

## Captain My Own Soul

Summary: After his flight at the end of HBP, Draco ends up in a slightly unusual place -- with a very unusual new teacher...

Notes: "Invictus", the poem, is by William Earnest Henley and can be sung to the tune of Amazing Grace, The Yellow Rose Of Texas, or, in a pinch, the theme song to Gilligan's Island. I'm not sure who wrote *Whiskey In The Jar*, it's an old Irish tune, but apparently Metallica has done a cover of it...

\*\*\*

It was dark in the old stone cottage, almost as dark as it was outside. The sky was overcast and thus starless, moonless; Draco wasn't even sure there would have been a moon. His head felt as if it were on slightly askew, and he couldn't make sense of anything that had happened, neither his relief that he had not been forced to kill the Headmaster nor Snape's flight from the Death Eaters with strange excuses. *It is not safe for us to remain in the Dark Lord's service just now, I'll return to you when the fuss dies down.*

And his mother and aunt and the others had all said this was fine, that Lord Voldemort would understand and that no doubt Severus would be a favourite of the Dark Lord for his deeds.

Then his Professor had brought him here and left him, saying that he would be cared for, with such a searching look, as if he were wondering whether care was what Draco required. He had left Draco in this little three-room cottage -- Draco had explored it thoroughly in case there were any surprises waiting for him, but there was nothing but a bedroom with a wide bed covered in a quilt, a bathroom with squeaking pipes, and a common room for kitchen and sitting room and library all in one. The books were mainly Wizarding novels. There was a stone lintel over the door with some nonsense incantation written on it that he ignored.

Someone outside was singing as he approached, in a voice that was oddly familiar, an accent like his mother's.

*He counted out his money and it made a pretty penny,  
I put it in me pocket to take home to darling' Jenny.  
She sighed and swore she loved me and never would deceive me  
But the devil take the women for they always lie so easy!  
Well shirigim duraham da, wack fall the --*

Draco stepped back involuntarily as the singer pushed the door open and strode inside, carrying a crate on one shoulder and an enormous, strangely-shaped flat case slung across his back. He wore Muggle clothes and thick boots, and he had short, bristling black hair. He was a tall man, broad-chested and with a face that was as familiar as his voice -- vague but definitely recognisable.

"Hullo there," the man said, setting the crate on the kitchen counter and depositing the black case in the corner. Draco saw vegetables poking out of the top. "Who're you? If you've come to steal from me, I'm afraid I've nothing worth your time."

"D-draco Malfoy," he said, hand going to his pocket for his wand. "I was brought here by Pr -- by Severus Snape..."

The man crossed his arms and regarded him with a keen, piercing look.

"Are you Lucius Malfoy's son?" he asked.

"Yes," Draco replied sullenly.

"Your mum's Narcissa Black?"

"Yes. Who are you? Why am I here?"

There was a laugh. "This place of wrath and tears, eh?"

"What?"

"It's a poem -- *Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade*," the man quoted. "You look as though you've seen your share of chance's bludgeonings. In town they call me Boardman. You may call me Regulus."

Draco's breath caught in his throat. "Regulus?"

The dark-haired man gave him a rakish grin. "Surprise."

"But -- you're dead -- I was told -- "

Regulus -- Boardman -- whoever -- burst into song again as he turned back to unpack the crate of food. *"I went into me chamber all for to take a slumber, to dream of gold and girls and of course it was no wonder -- "*

"You were killed for a traitor!"

"Well, I was a traitor," the man acknowledged, his back still to Draco. He accio'd a knife from a block nearby, wandlessly and wordlessly. In the sink, potatoes had begun to peel themselves. Regulus chopped the leaves off a handful of celery and began to dice it carelessly. "Don't stand there like an idiot, put the pot on the stove and put some butter in it."

"Shan't," Draco said.

"All right; I'll just make enough stew for me then, shall I?" Regulus asked. Draco became aware that he was starving; he hadn't eaten since the night before, when Dumbledore had --

Well, since the night before.

He went to the pot that had been indicated with the crook of an elbow and dropped it carelessly on the burner, adding half of the butter in a nearby dish. It began to sizzle and bubble while Regulus chopped onions and the potatoes began to dice themselves up.

"Potatoes are easy, you know; simple vegetables. They take care of themselves so well," Regulus said approvingly as he poured the celery and onions into the pan. Carrots followed in short order and a spoon began to stir it. The smell was overwhelming. Draco licked his lips.

"There's stew meat in the cold cupboard; wash it off and cut up the big slices," Regulus ordered. Draco bent to this task clumsily until Regulus reached over and silently adjusted the knife so that the sharp side was down.

