal attack of Death Eaters.

For a week there was no word whether the girl had survived. At the Dark Lord's assembly, Snape wormed Draco out, explaining that, while she was surely dead, the Ministry didn't want to reveal this. "My Lord, they hide from us, and from the public, how much we actually achieve."

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How had their next discussion started? As a monologue, probably.

Draco finally found the courage to admit that he couldn't do it, that he was not a murderer. He had not really achieved his goal this day. He had not been thinking like a Death Eater should, that is, thinking of Potter or McGonagall as the enemy, the most hated person. Instead, his thoughts had circled around Lucius and even the Dark Lord forcing him to such deeds. He had also been thinking of his baby sister, who would be a beautiful little girl by now.

After an unbearable silence, Draco asked his mentor shyly how he coped, if there was a deeper secret.

Severus looked deeply into Draco's eyes...probably a lot deeper than Draco was comfortable knowing. He didn't make out if the constant itch he felt indicated Legilimency or just his incredible discomfort.

"Did you not already find a deeper secret, Draco?"

Yes, he had found a secret, and it was a terrible one: he, Draco Malfoy, Death Eater, hated the Dark Lord.

Again, there was only silence as a confirmation until Draco spoke again. "Do you also hate him, sir? What was it you did to the girl in the end?"

"A strong paralysis that holds her in a painless coma for at least two week."

"You did not kill her."

"No, Mr Malfoy, I did not kill her. As you said yourself, she has done nothing wrong, except for existing."

"You aren't a Death Eater. You taught me how to perform acts of sabotage because you are using them against *Him*. You're a spy."

In no time, Severus Snape towered over Draco. "*Expelliarmus!* I am and have been working for the other side for a very long time, Draco Malfoy."

Draco sat stock still to not provoke the man. Quietly, he spoke, "You've been fooling our master then, and you're doing it again now. Probably, Dumbledore even knew about your Vow. He has arranged for me to not kill him. Now you arranged to have me here. Why? Have you been hoping... Sir, do you really think I can do that?"

Draco reflected on the question himself. He had learned a lot in these last weeks, and most of it was about himself. Even *possibly* he could become as hard and uncaring as his father and aunt or as the Carrows...he, Draco, did not want to become a Death Eater! He did not want to live in a world ruled by the Dark Lord.

Snape broke the silence. "I'll have to give you three options and not more than ten minutes to decide. Either you open your mind completely to me, allow unblocked Legilimency and then swear an Unbreakable Vow to join me. OR you'll be very thoroughly Obliviated here and now and will never again get any support from me. OR I will kill you right here now."

Draco did not need ten minutes to decide. There was still so much at stake, and here was a role his mentor believed he could fulfil. "I will join you, sir, if you take me."

"Then we should use first names when we're here, and soon also in public. Sit over here, and we'll begin. You have learned the basics of Occlumency, but at your stage I can still sense every barrier. Do not try my patience."

"I will not, Sir... Severus."

All his life, Draco had been dreading Legilimency. He vividly remembered how aggressively his father had always searched his brains for whatever betrayal or misbehaviour he might have committed. Worse even, the man had searched for every trifle and every little secret. He had intruded into Draco's private, most intimate life, checking which girls Draco might fancy, and where his fantasies about the girls took him.

Lucius Malfoy explored weaker people's minds with malevolence and joy just because he could.

Rather than that, Severus encouraged his young charge to show him all that he found worth showing. They went through all tasks Draco had ever received from his father. He had been spying on the Weasleys and Potter, mainly in their third year, and had searched all ways of sending information in and out the castle. They discussed Draco's

caused. The eye ointment on the other hand got an additive of shredded snapdragon roots that made the eyes more sensitive to light and thus matched well the blinding spell Draco and Severus liked to use.

It had taken Draco a while to understand the idea behind the love potion. Or more exactly lust potion, for it didn't enhance anything more than men's physical needs.

They didn't have enough children. While it might not be a great loss that the Crabbes and Goyles had only one son each, the fertility problems were equally severe if not worse among the higher ranks and in the Inner Circle. Their master held the pure-blood traditions and family rules in high regard. So he would not demand noble young as Draco to marry anyone his family couldn't approve of. In fact, he had made a disastrous attempt to do so shortly before his first downfall. Even if the forced couple had not been too unhappy, their infuriated families had managed to wriggle their offspring out of the need to produce any children their traditions would consider bastards. Many a Death Eater had killed his daughter before a recognised family feud was broken through forced marriage with the rival clan.

