

After the End

Mrs. Cecilia Snape shifted the small head on her shoulder into a more comfortable position and opened the door of the quarters to which her husband had brought her home on the day of their wedding. Well-meaning colleagues sometimes sympathized with her about living in a dungeon; Cecy simply smiled and thanked them for thinking of her.

Though truly they are not. If they were, they would know what I must have done with these rooms in six years. Severus might have been happy living with bare stone all around and the barest minimum of worn furniture, but I was not, and it was certainly no way to raise a child.

So velvet drapes in rich shades of green and blue now swathed the walls of the three-room suite; the armchairs and sofa were upholstered to match, with their dark wood complementing tables and bookcases. The only things Severus had flatly refused to have replaced were the battered desk at which he marked his students' papers and the chair that went with it, though he had finally agreed to have it restuffed the year before.

After a certain person removed a great deal of said stuffing by hand. Cecy chuckled under her breath. "We have been very good for your father, little one, haven't we?" she said, and smiled at the sleepy murmur that answered her. "Let's go see what he's up to..."

What Severus was up to, she discovered, was sleeping, leaning back in the same wing chair she had just been thinking about. Judging by the piles of parchment in front of him and the quill lying on the desk beside his hand, he had been halfway through the sixth years' final exams when tiredness had overcome him.

With all the extra time he spent with his special N.E.W.T. class this year, I'm not surprised in the least. He deserves a break, and I do believe I can give it to him. The day I don't know enough about potions to mark a set of teenagers' essays is the day I no longer deserve to be called a Healer.

Drawing her wand, she levitated her husband's chair away from his desk and to the fireside. He grunted once but did not wake, not even when she set her softly breathing burden down on his lap. "Keep Daddy asleep, now," she instructed their four-year-old, who snuggled up without bothering to reply. "He needs his rest."

She spent a few moments surveying two of the great treasures of her life and finding them good. The resemblance between Severus and his only child was striking; the few traces of herself Cecilia could find were in the softness and sleekness of the black hair, the clarity of the olive-toned skin, and a surprisingly small, straight nose on an otherwise strong-featured little face.

Which is as it should be. Draco has my coloring, if not many of my features, and Andrea swears his and Luna's little Scamp looks just like I did at that age.

Thinking of her son, as always, made Cecy smile. *What a week he is having. Not only the final rehearsals for the biggest part he's yet undertaken—the title role in The Mikado—but Luna ready to make me a grandmother again at any moment.*

Luckily for them, help is on the way...

"Daddy!"

Luna Malfoy looked up from the bed which was making itself under her wand's direction in time to see her husband intercept their two-year-old's running tackle-hug. "Hello to you too," he said, draping Scamp over one shoulder and coming into the bedroom. "Are we having company?"

"Not exactly." Luna tucked in a final corner and beckoned Draco nearer. "You have makeup under your ear. Hold still."

"Thanks." Draco tilted his head to expose the mentioned area to Luna's careful Cleaning Charm. "Putting it on, I can do, but getting it all off again just keeps evading me... and what does 'not exactly' mean? Is someone coming for half a night?"

Luna sat down on the edge of the bed, rubbing her back with both hands. "Don't be silly. This is going to be Abby's room."

"Abby's room?" Draco swung Scamp to the ground and sat down beside his wife, looking around what he'd been under the impression was still their spare bedroom. "Why does Abby need a room?"

"Because she's finished at Hogwarts, of course." Luna looked at him searchingly. "Do you need some sleep? I know you started rehearsal very early this morning, Scamp and I can go to King's Cross by ourselves to pick her up if you want to have a nap..."

Draco shook his head. "I don't think a nap would help solve this. Unless I'm so sleep-deprived that I forgot the conversation where we agreed Abby was coming to stay with us this summer."

"She's not coming for the summer," said Luna, extending her legs so that Scamp could sit on her feet and get bounced up and down. "She's

coming for good.”

“She’s *wh* —” Draco cut himself off mid-yelp. “When,” he asked in the calmest tone he could manage under the circumstances, “did I say Abigail Beauvoi could come to live with us?”

Luna flipped Scamp onto the floor, eliciting a giggling squeal. “Do you have a problem with it?” she said, smiling up at Draco.

“Do I—well, no, not really, but why isn’t she going home? Or getting her own place?”

“Because she doesn’t want to, and because I can use the help.” Luna checked her watch. “And it’s time to go get her. Who’s driving, you or me?”

“I am.” Draco stroked Luna’s swollen belly, chuckling. “If only because you don’t fit behind the wheel anymore.”

“And whose fault is that?”

Draco smirked. “Guilty as charged.” He bent and scooped Scamp off the floor, standing up in the same motion. “Come on, brat. Let’s go fetch your auntie.”

“Auntie!” shouted Scamp as Draco gave Luna a hand up. “Auntie, auntie, auntie!”

Leaning away from the noise, Draco escorted Luna from the room.

Results of Malfoy family poll: two strongly in favor of the motion, one still undecided...

Later that night, as he watched his godsister crooning his firstborn to sleep, brown curls hanging low over soft blond waves, Draco’s indecision persisted.

