June 9th, 2001

There was something ever so comforting about routine.

The day began just as Harry knew it would: grabbing coffee from the nearby cafe, passing Luna on his way to work, getting a biscuit from the office break room, before making his way to his office. The office that he shared with Malfoy. Unfortunately.

Harry did all of this as routinely as he always did, even doing his routine tap on his hat as he passed
the Weasley shop. He wasn't sure why he always did it; it gave him a sense of normalcy, he supposed, as if he were in control of what he did. It wasn't that he was into Trelawney's whole idea of fate and lucky signs and whatnot, but he just liked it. He could stop if he wanted. He could take a different route to work and not see Luna, he could go to another cafe, and he could firmly keep his hands by his side to keep himself from tapping his hat.

He supposed that the chaos of war had made him enjoy a quiet, organised life far more than he thought he would. He was fairly certain he wasn't OCD, though. He didn't hate it when he did something abnormal; he simply felt more comfortable in a routine.

In contrast, he suspected Malfoy was OCD. Everything was meticulously arranged on his desk, he had a detailed schedule above his work, which he always stuck to, and he never wore patterned clothing. He always fell quiet when Harry wore patterned clothing, which he often did after seeing that it bothered Malfoy. He had considered that perhaps Malfoy simply just didn't like patterned clothing rather than having a natural aversion to its design, but the outcome was still the same.

Malfoy hadn't actually given Harry any trouble in the whole year they'd been sharing an office as Aurors. He was mostly quiet, subdued and content to get on with his work. That didn't mean that Harry liked him. Harry rather enjoyed antagonising Malfoy and was always disappointed when Malfoy didn't acknowledge his efforts. Call him childish, but he just wanted attention.

Seriously, though, he didn't understand how Malfoy had gone from obnoxious, superior and smug to downtrodden, disinterested and morose in the space of a few years. How did he not care about Harry anymore when he'd done his utter best to irritate him every minute of every day at Hogwarts? It didn't make sense.

On this particular morning, Harry grabbed a biscuit- custard cream- and strode to his office on the fourth floor, foregoing the Floo. He glanced into Ron's office to see if he'd arrived yet but was greeted by an empty chair and piles of paperwork. Honestly, who knew being an Auror meant so much paperwork?

He went down the corridor- and paused.

From his position, steps away from his door, he could hear... sobbing? It was coming from inside. Malfoy?

Feeling an odd sort of déjà vu, and a shameful reminder of what happened in that bathroom five years ago, Harry drew his wand and warily stepped inside. Whatever, Harry thought derisively, he's probably just noticed a grey hair. That was a funny thought. Malfoy losing his strikingly blonde hair at twenty-one.

He shut the door behind him and was shocked to see both his and Malfoy's desk empty. But the sound of crying only grew. Well, perhaps crying wasn't the word- it was more like gasping. Harry glances around, so intent on finding Malfoy that he managed to completely miss what was right in front of him.

Then he saw it.

Someone had completely trashed his workspace.

Malfoy's desk, Malfoy's perfectly and systematically organised desk, was a mess.

His pristine schedule was tilted on the wall, no longer charmed precisely horizontal to the wall. His pen pot, a rather odd thing for a Pureblood to possess considering that it was a Muggle invention,
was tipped on its side, pens spread across a disarrayed pile of paper, and scattered across the floor. His clock, also Muggle, was a mere ten minutes out, though Harry knew how infuriating that could be. His immaculately pressed robes, which he always folded with care and draped over the back of his chair when he got to work, was crumpled on the floor. It struck Harry that Malfoy had no photos on his desk of anyone he loved.

And it suddenly became abundantly clear where Malfoy was.

Harry, with no thoughts of antagonism for the blonde, sprinted around behind his own desk, to find Malfoy hunched over in the small gap between the desk surface and the floor. His bony arms were tightly coiled around his equally skinny legs, where they were drawn up to his chest.