His insensibility to old family traditions, rites and even spells had cost their master quite an amount of supporters and had made him careful now.

The love potion was his new attempt to fortify their basis in the future. If it went according to their master's plans, Slytherin house would receive twice the amount of children in the future. Furthermore, the Dark Lord had found out that their wives being well attended for also made also the men more at peace with their lives and consequently with their tasks. To Draco's knowledge, however, the Inner Circle could not show any success yet. There was certainly little hope for his aunt to ever develop motherly feelings, or actually hope would be that any child would be spared from having her as a mother. The Rosiers, Averages and Mulcibers had led a childless life. The Notts had already been fairly old when Theodore had finally been born.

While the potions had boosted the morale, it had not caused any wonders. Among the less noble families in the middle ranks of the Death Eaters there had been some pregnancies reported. Marcus Flint, the chaser who had brought Draco into the Quidditch team so long ago, was among the fathers-to-be.

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Severus' kitchen skills were marginally better than Draco's. While he had lived on his own and knew well enough how to feed himself, he didn't bother much beyond the food's nourishing aspects. Three consecutive days, they would have the same meal, simply because it saved them the hassle of cooking for two days. Today they made a huge amount of soup with lentils, pot barley, pork meat and some carrots and had sandwiches to go with it.

Similarly, Severus dealt with most of his household. The furniture had been replenished upon need. If a chair had broken beyond repair, the cheapest chair had sufficed to replace it. His four chairs around a simple kitchen table all had different height and width, and certainly different material and colour. Cleaning was not done haphazardly but with little attention to the needs of different materials. The very same spell to clean china, metal and wood it surely worked but it wasn't becoming for the surfaces, certainly not for colour or elements of decoration.

Every Thursday, they reinforced the protective spells on the house. The simple Muggle building didn't keep wards as easily and long-lasting as magic buildings. Lucius...and later Draco...repeated the spells on Malfoy Manor only twice a year. Draco assumed Hogwarts castle with the hand-selected stones was safe for a decade per respelling round.

"You should have the walls and roof replaced with magical stone," Draco had commented once.

"I have mastered the spells, and now we are two for the work."

"But still, it is a nuisance. Maybe you could have the walls coated with slate?"

"If you feel like paying for a renovation, you're most welcome."

They slowly made their way around the house, using a magical path between them and their right neighbour that wasn't accessible for Muggles. They repeated the same spell every yard. Thanks to the continuously cold and unfriendly weather, the circle surrounding the house in the proper distance for spelling it became increasingly muddy. Five rounds were needed to get all the layers of wards in place: Muggle repellents, Apparition ward, bad-intention detectors, general approaching announcers, spell warning.

Draco had learned that Muggles let people come right to their doors where they can cause a sound chime... if they so chose.

Severus' home also needed a set of stabiliser spells to keep the old building standing upright. Back inside, dropping their mucky Wellington boots, Draco wondered what made Severus keep this ruin of a house. He could not imagine any of his parents' Death Eater friends ever setting foot in here. Well, his aunt and mother had done so, but their comments had been correspondingly derogatory.

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It was almost November when they had created so intimate a relationship that Draco dared to bring up the conditions of his Vow. "Severus, you limited the binding to half a year after your own death or half a year after the Dark Lord's demise. You even limited it to an absolute maximum of two years. Why was that?"

"Do you prefer to be bound longer?"

"No, and you know that. However, a time limit is highly uncommon with Unbreakable Vows, and certainly two years is not considered a worthy time span at all. You could have bound me for the rest of my life."

"I could not, because your mother's magic wasn't very strong, given her condition."

"Maybe. But you know that she would have done everything to have me live. You even decided to limit not to all conditions together but to whatever comes first. Severus Snape does not do such complex things without deep consideration."

"Then, probably, I did not."

Severus huffed in annoyance, but finally delivered an explanation. He knew that he would die in the field, and this Vow should not restrict Draco's life in any unduly way afterwards. "You will then decide for yourself what to do."

