

# Harry Potter and the Psychology of Prejudice

"You've had *lessons* on how to manipulate people?"

"Of course," Draco said proudly. "I'm a *Malfoy*. Father bought me tutors."

"Wow," Harry said. "The way Lucius looks at you, I thought he was going to crucify you."

"My father really loves me," Draco said firmly. "He wouldn't ever do that."

"Um..." Harry said. He remembered the black-robed, white-haired figure of elegance wielding that beautiful, deadly silver-handled cane. It wasn't easy to visualise him as a doting father.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but how do you *know* that?"

"Huh?" It was clear that this was a question Draco did not commonly ask himself.

"What makes you think Lucius wouldn't sacrifice you the same way he'd sacrifice anything else for power?"

Draco shot Harry another odd look. "Just what do *you* know about Father?"

"Um... seat on the Wizengamot, seat on Hogwarts' Board of Governors, incredibly wealthy, has the ear of Minister Fudge, has the confidence of Minister Fudge, probably has some highly embarrassing photos of Minister Fudge, most prominent blood purist now that the Dark Lord's gone, former Death Eater who was found to have the Dark Mark but got off by claiming to be under the Imperius Curse, which was ridiculously implausible and pretty much everyone knew it... evil with a capital 'E' and a born killer... I think that's it."

Draco's eyes had narrowed to slits. "McGonagall told you that, did she?"

"No, she wouldn't say *anything* to me about Lucius, except to stay away from him, so I grabbed a customer at the potions shop and asked *her* about Lucius."

Draco's eyes were wide again. "Did you *really*?"

Harry gave Draco a puzzled look. "If I lied the first time, I'm not going to tell you the truth just because you ask twice."

There was a certain pause as Draco absorbed this.

"You're so completely going to be in Slytherin. Anyway... to answer what you asked..." Draco took a deep breath, and his face turned serious. "Father once missed a Wizengamot vote for me. I was on a broom and I fell off and broke a lot of ribs. It really hurt. I'd never hurt that much before and I thought I was going to die. So Father missed this really important vote, because he was there by my bed at St. Mungo's, holding my hands and promising me that I was going to be okay."

Harry glanced away uncomfortably, then, with an effort, forced himself to look back at Draco. "Why are you telling me *that*? It seems sort of... private..."

Draco gave Harry a serious look. "One of my tutors once said that people form close friendships by knowing private things about each other, and the reason most people don't make close friends is because they're too embarrassed to share anything really important about themselves." Draco turned his palms out invitingly. "Your turn?"

Knowing that Draco's hopeful face had probably been drilled into him by months of practice did not make it any less effective, Harry observed. Actually it *did* make it *less* effective, but unfortunately not *ineffective*. The same could be said of Draco's clever use of reciprocation pressure. Draco had made an unsolicited gift of a confidence, and now invited Harry to offer a confidence in return... and the thing was, Harry *did* feel pressured. Refusal, Harry was certain, would be met with a look of sad disappointment, and maybe a small amount of contempt indicating that Harry had lost points.

"Draco," Harry said, "just so you know, I recognise exactly what you're doing right now."

Draco was looking sad and disappointed. "It's not meant as a trick, Harry. It's a real way of becoming friends."

Harry held up a hand. "I didn't say I wasn't going to respond. I just need time to pick something that's private but just as non-damaging. Let's say... I wanted you to know that I can't be rushed into things." A pause to reflect could go a long way in defusing the power of a lot of compliance techniques, once you learned to recognise them for what they were.

"All right," Draco said. "I'll wait while you come up with something."

*Simple but effective.*

And Harry couldn't help but notice how clumsy, awkward, graceless his attempt at resisting manipulation / saving face / showing off had appeared compared to Draco. *I need those tutors.*

"All right," Harry said after a time. "Here's mine." He glanced around. "Um... it sounds like you can really rely on your father. I mean... if you talk to him seriously, he'll always listen to you and take you seriously."

Draco nodded.

"Sometimes," Harry said, and swallowed. This was surprisingly hard, but then it was meant to be. "Sometimes I wish my own family was like yours." Harry's eyes flinched away from Draco's face, more or less automatically, and then Harry forced himself to look back at Draco.