It’s not that I don’t like having Abby around. I do. And watching Scamp say hello to her was fun. He chuckled under his breath, remembering. “Auntie, auntie, auntie, auntie” all the way across the station and wham, right into her legs. Nearly knocked her back through the barrier!

But I can’t help wondering what’s really going on here.

As though she’d read his mind, Abby looked up at him. “Asleep,” she mouthed, pretending to wipe her forehead. “Finally!”

Draco nodded and drew his wand, taking careful aim. “*Muffliato*,” he murmured, and Scamp twitched once before settling back into sleep. “So, how’re you?” he asked in a more normal tone of voice.

“I’m fine.” Abby leaned back in the chair, adjusting Scamp’s head on her arm. “But you’re not. Something’s eating you. Let’s have it.”

“It’s bad enough Mum and Luna can read my mind,” Draco grumbled. “Do you really have to add to it?”

“Of course.” Abby tossed her hair over her shoulder with the sly grin that made her look even more like her big sister Hermione. “Quit stalling and spit it out.”

Draco sighed, trying to think of how to put his nebulous questions into words. “Why?” he said finally. “Why here? Why with us?”

Abby shrugged. “Why not?”

“Cute, but no. Real reasons or you’re going home tomorrow.”

“Like you’d make me.” Abby hefted the small sleeping body in her arms. “Can you really afford to alienate the only person who can reliably make your Living Siren settle down for bed?”

Draco winced at the reminder of Scamp’s other, thoroughly deserved nickname. “Point. But that’s a benefit to us, not to you. You’re eighteen, you’ve just finished school, you have your whole life ahead of you—why come bury yourself here with the most boring quasi-relatives you have?”

“An up-and-coming actor and a magical creature rescuer hardly count as boring,” said Abby, smoothing a bit of Scamp’s hair back. “And you’re not going to be keeping me chained to the fireplace or anything like that. I hope.”

“Damn.” Draco snapped his fingers. “There goes my plan for the weekend.”

Abby chuckled deep in her throat. “Turn around what you said and look at it from my point of view,” she said, sobering. “I’m eighteen, I’ve just finished school, I have my whole life ahead of me—and there’s nothing in the world I would rather do with it than this.” Her hand described a graceful circle before coming to rest on Scamp’s cheek. “I want to make what you call ‘boring’ the best part of life. I want to keep things clean and tidy and then watch it get destroyed by rampaging children, and do it all over again tomorrow. I want a *home*, with a family I love. And the best place I could think to find that was here.”

“Shouldn’t you want your own home, though?” Draco asked, aware he was treading on delicate ground but unsure there was any other way to get his point across. “Your own family?”

“I saw you first,” Abby informed him, lifting her nose in the air. “You’re as much mine as you are anybody’s.” She grinned at Draco’s half-snorted laugh, then went on. “I suppose it might be better to have my own family. But that requires things I don’t have. Like a boyfriend.” Her smile turned

wistful. "I keep expecting them to measure up to the first boy I ever loved, and none of them do."

Draco focused his mind on a snowy wasteland in an effort, only somewhat successful, to quell his massive blush.

"It could have turned into something more than what it is." Abby's eyes were far away, somewhere between normal focus and her Seeing gaze. "If there had never been a Luna. But there is a Luna, and she's the right one for you to love that way." She blinked a few times, then refocused on him. "I'm just happy to have the best big brother and sister-in-law in the world to love and live with. And if what I Saw way back when about your kids is true, you're going to be glad I'm around..." She broke off, looking down at her lap. "Why am I wet?"

"Er," Draco said, trying to stifle a snicker. "Scamp's toilet-trained during the day, but not so much at night."

"Eww—" Abby broke off her plaint to glare at Draco. "Stop that. Stop. I see you—stop it—"

"What's he doing?" Luna asked, coming in from the kitchen.

Abby pointed at Draco, who had lost all control and was rolling on the floor, howling. "He's *laughing* at me!"

"So he is." Luna drew her wand and Silenced Draco, then turned to Abby and began the cleanup process. By the time Draco got his own wand out and reversed the spell, both Abby and Scamp were clean and dry once more, and Abby had volunteered to take Scamp upstairs and go through the tucking-in process.

"Be sure to leave the door open," Luna called after her, then sank into the chair Abby had vacated. Draco came to lean on its back, and she looked up at him. "Did you get it settled?" she asked, reaching up to run a finger along his cheek.

"More or less." Draco returned the favor, entwining his fingers in his wife's dark blonde hair and wondering idly which of them, if either, the new baby would favor. "She was saying something just before Scamp distracted her... something she Saw a long time ago, about our children and why we'd be glad she was here..."

"Oh, that." Luna rubbed her stomach, smiling. "This is only the beginning. We're going to have four by the time we're done."

"Four?" Draco gulped. "I think we're going to need a bigger house..."

The darkness brooded behind the burning walls. This was not the way it was supposed to be. But the walls were strong, and that strength was renewed every day, every hour, so that the darkness could never break free.

Someday, the darkness vowed, that would change. Someday the walls would falter, the strength fail, and on that day the world would again belong to its rightful master.

But when that day might come, no one could tell, not even the darkness itself.