If even six months after their master had fallen, large numbers of loyal Death Eaters walked freely, there was no chance for Severus whatsoever. But...so his mentor said...Draco was not to concern himself with this. "I haven't got a chance of living that long."

Even more calmly, he explained the last time limit. "If we haven't conquered the Dark Lord in the time of two years, we are all doomed. Your life ought to be back in your hands to exploit any knowledge you have, even if it means delivering me. Although, this scenario is not realistic since I will be dead far sooner than that."

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Big thanks to Greengecko and cnjstout for their untiring support and help.

To reply to some (very much appreciated) reviews: this little story here is not the reason why my bigger project is so slow. It is simply slow in itself :-(

casting objects out of his way and regularly emitting protection domes. Further, it was his task to keep the two of them from Muggle sight.

This training concept effectively challenged them both, as it was based on the huge difference in their experience and knowledge. Considering the risk for accidents, they would not exchange roles for a long time to come.

Their physical performance had profited from their chase practice as well as their wandwork. Their speed had increased so much that the little woods felt smaller every week.

Two men in trainers and light track suits didn't raise any suspicion in the Muggle town. On the contrary, they met fellow runners. Only their wands had to be hidden when they were out in the open.

Panting heavily, they arrived back at Spinner's End. Draco had seen the Muggles do some stretching after a run, and he did so while Severus had his shower. Lying on one leg, he noticed that this was more remarkable than one would think: a Malfoy copying Muggle habits!

They had dinner...the same chicken salad as yesterday.

Before Draco could cotton up on the discussion they had started outside, Severus left the sitting room announcing an early repose and proposing to Draco to do the same.

This early in bed, Draco could not calm down easily. With his thoughts fixed on the two brave Lycanthropes who had shown an interest in testing the new Wolfsbane, Draco drifted into sleep. Those two had not given up; neither would he.

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Friday morning they took up their training with the secondary wand. This task was far from a favourite to either of them, but the Dark Lord had insisted that his Death Eaters become accustomed to a replacement wand. The Inner Circle was to be the glowing example, and Draco's position in the group of ascenders could only benefit from showing eagerness and success. The latter they lacked so dearly that their will was also strained.

The barriers and protections well in place, Friday and the weekend were ideal days to train with the second wand they had been provided with by Ollivander. The old man had his own logic about which wands to present to a wizard or witch. The new one was hardly ever the same coating wood, nor was the length necessarily close to what they were used to. Merely the core usually remained, but he had only three choices anyway, hadn't he? Also, he had run low of Phoenix feathers, leaving only Unicorn hair and Dragon heartstring available. Faced with their frustration, Ollivander had given them verifiable proof in the form of a seventeen-hundred-year-old, bleached parchment on wand-making, *Know Thine Wand Family*, by E. Ollivander. Yet, this confirmation had not improved their results the least bit.

Suppressing a sigh, Draco put his primary wand into his wand pocket and took the secondary wand in his hand. It felt warm and active, though different from his old friend. Feeling increasingly silly, he once again performed first year spells, hovering feathers and small pieces of parchment, hoping to proceed to transforming a match into a pin. The first two hovering attempts went nicely, but then his wand hand started shaking. He lost all will to keep on with his new wand while his hand was magically drawn to the wand pocket. After four spells, he could not resist anymore and angrily dropped the second wand to the sideboard to get a hold on his old, familiar wand again.

"What if you deposit your wand on the corner shelf and move to the other end of the room?" his teacher asked.

There were many uncomfortable things Draco would prefer to do, but he tried anyway as Severus proposed and had three nice hovers before his hand itched. His fourth attempt was feeble, the fifth abysmal. At the sixth attempt, the feather exploded, smoke filled the room, and Draco gave in to the pull to cross over and take hold on the old wand. *His* wand, that is. In near-physical pain, he gripped it, letting his thumb glide over the familiar surface. It felt for the well known small dents and scratches, and Draco's heart slowed down. "Would you believe it?" he grumbled. "Last Saturday I still got five good ones before I had to pass. Now you try! Set me an example, Mister Inner-Circle-Right-Hand-of-our-Master."

The snarky comment earned Draco a raised eyebrow, where two months ago he would have been on the floor, toothbrush in hand. Or, in fact, he would have fainted before such a sentence had escaped him. Equipped only with his new, unfamiliar wand, Draco always felt more exposed than unarmed, and he assumed Severus would have similar problems. However, his mentor's stern face gave nothing away as he said, "We must try. In earlier days, wizards had less of a problem with the concept of two or even three rivaling wands."