Then it hit Harry *what on Earth he'd just said*, and Harry hastily added, "Not that I wish my Dad was a flawless instrument of death like Lucius, I only mean taking me seriously -"

"I understand," Draco said with a smile. "There... now doesn't it feel like we're a little closer to being friends?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. It does, actually."

"My father takes all his friends seriously," Draco said. "That's why he has lots of friends. You should meet him."

"I'll think about it," Harry said in a neutral voice. He shook his head in wonder. "So you really are his one weak point. Huh."

Now Draco was giving Harry a *really* odd look. "You want to go get something to drink and find somewhere to sit down?"

Harry realised he had been standing in one place for too long, and stretched himself, trying to crack his back. "Sure."

The platform was starting to fill up now, but there was still a quieter area on the far side away from the red steam engine. Along the way they passed a stall containing a bald, bearded man offering newspapers and comic books and stacked neon-green cans.

"Scuse me," Harry said, "but what *is* that stuff, exactly?"

"Comed-Tea," said the stallholder. "If you drink it, something surprising is bound to happen which makes you spill it on yourself or someone else. But it's charmed to vanish just a few seconds later -"

"How droll," said Draco. "How very, very droll. Come, Mr. Potter, let's go find another -"

"Hold on," Harry said.

"*Oh come on!* That's just, just *juvenile!*"

"No, I'm sorry Draco, I *have* to investigate this. What happens if I drink Comed-Tea while doing my best to keep the conversation completely serious?"

The stallholder smiled mysteriously. "Who knows? A friend walks by in a frog costume? Something unexpected is bound to happen -"

"No. I'm sorry. I just don't believe it. That violates my much-abused suspension of disbelief on so many levels I don't even have the language to describe it. There is, there is just *no way* a bloody *drink* can manipulate reality to produce *comedy setups*, or I'm going to give up and retire to the Bahamas -"

Draco groaned. "Are we *really* going to do this?"

"You don't have to drink it but I *have* to investigate. *Have* to. How much?"

"Five Knuts the can," the stallholder said.

"*Five Knuts?* You can sell reality-manipulating fizzy drinks for *five Knuts the can?*" Harry reached into his pouch, said "four Sickles, four Knuts", and slapped them down on the counter. "Two dozen cans please."

"I'll also take one," Draco sighed, and started to reach for his pockets.

Harry shook his head rapidly. "No, I've got this, doesn't count as a favor either, I want to see if it works for you too." He took a can from the stack now placed on the counter and tossed it to Draco, then started feeding his pouch. The pouch's Widening Lip ate the cans accompanied by small burping noises.

Twenty-two burps later, Harry had the last purchased can in his hand, Draco was looking at him expectantly, and the two of them pulled the ring at the same time.

They tilted their heads back and drank the Comed-Tea.

It somehow *tasted* bright green - extra-fizzy and limer than lime.

Aside from that, nothing else happened.

Harry looked at the stallholder, who was watching them benevolently.

"It doesn't always happen immediately," the stallholder said. "But it's guaranteed to happen once per can, or your money back."

Harry took another long drink.

Once again, nothing happened.

*Maybe I should just chug the whole thing as fast as possible... and hope my stomach doesn't explode from all the carbon dioxide, or that I don't burp while drinking it...*

No, he could afford to be a *little* patient. But honestly, Harry didn't see how this was going to work. You couldn't go up to someone and say "Now I'm going to surprise you" or "And now I'm going to tell you the punchline of the joke, and it'll be really funny." It ruined the shock value. In Harry's state of mental preparedness, Lucius Malfoy could have walked past in a ballerina outfit and it wouldn't have made him do a proper spit-take. Just what sort of wacky shenanigan was the universe supposed to cough up *now*?