Malfoy was gasping, short, panicked breaths, while he emitted a high, keening sound between breaths. His whole body was shuddering, and he looked as if he couldn't breathe. Sweat soaked his forehead, and Harry could see the dangerously fast pulse of his heartbeat in his neck.

Panic attack, Malfoy was having a panic attack.

But what could Harry do?

He had never had one himself, he barely even knew what happened during one, and he certainly didn't know how to stop one.

But, dammit, he was a Gryffindor and he didn't like seeing people in distress.

"Malfoy?" he said, gingerly crouching down in front of the man. Malfoy didn't acknowledge his presence, and probably wasn't aware of his presence. He just kept hyperventilating.

Harry quickly cast a silencing charm on the office, so that no one overheard. He was completely out of his element. Fighting criminals with a mere stick of wood he could do, but comforting his old-school-rival-turned-office-partner? What the hell? This wasn't right. Malfoy wasn't supposed to have feelings, wasn't supposed to need comforting, particularly by Harry. Because if he did have feelings, then Harry was about to feel hella guilty.

There was no one close to Malfoy who he could contact; his parents were dead, and his friends were either also dead or in Azkaban.

Damn. He really has no one, Harry thought, thinking of how Malfoy always left alone and never received any personal owls or notices.

"M-Malfoy?" he tried again, shuffling closer and wincing as his voice stuttered. Still no response. Fine. "Draco?" The name felt strangely foreign on his lips.

This time Malfoy seemed to register him.

His eyes flared wider, if that was even possible, and he took a single, jerking gasp. His terrified gaze was suddenly fixed on Harry with such an intensity that Harry almost shrank back. He hadn't seen so much emotion in those eyes in the entire time they'd been colleagues.

"Potter?" he rasped.

Harry just stared at him, before it dawned on him that he should respond in some way, so he nodded rapidly. And this prior realisation caused another realisation, which was that he should try to appear calmer. If he was calm, then hopefully Malfoy would follow.
"Malfoy. It's okay. Just breathe." he said, voice a steady volume and tempo. He decided against putting his hand on Malfoy's shoulder, thinking it would just freak him out further. Unfortunately, Malfoy was already freaked out.

"That's...what I'm trying...to do!" Malfoy yelled, actually yelled. But then he lurched back into gasping again. Harry threw his conscience out the window and just leaned forward and grabbed Malfoy's hand, pulling it to his chest tightly. The other man shot him a frantic look but did nothing to pull away.

"Breathe. It's okay. You're okay." Harry intoned, taking slow, deep breaths in the hope that Malfoy would copy them. "We can fix this. There's no danger. Everything is okay. Just breathe."

Malfoy did as he was told, closing his eyes.

He kept this up for a few minutes, beginning to wonder whether he should call for some medical help, when the hand clasped tightly in his own relaxed. Malfoy's shuddering was now subsiding, and his breathing was evening out as his panic alleviated. Harry thanked anyone who was listening that this was almost over.

"Malfoy?" he asked tentatively.

The Slytherin slowly opened his eyes, and his silver gaze rested on Harry. He swallowed.

"Potter?" he whispered, and Harry nodded. "Thank you."

The room fell silent. Harry had absolutely no idea what he should do now, or say now, so he just nodded again and rose to his feet, setting about tidying up Malfoy's half of the room. Several spells later, it looked as it always did: perfectly arranged. Harry almost grinned at his handiwork, as the feeling off accomplishment filled him, as did the pride that came with helping someone.

Behind him, Malfoy stood up- somewhat shakily- and went over to his desk.

"It was Dawlish." He said. "I saw him leaving the office this morning just as I arrived, but he left before I could do anything."

Harry thought of Dawlish, his older, more aggressive fellow Auror. Dawlish had always been a pain in Harry's side ever since he had joined, always trying to take credit for Harry's case solves, and steal his cases. Luckily, Kingsley was not fond of him and he rarely succeeded. However, he was a loud person with a large presence, which meant that you always knew what he thought of you. Dawlish had always been upfront about his hatred for Malfoy, so Harry knew that Malfoy was telling the truth, and this infuriated him.