His old wand at the other end of the room, Severus Snape held a parchment hovering perfectly for a minute. Releasing his breath, he let it down and tried again. The feather, however hardly turned over. *Pathetic, even for a Goyle*, Draco thought, but could not feel any glory. The third, more violent attempt set the slip on fire, and with a leap Severus crossed over, connecting painfully with the armchair, grabbed his wand and shouted "*Agumentii!*" A load of two buckets of water drenched the sofa and floor where Draco had already extinguished the flames.

"Did you rush to your wand because of the fire or did you rush over due to a general need, and the wand came handy to extinguish the flames?" Draco asked, throwing drying spells around until they stood in a warm mist.

"I don't know," Severus replied while Banishing the steam. "But I do know that I was better last weekend."

Against his feelings of naked exposure, Severus now dropped his wand on his bedside table and returned to the sitting room. Even without trying any magic, he felt bad. He picked up the new wand. The warmth and prickling felt like a feeble attempt to be reassuring, that didn't quite reach the subconscious parts of his mind.

Thrice he managed to hover the parchment well. Then he failed. The second failure brought him to the door to his sleeping room, and a third attempt was just not possible. The urge to reach out for his old friend was overwhelming, and he had it in his hand before he could think straight again.

"Distance seems to improve the results." Determined now, Severus commanded Draco to stand guard most attentively. "Remember you've sworn the oath also to my benefit!" With a last glare at Draco, he dropped his old wand again, left and closed the door to the sleeping room.

"*Wingardium Leviosa!*" The feather hovered. Severus steered it in a circle around himself. He chanced a glance at Draco, who watched in vigilance. The feather found the table, and Severus repeated the charm with the parchment. This time, he had to complete the round with haste, tossed the substitute tool most unceremoniously and even kicked it while running to the bedroom. He wrenched the door open as if someone was drowning inside and dived to the bedside table to grab his wand.

Severus regarded both his wands: his old friend and the new stick of wood. Never would he treat his familiar wand the way he had just treated the secondary wand.

Draco tried again with very similar effects. The distance improved the first two to four spells, but made the urge to reach for the old wand even stronger afterwards. "It is no good."

"We seem to be approaching it in a wrong way. I will owl Goyle to bring Ollivander this afternoon. He will have to explain it once again. Maybe it will make sense this time. We at least have a distraction for the day before we catch Hermione Granger."

After Pöllö, the elderly owl, had left with the missive for Goyle, Severus went to the cellar, and Draco tried to concentrate on his reading on the topic of Transforming solid objects into animal forms. He might try and Transform stone into a beast just before Crabbe junior stepped on it. Preferably into a Blast Ended Screwt, he joked inwardly. Crabbe had been terrified of them. Slytherin house ethics had made them cover up for their house-mate, to not let show any weakness to that Gryffindor lot, but once in the common room, he had felt the teasing and shame all the same.

For four months, Draco had hardly seen the two bodyguard-like companions he had been tied to at Hogwarts. Together with their fathers and mothers, they performed minor tasks for the Dark Lord. These families will never mount high in the ranks, but then again they were also safe from dropping low. At school they had learned their mutual roles, Draco leading, the others obeying. With a wide grin, he remembered their embarrassment at being transformed into girls while standing guard for him. Draco

while, as Draco noticed, Gregory Goyle had a very strange expression on his face. As if he was thinking! *Can't be*, Draco decided and headed back into the kitchen.

He returned, levitating six soup bowls, spoons and the pot. He measured a good portion for the old wandmaker, ladling or magicking the best pieces of meat in there. His guards got a ladle of soup as well. It could not really be avoided. Severus' face took on a weird expression while he eyed them, one after the other, his wand barely protruding from his sleeve. They ate with little discussion. Neither Crabbe nor the Goyles asked for second helpings while Ollivander got his bowl refilled.

The unpleasant group gagged and bound Mr Ollivander and turned to leave. Severus accompanied them to the door and murmured three spells.

Back inside, he turned to Draco: "What have we learned today?"

"That operating two wands would be easier if we had had two siblings?"