"Anyway, let's sit down," Harry said. He prepared to swig another drink and started towards the distant seating area, which put him at the right angle to glance back and see the portion of the stall's newspaper stand that was devoted to a newspaper called *The Quibbler*, which was showing the following headline:

*BOY-WHO-LIVED GETS*

*DRACO MALFOY PREGNANT*

"*Gah!*" screamed Draco as bright green liquid sprayed all over him from Harry's direction. Draco turned to Harry with fire in his eyes and grabbed his own can. "You son of a mudblood! Let's see how *you* like being spat upon!" Draco took a deliberate swig from the can just as his own eyes caught sight of the headline.

In sheer reflex action, Harry tried to block his face as the spray of liquid flew in his direction. Unfortunately he blocked using the hand containing the Comed-Tea, sending the rest of the green liquid to splash out over his shoulder.

Harry stared at the can in his hand even as he went on choking and spluttering and the green colour started to vanish from Draco's robes.

Then he looked up and stared at the newspaper headline.

*BOY-WHO-LIVED GETS*

*DRACO MALFOY PREGNANT*

Harry's lips opened and said, "buh-buh-buh-buh..."

Too many competing objections, that was the problem. Every time Harry tried to say "But we're only eleven!" the objection "But men can't get pregnant!" demanded first priority and was then run over by "But there's nothing between us, really!"

Then Harry looked down at the can in his hand again.

He was feeling a deep-seated desire to run away screaming at the top of his lungs until he dropped from lack of oxygen.

Harry snarled, threw the can violently into a nearby rubbish bin, and stalked back over to the stall. "One copy of *The Quibbler*, please." Harry paid over four more Knuts, retrieved another can of Comed-Tea from his pouch, and then stalked over to the picnic area with the blond-haired boy, who was staring at his own can with an expression of frank admiration.

"I take it back," Draco said, "that was pretty good."

"Hey, Draco, you know what I bet is even better for becoming friends than exchanging secrets? Committing murder."

"I have a tutor who says that," Draco allowed. He reached inside his robes and scratched himself with an easy, natural motion. "Who've you got in mind?"

Harry slammed *The Quibbler* down hard on the picnic table. "The guy who came up with this headline."

Draco groaned. "Not a guy. A girl. A *ten-year-old* girl, can you believe it? She went nuts after her mother died and her father, who owns this newspaper, is *convinced* that she's a seer, so when he doesn't know he asks Luna Lovegood and believes *anything* she says."

Not really thinking about it, Harry pulled the ring on his next can of Comed-Tea and prepared to drink. "Are you kidding me? That's even worse than Muggle journalism, which I would have thought was physically impossible."

Draco snarled. "She has some sort of perverse obsession about the Malfoys, too, and her father is politically opposed to us so he prints every word. As soon as I'm old enough I'm going to rape her."

Green liquid spurted out of Harry's nostrils. Comed-Tea and lungs did not mix, and Harry spent the next few seconds frantically coughing.

Draco looked at him sharply. "Something wrong?"

It was at this point that Harry came to the sudden realisation that (a) the sounds coming from the rest of the train platform had turned into more of a blurred white noise at around the same time Draco had reached inside his robes, and (b) when he had discussed committing murder as a bonding method, there had been exactly one person in the conversation who'd thought they were joking.

*Right. Because he seemed like such a normal kid. And he is a normal kid, he is just what you'd expect a baseline male child to be like if Darth Vader were his dotting father.*

"Yes, well," Harry coughed, oh god how was he going to get out of this conversational wedge, "I was just surprised at how you were willing to discuss it so openly, you didn't seem worried about getting caught or anything."

Draco snorted. "Are you joking? *Luna Lovegood's* word against mine?"

Holy crap on a holy stick. "There's no such thing as magical truth detection, I take it?" *Or DNA testing... yet.*

Draco looked around. His eyes narrowed. "That's right, you don't know anything. Look, I'll explain things to you, I mean the way it really works, just like you were already in Slytherin and asked me the same question. But you've got to swear not to say anything about it."

"I swear," Harry said.