They sat down in silence. Harry pulled out a file requesting his signature - but he found he couldn't concentrate on it at all. The whole ordeal was weighing on him, and the words on the page just began to blur together even as he stared at it. Merlin. He had to do something. He'd been mean to Malfoy for long enough. He sighed, and he skipped to the bottom of the document, scrawling his name on the dotted line absent-mindedly.

"I'll complain then." He said, in as firm a voice as possible. "I never liked Dawlish anyway."

Harry looked away from him then, not wanting to think about the anger this incurred in him, or the gratitude on Malfoy's face and the funny things it made him feel.

The rest of the day passed by without conversation.
"Explain to me what happened to Malfoy's desk."

Dawlish gave Kingsley and Harry an honest looking smile, as well as a nod. "Well, Sir, I'm afraid it was all a complete accident." he began, sounding so genuine that Harry had to catch himself. "One of my recent assignments resulted in me taking a criminal into custody, and unfortunately he tried to escape while on the fourth floor. He ran into Malfoy's office and I was forced to use violence as a means to detain him, resulting in the mess."

Completely fabricated, Harry knew. But points for his creativity. He'd clearly had minimal time to think of an alibi.

Still, it was wrong.

Unfortunately, Kingsley was nodding along, writing something on the paper before him. Beside him, Malfoy narrowed his eyes and seemed a moment away from snarling. Harry saw his fists clench at his sides.

"Would you be willing to confirm that under Veritaserum?" He hissed.

Dawlish only rolled his eyes. "Malfoy, you may have a flair for the dramatics, but you don't have any authority for a suggestion like that. If Kingsley deems my reason valid, then such a request is ridiculous and unnecessary."

That was harsh, Harry thought, as he winced. He waited for Malfoy to explode into a fiery pool of rage but was sorely disappointed when Malfoy only stared for a few moments, before rising and striding from the room. He looked oddly resigned, as if he were used to such treatment.

Harry watched him go, a surge of guilt rearing its ugly head within him. He had said he'd help him, and yet so far, he'd remained silent. It was becoming more apparent to Harry that these things happened far more frequently to Malfoy than he'd ever known. This made him feel a strange sort of pity for the man who seemed to be so alone in the world.

"...ought to be fired." Harry heard Dawlish chuckle, and he whipped his head back around to stare at the older man.

"What?" He asked sharply. He barely recognised his own voice.

Dawlish seemed surprised at his unexpected reaction. "Well...he is an ex- Death Eater. He clearly can't be trusted to keep his office tidy let alone protect our people! Honestly, Kingsley, it's a wonder you even hired him in the first place."

Harry was speechless for a moment. He suddenly realised the extent of the situation, and the extent of people's hatred for Malfoy; Merlin, to think he'd been enabling them, and allowed himself to indulge in such ignorance.

"Auror Malfoy happens to be very good at his job." He snapped.

Dawlish laughed but his eyes were confused. "Come on Harry. Yesterday you were bemoaning having to share an office with him and now you're singing his praises? Please. You don't have to defend him just because Kingsley's here. We all know he's scum."
Harry just stared. The words felt like a slap to the face and the insult wasn't even directed at him. It just didn't sit right with him that people felt it was okay to call others scum. He didn't care that Kingsley looked about to say something, perhaps to admonish Dawlish, or restrain Harry.

"Malfoy can hardly be described as scum. He is exceptional at his job because he's not wasting his time trashing his colleagues' offices."

Harry stood, anger thrumming in his chest, and prepared to leave when Dawlish's next words halted him completely.

"No, he's just torturing their muggle family members instead."

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"You got suspended?"

Malfoy's voice, normally so calm and collected, was shrill and thick with shock.

Harry smirked wryly at him. "Only for the rest of the day."

"But why?"

Here Harry had to laugh, even though his own embarrassment warred with the amusement. Malfoy raised a perfect eyebrow at him expectantly. "I punched Dawlish in the face."

