Before the Storm, Calm

by mayachain

Summary

Even after the war is over, the future remains uncertain. Spending the night in his bedroom at the Manor has never been a good thing for Draco Malfoy.

Notes

Although the two storylines to not comply, this ties in with a bit of backstory given in Sanctuary.

The bedroom is dark. It's two and a half hours after midnight, and as per usual at this hour, the moon has moved past the cloudless sky in front of his window. There's no wind outside; in fact, there's no sound at all, even the hooting of the owls has stopped. The gardens surrounding the Manor have fallen eerily silent, the same way they have done every night for centuries.

In spite of being born and raised in this house, Draco's never found out why there has always been an hour or so without any movements in the vicinity of the Ancient House of Malfoy at all, about seventy-five minutes where absolutely all activities cease. The calm before the Storm, his grandmother had murmured to him once, but she had not explained, and he had never asked. The calm before the storm, he thinks now, ominous and quiet, as if the whole of the Manor were struggling to recharge enough physical and magical energies to maintain his family's rightful place before dawn.
During centuries of political intrigues and feuds, during roughly thirty years of warfare that was never really interrupted throughout his childhood, this has always been the only hour of the day where nothing bad could happen to his family, to whoever was a guest at their house, to him. Doors were locked, plants, animals and people were sleeping. Even if someone were lying awake plotting murder, for a precisely short amount of time, no-one with neither benevolent nor nefarious intentions whatsoever would come near the heir's bedroom. Still, the time between two and four a.m. has always been the time he's been most afraid, unable to sleep, unable to breathe in terrified anticipation. It's why the sun never managed to get any colour to his face, no matter how many hours of the day he spent outside on his broom, flying. Only at Hogwarts had he not felt quite the same anxiety, surrounded by his roommates, but those hours of bearable insomnia had only made the experience more paralyzing, not-sleeping alone at the unfailingly silent Manor. He may not be alone in his bed now, but he still wakes up on cue the minute the sounds stop, and there is no way he can go back to sleep, the urge to stay awake, to stay on guard until some bird re-introduces sound into his world too deeply ingrained.

The eighteen years he's been alive have shown him the rightness of his grandmother's interpretation, shown him he has every reason to fear the mornings. Bad things happen in the mornings, during the last hours of the night. Some of his kinder memories, in hindsight, include looking out the window during Charms at thirteen and seeing a much too easily insulted Hippogriff first thing, as well as being fourteen and having a teacher he'd been in the same room with revealed to be a bloodthirsty, monstrous werewolf by his Head of House. Equally innocent, but of far more life-changing importance, is the memory of being fifteen and sauntering into the Great Hall to find a look of sheer hatred directed at him out of previously timid brown eyes.

He has no recollection of the first time he met the Dark Lord, but Draco vividly remembers being sixteen and waking up to his mother having found his grandmother strangled by her own semi-tamed Devil's Snare in her secret garden, her sanctuary he hadn't been in since he was nine. He remembers being seventeen and finding Narcissa crying in the living-room, her attempts at bribing the Ministry to release her husband from prison failed. He remembers being a newly initiated junior Death Eater, stumbling bleary-eyed into the dining hall and finding Aunt Bellatrix reminiscing gleefully about Longbottom's parents, remembers being sickened for the first time by the detail of her description. He also remembers her manic eagerness at informing him of the task that might or might not eventually persuade the Dark Lord to free his father, the first rays of sunlight bathing her face.

During the entirety of sixth year, he'd barely slept at all, and dawn was not even in sight a year later when Dumbledore had been dead and he and Professor Snape had to flee the school.

Draco first met Nagini during breakfast a week after that; the delicious toasts his mother had prepared for him herself had remained untouched. Another breakfast, and he'd comprehended just how many of his classmates were not around, how many Mudbloods and Halfbloods had used to attend the school and he'd never known, Slytherins - even Slytherins! - Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and Gryffindors. Breakfast again, when the red streaks on Longbottom's face meant he could no longer justify what the Carrows did to those who spoke up. It had still been dark outside when a burn racing through his left arm had alerted him to the fact that the Dark Lord planned on coming to Hogwarts, a sharp pain that turned out to announce the beginning of the final battle. Midnight, when he'd subsequently passed out in his father's arms from exhaustion after three days without any sleep at all and early morning when he'd woken up in a cell in Azkaban without his parents.

Bad things happen after the dark fades, and in the dark where no-one comes near him, no-one watches him, all he can do is imagine the trials to come.

Days tend to get better after a while - Hippogriff-inflicted injuries are exploited, werewolf teachers fired, grandmothers' wills read, looks of hatred explained by newspapers announcing aunts' prison
escapes, tears dried, lessons in Occlumency started, plans set into motion, alliances not even spoken to the D.A. formed. Lives are saved and battles are won by obnoxious scar-faced Halfbloods; snakes killed by brown eyed, plant-loving heroes, pardons handed over by red-haired, bespectacled Ministry officials. However, no matter how good the resolve in the evenings, the first hours of his days have tended to make his nights a horror.

It's two and three quarters of an hour after midnight. Draco is surrounded by silence, the same foreboding, near tangible quiet that has for centuries frozen the moonlit Manor grounds. Eighteen years old, the Malfoy heir is lying in his bed, a junior Death Eater just barely redeemed in the public eye, chief witness in more cases of violence against humans and magical creatures than he can count; apart from a burned streak on his hip uninjured himself, petrified.

A cold foot is nudging his ankle, and the panic attack is interrupted by a soft snore. Years of nightly tension seep out of his body as he closes his eyes, burrows his face into Neville's shoulder. For the first time he can remember, he feels protected in the dark.

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