"The courts use Veritaserum, but it's a joke really, you just get yourself Obliviated before you testify and then claim the other person was Memory-Charmed with a fake memory. Of course if you're just some normal person, the courts presume in favor of Obliviation, not False Memory Charms. But the court has discretion, and if *I'm* involved then it impinges on the honor of a Noble House, so it goes to the Wizengamot, where Father has the votes. After I'm found not guilty the Lovegood family has to pay reparations for tarnishing my honor. And they know from the start that's how it'll go, so they'll just keep their mouths shut."

A cold chill was coming over Harry, a chill that came with instructions to keep his voice and face normal. *Note to self: Overthrow government of magical Britain at earliest convenience.*

Harry coughed again to clear his throat. "Draco, please please *please* don't take this the wrong way, my word is my bond, but like you said I could be in Slytherin and I really want to ask for informational purposes, so what would happen *theoretically speaking* if I *did* testify that I'd heard you plan it?"

"Then if I was anyone other than a Malfoy, I'd be in trouble," Draco answered smugly. "Since I *am* a Malfoy... Father has the votes. And afterwards he'd crush you... well, I guess not easily, since you *are* the Boy-Who-Lived, but Father is pretty good at that sort of thing." Draco frowned. "'Sides, *you* talked about murdering her, why weren't you worried about *me* testifying after she turns up dead?"

*How, oh how did my day go this wrong?* Harry's mouth was already moving faster than he could think. "That's when I thought she was *older!* I don't know how it works *here*, but in Muggle Britain the courts would get a lot more upset about someone killing a child -"

"That makes sense," Draco said, still looking a bit suspicious. "But anyway, it's always smarter if it doesn't go to the Aurors at all. If we're careful only to do things that Healing Charms can fix, we can just Obliviate her afterwards and then do it all again next week." Then the blonde-haired boy giggled, a youthful high-pitched sound. "Though just imagine her saying she'd been done by Draco Malfoy *and* the Boy-Who-Lived, not even *Dumbledore* would believe her."

*I am going to tear apart your pathetic little magical remnant of the Dark Ages into pieces smaller than its constituent atoms.* "Actually, can we hold off on that? After I found out that headline came from a girl a year younger than me, I had a different thought for my revenge."

"Huh? Do tell," Draco said, and started to take another swig of his Comed-Tea.

Harry didn't know if the enchantment worked more than once per can, but he *did* know he could avoid the blame, so he was careful to time it exactly right:

"I was thinking *someday I'm going to marry that woman.*"

Draco made a horrid sound and leaked green fluid out the corners of his mouth like a broken car radiator. "*Are you nuts?*"

"Quite the opposite, I'm so sane it burns like ice."

"You've got weirder taste than a Lestrage," Draco said, sounding half-admiring about it. "And I suppose you want her all to yourself, huh?"

"Yep. I can owe you a favor for it -"

Draco waved it off. "Nah, this one's free."

Harry stared down at the can in his hand, the coldness settling into his blood. Charming, happy, generous with his favors to his friends, Draco wasn't a psychopath. That was the sad and awful part, knowing human psychology well enough to *know* that Draco *wasn't* a monster. There had been ten thousand societies over the history of the world where this conversation could have happened. No, the world would have been a very different place indeed, if it took an *evil mutant* to say what Draco had said. It was very simple, very human, it was the default if nothing else intervened. To Draco, his enemies weren't people.

And in the slowed time of this slowed country, here and now as in the darkness-before-dawn prior to the Age of Reason, the son of a sufficiently powerful noble would simply take for granted that he was above the law, at least when it came to some peasant girl. There were places in Muggle-land where it was still the same way, countries where that sort of nobility still existed and still thought like that, or even grimmer lands where it wasn't just the nobility. It was like that in every place and time that didn't descend directly from the Enlightenment. A line of descent, it seemed, which didn't quite include magical Britain, for all that there had been cross-cultural contamination of things like ring-pull drinks cans.

*And if Draco doesn't change his mind about wanting revenge, and I don't throw away my own chance at happiness in life to marry some poor crazy girl, then all I've just bought is time, and not too much of it...*

For one girl. Not for others.

*I wonder how difficult it would be to just make a list of all the top blood purists and kill them.*

They'd tried exactly that during the French Revolution, more or less - make a list of all the enemies of Progress and remove everything above the neck - and it hadn't worked out well from what Harry recalled.