He was met with silence. Malfoy just stared at him. Then, he said, "But why?"

"...Because he said you were scum and that you spent your time torturing muggles." Harry was almost afraid by the sudden rise of anger in Malfoy's eyes. "And I thought it was wrong. He, uh, can't treat you like that."

Malfoy still looked furious. It was an almost exciting thing to see emotion in his eyes again.

"Don't worry, Dawlish was suspended for two months for 'inappropriate, unprofessional and prejudiced comments towards a colleague'. Dawlish is a prat, so... he deserved it." Silence followed his words, and Harry glanced back over to see Malfoy with a peculiar expression on his face. He looked to be biting the inside of his mouth hard and his face was slowly gaining colour.

And then suddenly, Malfoy burst out laughing. He bent double over his desk, and Harry had to chuckle at the violent shaking of his shoulders and at his clear amusement. Malfoy straightened again and Harry snorted at his red face was. Malfoy grinned at him, completely unexpectedly.

"Well damn, Potter."

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"Don't you ever get lonely?"

Harry instantly knew it was the wrong thing to say as soon as Malfoy's face shut off, all mirth disappearing from his eyes, his mouth hardening. Why the hell would he say something like that?

It had now been a few weeks since the incident, and Harry and Malfoy could almost say there were friends. Almost. The only thing that was holding Harry back was the fact that he had suddenly and rather shockingly begun to see Malfoy as attractive. It was true. He was tall and slim, probably too
slim, but that was something to worry about at another time. His skin was a startling white, beautifully smooth and incredibly susceptible blushes, as Harry had discovered. His eyes were a striking grey that shone in his sharp face, his white hair a halo that suited the rest of his pallor. He often wore black robes, despite the dress code, which contrasted his pale looks and contributed to the whole monochrome look about him.

And it seemed that Malfoy had begun to trust him slightly, opening up more and more and becoming rather pleasant to converse with. He didn't speak much about personal life, though Harry knew better than to ask.

Or at least he had thought he did.

He felt his face drain of colour, one hand rising jerkily and waving at Malfoy as if that would take back what he said. "Uh- I mean, that's not what I meant. I'm sorry-"

But to his surprise, Malfoy's face just cleared completely into an expression of tiredness as he rested his head back and closed his eyes. "Potter, stop." He didn't elaborate further.

"Sorry-"

"Oh my God, stop!" Malfoy's voice had risen in the mere space of seconds and some semblance of colour had flushed his cheeks. Harry fell silent. He was shocked by both the muggle exclamation and the sudden emotion in Malfoy's voice, which was sorely missing these days. "I know what you meant, Potter. I don't care. Just don't get all Hufflepuff-y on me, I hate that."

Harry didn't know whether to press further or to wallow in his guilt, but it seemed Malfoy had decided to answer his question after all. "Sometimes. Yeah, sometimes it gets lonely."

His voice was so casual, but what he was saying was so awful that Harry couldn't reconcile this Malfoy with the one he'd known at Hogwarts, or even the one he'd found trembling under Harry's desk. This wasn't right. According to routine, Malfoy wasn't meant to be so... empty.

Then Malfoy laughed, a bitter, humourless sound that stirred all the pity in Harry's heart.

"Who am I kidding? It's lonely all the time. Literally no one cares about me, which means no one visits me, which means my tiny flat gets quite lonely. Especially at Christmas. I haven't had a present in four years. People are supposed to see each other, eat nice food together and give each other stuff that no one really cares about but it matters all the same because it's proof that someone cares. I just want someone to care. About me. Not the Mark on my arm."

And damn, if that wasn't the saddest thing Harry had ever heard. It took him a moment to realise that Malfoy's eyes had filled with tears, though only one escaped. Harry had to fight the unbelievable urge to join him in his crying and settled on remaining still from where he sat at his own desk, watching Malfoy.