"Something like that," Severus agreed with a sigh.

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Clearing away dishes, Draco mused over the subtle change in his relationship with Severus. He had not delivered water to Mr Ollivander, but a nourishing potion first, and a Pepper-Up later. Severus had of course noticed and not reacted.

Then there had been the impromptu dinner. They had not planned to beforehand, but they had both found it necessary to provide the old man with some comfort, a nourishing, warm meal, if nothing else was in their hands. However, they had made the huge pot of soup to be free from cooking lunches over the weekend. Neither of them had hesitated to share it. What was more: they had both known that the other would agree.

Severus must have modified the minds of Ollivander's guards on their way out. And he had made little effort to hide this fact from his young charge.

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Much later, already in bed, Draco considered more details. Some memories of his recent life played through his mind's eye as vivid pictures.

In their many quiet evenings, they had returned several times to their future perspective.

Severus didn't expect anything from life. He would shock Draco with statements like, "Friendship is a hollow concept. The Dark Lord binds his followers with the Dark Mark, with fear and pain. Dumbledore bound me with an Unbreakable Vow for endless years before he began to trust me. I bound you, as I cannot trust you either."

On more than one occasion, Severus had returned from his operations complaining vehemently about the Sands, the Parkinsons or other couples that stood in their master's service. He would equally mock the Carrow siblings or Paul Nott who overprotected his son Theodore.

Draco had tried to reason that they would naturally protect their spouse or close relatives even if it made the task as a whole more difficult, but Severus showed no sympathy for any mention of the word love. "Love," he would spit, "what is it good for? You'd better keep yourself free from such nonsense and remain in control of your wits." From all Draco could tell, Severus didn't know what any kind of love felt like, and had never been on the receiving end of it either.

If the ten weeks Draco had spent at Spinner's End were an indicator, Severus did not feel the physical need for a sex life either. The inappropriate remarks and snide questions directed at Draco during Death Eater gatherings pointed the same direction.

Severus and Draco had also discussed the wards of Hogwarts castle on which they had complementary experiences. Besides the external wards...which protected rather well against intruders...the different sections were protected individually. The ingredients cupboards in the potions lab must not allow unauthorised access. The wards cannot be absolute though, allowing for the case that a colleague needed to fill in for a lesson or wanted to brew for himself. This permission had included an impostor like Crouch, unfortunately.

And there was always the clever student who broke the wards. One of them had been Severus Snape, which explained why in the last eighteen years there had not been many others.

It was easier to set up strong wards on a teacher's private quarters because they could be personalised. Severus' private rooms were most likely as safe as the headmaster's. "I have set up four layers. The first isn't really a ward, only an empathy check. It allows passage only to those who really want to reach my personality and who empathise with me. Then there are two normal wards. Breaking them must not take too long though, because there is another empathy check inside them. It is linked to the outer one such that the empathic feeling must have held all through the way. Otherwise the wards snap back into place. And even if someone ever passes through, the study cannot be left open for long. The four wards replace themselves."

With his eyebrows raised, Severus had noted, "The greasy bat of the dungeon, the nightmare of generations of Potions students does not get empathic visitors, you see. Not even Slytherins come to me for personal reasons. Do not lie; I have seen your mind. This barrier is invulnerable."

Draco had asked if the inside could not show Severus' true nature as a spy *for* the good side, *for* Potter and *for* the Order. Severus had not denied that. This was what the half year in Draco's Vow was for. Severus would attempt to open his quarters and give the Order or Ministry the proof he had, together with explanations. "I simply have too many enemies...in each group...to allow one of them to destroy this last chance of proving my position. But again," he insisted, "this is purely hypothetical. I took these precautions more to keep the headmaster from nagging me than for anything else."

Draco's ears had burned red at the mention of Albus Dumbledore.

Draco checked the clock. It was midnight, and tomorrow they would have to play pretend, catching Hermione Granger. He needed to sleep.

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A/N: This is the end of this little story. The next day they go out and they make a catch indeed. Find this adventure and its consequences in my story Three Options for Ginny. But if you don't mind too much, please leave a review here before you leave. Thank you!!

Greengecko and cnjstout made this story what it is today. They pushed Snape back in character and my sentences into standard-English. I owe them so much. Thanks girls, you were great!!!