Harry gazed up at the sky, and at the pale shape of the Moon, visible this morning through the cloudless air.

*So the world is broken and flawed and insane, and cruel and bloody and dark. This is news? You always knew that, anyway...*

"You're looking all serious," Draco said. "Let me guess, your Muggle parents told you that this sort of thing was bad."

Harry nodded, not quite trusting his voice.

"Well, like Father says, there may be four houses, but in the end everyone belongs to either Slytherin or Hufflepuff. And frankly, you're not on the Hufflepuff end. If you decide to side with the Malfoys under the table... our power and your reputation... you could get away with things even *I* can't do. Want to *try* it for a while? See what it's like?"

*Aren't we a clever little serpent. Eleven years old and already coaxing your prey from hiding...*

Harry thought, considered, chose his weapon. "Draco, you want to explain the whole blood purity thing to me? I'm sort of new."

A wide smile crossed Draco's face. "You really should meet Father and ask *him*, you know, he's our leader."

"Give me the thirty-second version."

"Okay," Draco said. He drew in a deep breath, and his voice grew slightly lower, and took on a cadence. "Our powers have grown weaker, generation by generation, as the mudblood taint increases. Where Salazar and Godric and Rowena and Helga once raised Hogwarts by their power, creating the Locket and the Sword and the Diadem and the Cup, no wizard of these faded days has risen to rival them. We are fading, all fading into Muggles as we interbreed with their spawn and allow our Squibs to live. If the taint is not checked, soon our wands will break and all our arts cease, the line of Merlin will end and the blood of Atlantis fail. Our children will be left scratching at the dirt to survive like the mere Muggles, and darkness will cover all the world for ever." Draco took another swig from his drinks can, looking satisfied; that seemed to be the whole argument as far as he was concerned.

"Persuasive," Harry said, meaning it descriptively rather than normatively. It was a standard pattern: The Fall from Grace, the need to guard what purity remained against contamination, the past sloping upwards and the future sloping only down. And that pattern also had its *counter*... "I have to correct you on one point of fact, though. Your information about the Muggles is a bit out of date. We aren't exactly scratching at the dirt anymore."

Draco's head snapped around. "*What?* What do you mean, *we?* "

"We. The Muggles. We didn't just sit around crying about not having wands, we have our *own* powers now, with or without magic. If all your powers fail then we will all have lost something very precious, because your magic is the only hint we have as to how the universe must *really* work - but you won't be left scratching at the ground. Your houses will still be cool in summer and warm in winter, there will still be doctors and medicine. It'd be a tragedy, but not literally the end of all the light in the world. Just saying."

Draco had backed up several feet and his face was full of mixed fear and disbelief. "*What in the name of Merlin are you talking about, Potter?* "

"Hey, I listened to *your* story, won't you listen to mine?" *Clumsy*, Harry chided himself, but Draco actually did stop backing off and seem to listen.

"Anyway," Harry said, "I'm saying that you don't seem to have been paying much attention to what goes on in the Muggle world." Probably because the whole wizarding world seemed to regard the rest of Earth as a slum. "All right. Quick check. Have wizards ever been to the Moon? You know, that thing?" Harry pointed up to that huge and distant globe.

"*What?*" Draco said. It was pretty clear the thought had never occurred to the boy. "*Go to the - it's just a -*" His finger pointed at the little pale thingy in the sky. "You can't Apparate to somewhere you've never *been* and how would anyone get to the Moon in the *first* place?"

"Hold on," Harry said to Draco, "I'd like to show you a book I brought with me."

Harry pulled a book out of his pouch and turned the pages of the book until he found the picture he wanted to show to Draco.

The one with the white, dry, cratered land, and the suited people, and the blue-white globe hanging over it all.

That picture.

*The picture, if only one picture in all the world were to survive.*

"*That,*" Harry said, his voice trembling because he couldn't quite keep the pride out, "is what the Earth looks like from the Moon."

Draco slowly leaned over. There was a strange expression on his young face. "If that's a *real* picture, why isn't it moving?"