"It's okay. You don't have to tell me this," he said quietly. He didn't like seeing Malfoy cry. He'd seen too many people crying in his life. Ginny cried loudly and Hermione cried with deep, shuddering breaths and Ron cried with gruff sobs that he always tried to stop. But Malfoy did none of these things (except if he was having a panic attack). He just sat still and quiet, tears silently trickling down his cheeks.

And, in some ways, that was worse. He couldn't even cry passionately anymore.

"No. You helped me before, so I owe you an answer. Besides, if I don't talk to someone, I'll probably go mad. At school, I had friends. Lots of friends I hardly knew and a few friends who
meant the world to me. They're dead now, or in Azkaban. But, although they loved me, they never understood. They never understood my aversion to chaos and the panic it would make me feel. They always looked at me weirdly, and it was always the thing we didn't talk about. At the time, I hated it and I wished they would understand me, but now... I'd give anything to have them back."

Harry knew the feeling, as these words sparked images of Sirius and Fred and Dobby and Remus and Tonks and his parents, and everyone else he lost. But then he thought of Hermione and the Weasleys and Neville and Luna and everyone he had now, and he couldn't imagine being without them or being without anyone. For the first time ever, Harry Potter realised all that he did have when met by someone who had none of that.

Malfoy's colleagues hated him, society spat on him, he had no friends and no one to share Christmas with, and the whole world was telling him just to give up, but he still found the strength to get up in the morning and come to work and try to prove that he was more than what everyone thought he was.

Perhaps Malfoy should have been in Gryffindor.

Harry didn't say he was sorry, because words like that were meaningless. Instead, he stood and slowly walked over to the other desk, where he laid a hand on Malfoy's shoulder.

Malfoy smiled faintly, his body leaning into Harry's touch.

And from then on, Harry vowed to show Malfoy he was cared about.

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It started out with small things.

Harry began to grab an extra coffee in the morning, having casually asked which order Malfoy preferred. The look of surprise on his face the first time Harry had done it had been upsetting, but as Harry had continued to do it, he became more used to it.

Harry also began to call him Draco. It showed that he cared about him as a person, rather than just his name and his past. In return, Draco called him Harry.

He would also casually ask him about his day, no matter how sad an answer he got. Draco started to tell him more and more things that friends would tell each other, like how he had loads of work or he had bought himself an ice cream for the first time in three years. Harry secreted away that information, memorising the flavour.

And then, Harry had asked him to a pub to get together with his friends. It had been... interesting. Interesting, but not awful. It had taken a few mean comments and a whispered apology from Draco, before he had run from the room, almost in tears, for everyone to realise that Harry was serious about wanting Draco to be included. He had made that perfectly clear when he yelled at them all in front of an entire pub.

Draco had returned, pale and silent, to an awkward round of apologies. From then on, they had all worked extra hard to incorporate Draco into conversation, and Harry had firmly stuck by his side, one hand on his back.

He was invited to all the following gatherings, and not just at Harry's insistence. His friends had actually become fond of Draco, especially after he profusely apologised for everything that happened in school.
It turned out that Draco was sharply intelligent, witty and incredibly easy to talk to. Harry could barely reconcile this Draco with the hateful one he had known at school. Harry was finding that liked seeing Draco smile, liked his laugh and his hair and his face, and his lips. He wanted to kiss those lips, and see if it was everything he had hoped it would be. Did he love Draco? It was far too soon to know that. Was he in love with Draco? He wasn't sure. But he definitely liked him.

If Harry was being honest, it was going great, especially since he was preparing to ask Draco out.

But, of course, something had to go wrong. Because he was Harry Potter, after all.

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The day began just as Harry knew it would.

Grabbing coffee from the nearby cafe, passing Luna on his way to work, getting a biscuit from the office break room, before making his way to his office. Over the past two months, Harry had grown accustomed to meeting Draco and giving him his coffee in their office.

But today that didn't happen.

And Harry didn't like that. It meant he had no idea what to expect.

Today, Harry sauntered into their room, holding two still steaming cups of coffee, ready to greet Draco and tell him about the awful TV show that was on last night- when the sight that met him froze all of these plans.