*"Me Jenny took charges and she filled them up with water, called on Colonel Farrell to get ready for the slaughter."* he continued to sing while he put the potatoes into the pot and peered down into it. "Beef ready yet?"

Draco offered it for inspection. Regulus took it up in handfuls, large broad hands carrying it easily. The spoon began to stir more vigorously.

*"Next morning early before I rose to travel, there came a band of footmen and likewise Colonel Farrell, I goes to draw me pistol for she'd stole away me rapier, but a prisoner I was taken -- I couldn't shoot the water,"* he finished, as the meat spat and sizzled in the big pan.

"Will you stop singing?" Draco said impatiently. "Why am I here?"

*"Well shirigim duraham da, wack fall the daddy oh, wack fall the daddy oh, there's whiskey in the jar,"* Regulus finished. "Why do you think, little cousin? Shame you take after the Malfoy side, you know; nouveau riche passing themselves off as pureblood. Four generations does not a pureblood make!" he said cheerfully.

"My father -- "

"Was, as all Malfoys ever are, a social climber," Regulus cut him off. "Breeding is more than being able to do magic; it's a matter of grace, knowledge, arrogance, pride, and noblesse oblige. Which brings us around to you! What a circle life is," he sighed blissfully. He reminded Draco, irrationally, of Albus Dumbledore. "There's bread in the crate."

Draco took the hint and began slicing off slabs of the thick, crusty bread. Fortunately, Regulus didn't continue to sing.

"I don't know why you're here, actually," he said as Draco worked. "I've had all the news; Fawkes brought it to me. So I can guess," he said shrewdly. He took down a jar from the cold-cupboard and poured its contents, which sounded like water, into the pot. "Has Severus said where he's gone?"

"No," Draco answered, stabbing the bread angrily.

"It's the flour and yeast's fault, is it?" Regulus asked. Draco set aside the mangled slice of bread. "He's probably gone on to report to the Dark Lord personally, without the others knowing. That'd be like him."

"What's going on?" Draco burst out, throwing the knife onto the cutting board and turning to glare at him. Regulus gave him a small smile and turned to stir the pot.

*"They put me into jail with a judge all a writin, for robbing Colonel Farrell on Gilgarry Mountain,"* he sang. Draco fumed. *"But they didn't take me fists so I knocked the jailer down, and bid a farewell to this tight-fisted town."*

He was turning before Draco even had the hex fully cast, and lighting quick the petrificus rebounded on Draco without him even seeing how it had happened. He found himself frozen, hand out, eyes fixed forward, jaw clamped shut.

"Good posture; a little weak in the grip, but nothing a few weeks' lessons won't cure," Regulus said, circling him, and now Draco saw what he had

expected to see first. A predatory, dangerous gleam in the eyes, like his mother's but paler, and a wolfish grin on a face that looked like Aunt Bellatrix's. "Nice leg placement, good sweeping robes. Bit slow on the uptake, but that's not insoluble either."

He came to stand in front of Draco and bent slightly to look directly into his frozen eyes. "I know what you're thinking, cousin. Believe me, and I sympathise."

He took Draco's wand out of his fingers and spun it across the back of his hand, catching it and making it disappear before Draco's eyes. "You'll get that back in a week or two at the outside, if you're diligent," he said. The hex was lifted, and Regulus caught Draco's elbow as he stumbled.

"Toasting forks are by the hearth; it might be summer but it certainly doesn't feel it this far up," Regulus said, turning back to the bubbling concoction on the stove. He took out some of the liquid, added a pinch of white powder from a canister on the counter, and stirred, then slung the thickened liquid back into the pot. "Put the bread on the forks and get them started; they'll be lovely by the time we've eaten. *I'd like to find me brother – the one that's in the army, I don't know where he's stationed; in Cork or in Killarney,*" he sang, as he continued to tend the pot.

Draco had to admit, hunched over his bowl of stew and with the bread toasting by the warm fire, that it was good food, whatever was in it. Regulus watched him as he ate, and took only a sparing helping for himself. His line about making only enough for one person had been a bluff; there were easily a week's worth of meals still left in the pot that sat warming on the stove.

"Let me tell you what you've believed," Regulus said, around a bite of beef. "When you were a child, you heard stories about your cousin Sirius and the glorious martyr to the cause that he'd been. You thought your purebred cousin was a hero and you admired him and wished he'd come take you away, because your parents didn't notice you except to tell you how a pureblood should behave. That should have been an interesting experience, by the by -- I suppose your father garbled it. The Malfoys never did have any idea of how polite society truly behaved. You heard far fewer stories about your cousin Regulus, because he'd tried to turn tail and run and been killed for his efforts."