*Moving?* Oh. "Muggles can do moving pictures but they need a bigger box to show it, they can't fit them onto single book pages yet."

Draco's finger moved to one of the suits. "What are those?" His voice starting to waver.

"Those are human beings. They are wearing suits that cover their whole bodies to give them air, because there is no air on the Moon."

"That's impossible," Draco whispered. There was terror in his eyes, and utter confusion. "No Muggle could ever do that. *How...*"

Harry took back the book, flipped the pages until he found what he saw. "This is a rocket going up. The fire pushes it higher and higher, until it gets to the Moon." Flipped pages again. "This is a rocket on the ground. That tiny speck next to it is a person." Draco gasped. "Going to the Moon cost the equivalent of... probably around a thousand million Galleons." Draco choked. "And it took the efforts of... probably more people than live in all of magical Britain." *And when they arrived, they left a plaque that said, 'We came in peace, for all mankind.' Though you're not yet ready to hear those words, Draco Malfoy...*

"You're telling the truth," Draco said slowly. "You wouldn't fake a whole book just for this - and I can hear it in your voice. But... but..."

"How, without wands or magic? It's a long story, Draco. It doesn't work by waving wands and chanting spells, it works by knowing how the universe works on such a deep level that you know exactly what to do in order to make the universe do what you want. If magic is like casting *Imperio* on someone to make them do what you want, then this is like knowing them so well that you can convince them it was their own idea all along. It's a lot more difficult than waving a

wand, but it works when wands fail, just like if the *Imperius* failed you could still try persuading a person. And it builds from generation to generation. You have to really *know* what you're doing - and when you really understand something, you can explain it to someone else. The greatest experts of one century ago, the brightest names that are still spoken with reverence, their powers are as *nothing* to the greatest experts of today. There is no equivalent of your lost arts that raised Hogwarts. Our powers wax by the year. And we are beginning to understand and unravel the secrets of life and inheritance. We'll be able to look at the very blood of which you spoke, and see what makes you a wizard, and in one or two more generations, we'll be able to persuade that blood to make all your children powerful wizards too. So you see, your problem isn't nearly as bad as it looks, because in a few more decades, Muggles will be able to solve it for you."

"But..." Draco said. His voice was trembling. "If *Muggles* have that kind of power... then... what are *we*? "

"No, Draco, that's not it, don't you see? We tap the power of human understanding to look at the world and figure out how it works. It can't fail without humanity itself failing. Your magic could turn off, and you would hate that, but you would still be *you*. You would still be alive to regret it. But because reason rests upon my human intelligence, it is the power that cannot be removed from me without removing *me*. Even if the laws of the universe change on me, so that all my knowledge is void, I'll just figure out the new laws, as has been done before. It's not a *Muggle* thing, it's a *human* thing, it just refines and trains the power you use every time you look at something you don't understand and ask 'Why?' You're of Slytherin, Draco, don't you see the implication?"

Draco looked up from the book to Harry. His face showed dawning understanding. "Wizards can learn to use this power."

Very carefully, now... the bait is set, now the hook... "If you can learn to think of yourself as a *human* instead of a *wizard* then you can train and refine your powers as a human."

And if *that* instruction wasn't in *every* curriculum, Draco didn't need to know it, did he?

Draco's eyes were now thoughtful. "You've... already done this?"

"To some extent," Harry allowed. "My training isn't complete. Not at eleven."

Slowly, Draco nodded. "You think you can master *both* arts, add the powers together, and..." Draco stared at Harry. "Make yourself Lord of the two worlds?"

Harry gave an evil laugh, it just seemed to come naturally at that point. "You have to realise, Draco, that the whole world you know, all of magical Britain, is just one square on a much larger game board. The game board that includes places like the Moon, and the stars in the night sky, which are lights just like the Sun only unimaginably far away, and things like galaxies that are vastly more massive than the Earth and Sun, things so large that only astronomers can see them and you don't even know they exist. But I don't want to rule the universe. I just think it could be more sensibly organised."

There was awe on Draco's face. "Why are you telling *me* this?"