Draco was stood by his desk, one hand pressed to his mouth and the other efficiently picking up everything on his desk and placing them in a box. His half of the room was sparse, everything stripped bare of Draco's belongings. The timetable was gone, his papers were stacked in the box and his Auror robes were nowhere to be seen.

Harry stared at him in horror.

"What- what are you doing?" he choked out. The thought of Draco leaving terrified him a hell of a lot more than he was prepared for.

Draco barely spared him a glance, his eyes bloodshot and tired, as if he hadn't slept at all last night and had cried instead. His gaze was distant and desolate, the familiar emptiness returning. He continued to quietly pack his possessions tidily into the box in that meticulous way of his.

"Draco. What- why?" Harry persisted. His heart was hammering in his chest and a sick feeling was rising in his stomach.

This time Draco looked at him. Harry's heart dropped further at the coolness in his eyes and the... betrayal. But what had he done?

"I'm surprised you don't already know, Potter." Harry flinched at the use of his surname, and Draco looked equally pained, but he continued. His voice was quiet and void of emotion. "A new law is being ratified decreeing that no witch or wizard bearing the Dark Mark is to have a wand."

Harry's breath caught in his throat.

"And since having a wand is required to be an Auror..."

But he didn't finish. Harry had already figured it out.
"You're not allowed to work here anymore."

Draco nodded mutely, returning to his packing. It seemed as if there was nothing left but still, he kept going. It only took a few minutes to finish off, but Harry stood stock still for the entirety of the time, shaken to his core. When Draco was done, he picked the box up and moved from behind his desk.

Slowly, he walked to the door, and Harry could see the gleam of tears in his eyes.

"Draco." He whispered, reaching out to take his hand for comfort, support, or whatever the hell he wanted to call it. But Draco flinched away as if his touch burned.

"Don't." he murmured brokenly. "You've done enough."

*Harry nearly exploded with tension. He could feel his magic sparking out like a live wire, shaking the lights and making the desk tremble, but he didn't care. "What do you mean? I don't want this! I don't want you to go! *Please, stay!*"

A tear spilled down Draco's pale cheek.

"I can't, Harry. You made sure of that."

"How?"

Draco inhaled shakily, tears now freely spilling down his face as he turned away in anguish. The sight broke Harry's heart.

"The forms that were needed to approve this law had been signed by you. Your signature was right on the line saying that you agreed with this policy and wanted it to be official." His voice had dropped to a whisper.

Harry nearly staggered back in shock. He had no recollection of this whatsoever, which meant that someone *had* to have forged it. There was no way he would sign something that disgusting... except if he hadn't read it properly, or even at all. His mind flashed back to the day of Draco's panic attack and the form he had scrawled his name on unthinkingly, without reading.

He'd done this.

*No. Merlin, no.*

And now Draco was paying the price.

Harry actually thought he would be sick at the thought, and the guilt that followed and engulfed him.

"Draco, I'm so sorry." He began. His voice sounded nothing like him. "I am so sorry. I will make this right. Nothing I can say or do will make up for this, but you have to believe me when I say that I didn't know what I was signing! I would never have knowingly signed it-"

Draco cut him off. "Spare me, Harry. I've been let down by enough people in my life. For me, the worst part of all this is that you actually made me feel, for the first time in years, that I was worth something. That I deserved happiness. Or, at least that's what I thought it was."

He sighed, as if collecting himself and turned away from Harry and towards the door.

"I'm sorry I wasn't good enough for you."
And then, he was gone.

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Harry didn't see Draco for several weeks after that.

It wasn't for lack of trying. He had gone to Draco's flat countless times and had been turned away by the neighbours who had insisted that Draco didn't want to see him. The last time he had gone, the landlord had told him that Draco had moved out. Apparently, he'd been unable to afford it as he couldn't pay his rent anymore.