Draco stared at him. "You're a Legilimens."

"No, but I grew up in a house very much like yours. I used to wish Sirius would come and take me away, after he started school; I used to dream about it. He always protected me from our parents. Oh, we grew up knowing all the proper things to say and do, but it wasn't as though we didn't suffer if we failed," he said, with a momentary frown. "At any rate, neither he nor I have turned out up to the expectations of those in charge, so it's a moot point. But I want you to understand that I know precisely what you are feeling, and I'm two steps ahead of you. You can trust me, because I know what your future holds."

"You haven't told me what you're doing alive," Draco pointed out.

"Singing, mostly," Regulus said.

"That wasn't what I meant!"

"I know. Oh, child. I couldn't kill a man, and he wanted me to; so I asked a man to kill me, and was reborn as Seth Boardman -- they called me Stubby on tour, sounded more edgy I suppose. Did you really think you could kill a man?"

Draco ducked his head. "Yes."

"But you couldn't? Good, that's your blood telling true. We may be hearty men, foolish men, and arrogant men, but the Blacks are not wicked men. We simply haven't got it in us. You knew it was wrong, and that's your sense of duty, blooming rather late to be sure; you knew no good could come of it, and that's your sense of self-preservation, blooming even later."

"We aren't on his side, are we?" Draco whispered. "You and Professor Snape, I mean --"

"On whose side? Voldemort's? Good heavens no, are you a fool? And you aren't either, you just don't know it yet. You'll come round, though. *Together we'd go roving o'er the mountains of Killkenney, And I swear he'd treat me better than me darlin' sporting Jenny,*" Regulus trailed off into laughter when he saw the look on Draco's face. "You're not a brother, but cousins are close enough, and certainly you've been enlisted; I'm a bit old to be called up to active service, but a Black never shirks when he's asked."

"I'm not on your side!"

"No, but you will be. That's of no matter, I won't argue politics with you tonight." Regulus broke off a piece of bread and sopped up the dregs of his stew with it. "Pass me that guitar," he said, dusting off his fingers. He waved at the black case in the corner and it opened to reveal the stringed instrument Draco had uncovered earlier, probably some Muggle device by the look of it. Draco hooked his hand in the hole in the middle --

"Not like that!" Regulus said, aghast. Draco paused. "The neck!"

"The what?"

"The pointy bit! My god, child!"

Draco grasped the long, straight part of the instrument and carried it gingerly to Regulus, who took it from him and stroked it affectionately, resting the fat part over his knee.

"Never seen a Muggle guitar before?" he asked, unnecessarily. "Pay attention -- lessons start tomorrow."

"On that?" Draco asked disdainfully. "Why?"

Regulus raised an eyebrow. "I need an accompanist, and there's nothing better to do. I'll make you a better wizard, you know."

He fixed one hand on the pointy -- the neck, and the other across the hole in the middle of it, fingers hovering above the metal wires stretched on it. Finally he lowered his hand and played a few notes, plucking the wires with his fingers. Draco listened. He could just about pick out the tune from earlier.

"Well, *sirigim duraham da, Wack fall the daddy oh* --" Regulus sang to himself, then pressed his palm down to still the sound. "Perhaps not quite germane to the situation we find ourselves in, eh? Something a little more plaintive..."

He stroked the wires again and Draco listened, breaking his toast into small pieces and eating it with his fingers as Regulus played.

"I've taken a few liberties with the words..." he said, over the music. "But it keeps the general gist. The tune's an old Muggle song. You'll like it."

*Out of the night that covers me  
Black as the pit and cold  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquered soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance,  
I've winced but not cried 'loud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head remains unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms death's eternal shade  
And yet the menace of the years  
Shall find me unafraid.*

Draco recognised the quote he'd made earlier; *this place of wrath and tears*. He raised his eyes to the carving over the door, the final verse of the song, which now made more sense than it had. He joined in, hesitantly on the first two lines and then more forcefully on the last two, certain now of the tune.

*It matters not how strait the gate  
How charged with pain the scroll  
I am the master of my fate  
I captain my own soul.*

Regulus pressed his hand flat against the wires again. "Good. I'm glad we're agreed."

"Agreed on what?"

Regulus lifted a finger and pointed behind him, to the last stanza inscribed over the door. "You captain your own soul, young Draco Black. It's time you started learning how."

END