"Oh... there aren't many people who know how to understand something for the very first time, even if it confuses the hell out of them. Help would be helpful."

Draco stared at Harry with his mouth open.

"But make no mistake, Draco, this really *isn't* like magic, you can't just do it and walk away unchanged like learning how to say the words of a new spell. The power comes with a cost, a cost so high that most people refuse to pay it."

Draco nodded at this as though, finally, he'd heard something he could understand. "And that cost?"

"Learning to admit you're wrong."

"Um," Draco said after the dramatic pause had stretched on for a while. "You going to explain that?"

"Trying to figure out how something works on that deep level, the first ninety-nine explanations you come up with are wrong. The hundredth is right. So you have to learn how to admit you're wrong, over and over and over again. It doesn't sound like much, but it's so hard that most people can't do it. Always questioning yourself, always taking another look at things you've always taken for granted, and every time you change your mind, you change yourself. But I'm getting way ahead of myself here. Way ahead of myself. I just want you to know... I'm offering to share some of my knowledge. If you want. There's just one condition."

"Uh huh," Draco said. "You know, Father says that when someone says that to you, it is never a good sign, ever."

Harry nodded. "Now, don't mistake me and think that I'm trying to drive a wedge between you and your father. It's not about that. It's just about me wanting to deal with someone my own age, rather than having this be between me and Lucius. I think your father would be okay with that too, he knows you have to grow up sometime. But your moves in our game have to be your own. That's my condition - that I'm dealing with you, Draco, not your father."

"I've got to go," Draco said. He stood up. "I've got to go off and think about this."

"Take your time," Harry said.

The sounds of the train platform changed from blurs into murmurs as Draco wandered off.

Harry slowly exhaled the air he'd been holding in without quite realising it, and then looked at the watch on his wrist. The second-hand was still ticking, and if the minute hand was right, then it wasn't quite eleven just yet. He probably ought to get on the train soon, but it seemed worth taking a few minutes first to do some breathing exercises and see if his blood warmed up again.

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### *Aftermath:*

Not too long after that, when all that day's fuss had finally subsided, Draco was bent over a desk with quill in hand. He had a private room in the Slytherin dungeons, with its own desk and its own fire - sadly not even *he* rated a connection to the Floo system, but at least Slytherin didn't buy into that utter nonsense about making *everyone* sleep in dorms. There weren't many private rooms, you had to be the *very* best within the House of the better sort, but that could be taken for granted with the House of Malfoy.

*Dear Father*, Draco wrote.

And then he stopped.

Ink slowly dripped from his quill, staining the parchment near the words.

Draco wasn't stupid. He was young, but his tutors had trained him well. Draco knew that Potter probably felt a lot more sympathy towards Dumbledore's faction than Potter was letting on... though Draco did think Potter could be tempted. But it was crystal clear that Potter was trying to tempt Draco just as Draco was trying to tempt him.

And it was also clear that Potter was brilliant, and a whole lot more than just slightly mad, and playing a vast game that Potter himself mostly didn't understand, improvised at top speed with the subtlety of a rampaging nundu. But Potter had managed to choose a tactic that Draco couldn't just walk away from. He had offered Draco a part of his own power, gambling that Draco couldn't use it without becoming more like him. His father had called this an advanced technique, and had warned Draco that it often didn't work.

Draco knew he hadn't understood everything that had happened... but Potter had offered *him* the chance to play and right now it was *his*. And if he blurted the whole thing out, it would become Father's.

In the end it was as simple as that. The lesser techniques require the unawareness of the target, or at least their uncertainty. Flattery has to be plausibly disguised as admiration. ("You should have been in Slytherin" is an old classic, highly effective on a certain type of person who isn't expecting it, and if it works you can repeat it.) But when you find someone's ultimate lever it doesn't matter if they know you know. Potter, in his mad rush, had guessed a key to Draco's soul. And if Draco knew that Potter knew it - even if it had been an obvious sort of guess - that didn't change anything.

So now, for the first time in his life, he had real secrets to keep. He was playing his own game. There was an obscure pain to it, but he knew that Father would be proud, and that made it all right.