Harry had scoured what felt like all of London for Draco, including the seized Malfoy Manor, but to no avail. Each new lead transpired simply to be a dead end.

The empty desk in the office hadn't been filled, either. Harry had refused, even after Kingsley had repeatedly asked him to find him a new office partner, because no one else deserved to sit in such a special place. No one else was worthy.

Harry's friends were also angry with him for what he'd done. Hermione had had a right go at him, fairly, in the moments after she'd discovered it, and then proceeded to ignore him for a full week. They were all assisting him in locating Draco, but none of them had yet to have any luck either. Hermione was working all around the clock to get the new law revoked, using Draco's case as her evidence on its harshness. She was making progress, but it was slow. She'd managed to get some people to come forwards in defence of Draco, including people he'd saved in the line of duty.

They all stopped giving him a hard time when he quite spontaneously came apart in front of them.

George, who seemed to have grown the fondest of Draco despite everything, made a veiled comment about what happened, and Harry just snapped. He didn't mean to yell at them until his voice was hoarse and his eyes were brimming with angry tears but he was just so fed up with being held continually accounted for, and reminded of, something he'd stupidly done in the past - something he was trying to undo.

He realised that this was what Draco must have felt like since the war, when encountering those who used him as a scapegoat for all the suffering they'd endured.

Merlin, he hated it. It was awful.

Harry went to work each day, and each day he glanced over the empty desk as if the sheer force of his gaze would materialise Draco.

Dammit, why was he so goddamn stupid?

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"Mate, I think we've found him."

It was December 15th, 2001, and still there was no snow. It wasn't expected to snow, but Harry felt the disappointment, nonetheless.

"What?" he nearly yelled. His mind had narrowed down to the sight of Ron handing in the doorway, face alight with hope. Ron nodded at again, stepping into the office with a grin.
"Turns out a friend of a friend of Ginny saw him going into this building- a block of flats- only last week. Don't look at me like that, I know it sounds unreliable, but it's worth a shot, right?"

The excitement in Ron's voice made him sound very young all of a sudden, and Harry thought of another time, back at Hogwarts, before the war and before Draco... No. Now was the time to find Draco.

Because, yes, he did love him.

He frowned. Maybe it was too soon for that. He didn't want to scare Draco off by rushing into things as he always did and confessing his sudden undying love to a man he wasn't even dating. He would settle for caring a good deal about Draco for now and go from there. That was better.

He jerked to his feet, grabbed his coat and Apparated away a moment after Ron gave him the location, despite his friend's call for him to wait a goddamn second.

When his feet touched the ground again, he saw he was on an unknown pavement with people milling around him, clearly unperturbed by his sudden appearance. They had to all be wizards then. Thank goodness, he thought as he realised how badly this could have gone. Kingsley would have been furious. Several gave him shocked looks when they realised who he was, but he paid them no mind.

His gaze was fixed on the ropy block of flats before him. It was the only building that could be a flat, as the rest were shops or small business firms. The flats really were ugly and in awful condition. There was graffiti everywhere, cracked windows, peeling paint, and scarily precarious looking walls.

No, Draco would not live here.

Harry marched into the building, head held high and determined. He was going to find Draco, drag him back to his much nicer flat and make him live there.

There he went again, getting ahead of himself. Merlin, he really was more impulsive than he had thought. What was he going to do? Kidnap Draco and force him to live with Harry?

Whatever. He couldn't think about that now. He began to knock on various doors, asking shamelessly if they'd seen a gorgeous blonde man recently, and if so, where. He did realise that this made him seem rather dodgy, but the only one to question him was an old woman who threatened to call the Aurors if he didn't explain himself. He hastily explained himself.

Many of the occupants stared at him as if he suddenly had a halo, and Harry found himself signing a lot of autographs before he was able to find Draco.

Finally, he came to stand outside door on one of the higher floors.

Draco lived here, in this dump. Draco was on the other side of this door. Draco was close to him... Harry could have screamed at the nervous tension this brought.

He brought a shaking hand to the door, hovering it over the wood before knocking.

The door made a disconcerting breaking sound.

There was only silence on the other end. No sound of anyone getting to their feet, or walking to the door, or even asking who was there. Harry's heart dropped for what felt like the thousandth time.
But just as he was about to knock again, there came a scraping sound, and the door was being pushed open.

In the doorway stood Draco Malfoy.

But he didn't look quite right.

His hair was vaguely lanky and hung around his face, completely unlike the pale halo of gloss that Harry had grown accustomed to. His skin was paler, and he seemed to have lost weight. His cheekbones were prominent, cheeks hollower than they had been. The wrist that held the door open was frightfully thin.

He looked physically worse than he had been, but what struck Harry the most was how tired he appeared, judging by the purple bags beneath his eyes.

"Harry... You're here."

Harry realised that he'd been gaping in horror at the Slytherin and smoothed his expression down in a way that Draco used to do. He hoped it was convincing, though he never had been very good at acting.

"Draco, Merlin. I... I'm so sorry. I didn't know you'd end up here in terrible place like this." No, that wasn't what he had wanted to say. He shook his head. "I've been looking for you since you left. We've all been looking for you, thinking something had happened, that you'd been hurt, or..."

He couldn't say it.

Draco raised one eyebrow in silence.

"Wait, isn't this your idea of hell? I mean, look at this place." Harry asked. Draco, somewhat reluctantly, shook his head.

"No, actually, I think living here has been positive because there not a thing I can do about the instability and everything. Although I make sure that I keep everything I can organised."

"When was the last time you ate?" Harry asked suddenly.

Draco glanced at the floor, looking embarrassed. "I'm not starving myself intentionally, don't worry. It's just that I work long shifts in a few nearby places, like the shop down the road, so I often forget to eat, and I don't get to sleep much." He paused. "It was hard getting people to hire me initially and even if they wanted to, they couldn't because I don't have a wand. You'd be surprised how much you can't do without them." He sounded matter of fact. Harry hated it.

"Come with me." He said.

Draco's head snapped up so that he was staring at Harry. "What?"

"Come with me. Live with me." He hadn't meant to say it so abruptly, but now it was done and he would have to deal with it.

Draco shook his head at him, looking vaguely confused.

"No." he replied, far more bluntly than expected.

"Why?" Harry's voice dropped to match the volume of Draco's. He thought that he could hear his own heart pounding and wondered if Draco could as well.
"Because... I can't. You don't want that; you don't want me." The tone of his voice made Harry want to cry all over again and throw himself to his knees in front of him and beg him to forgive him and kiss his fingers and pretty lips.

"I do want you." He insisted. "I don't think I've ever wanted anyone more. I was stupid, and all of this is my fault. I promise that I'll fix this, and you'll get your wand and your job back. Just come with me, please." This was the closest Harry had ever come to begging, and he didn't even care.

But resolve seemed to have settled in Draco's eyes, and he was able to finally glimpse the old Slytherin that had long since been buried.

Draco took a deep breath and squared Harry with a look. "I'll live with you if you can get my wand back."

And then he shut the door.

December 25th, 2001

*And have yourselves a merry little Christmas now.*

Harry knocked on the door with his free hand, the other carefully holding a wrapped-up gift, albeit a small, compact one. The door made the same creaking sound as it did before, especially when Draco opened it and almost reeled back at the sight of Harry. He looked even worse than he had before, with what seemed to be sleep deprivation joining the mix, but Harry had never seen anyone so beautiful.

"Harry? What are you doing here? Isn't it Christmas-"

But anything he might have said was lost when Harry leaned forwards on impulse and kissed Draco full on the mouth.

Draco stood frozen.

Harry pulled away, smiling at the dazed look on his face.

"Merry Christmas, Draco. In honour of me being a fool and you having not received a present in four years, I have a gift for you. I think you'll like it." He placed the object in Draco's bony hands, ignoring the frailty to them and mentally reminding himself to buy Draco lots of food in the future.

Draco was still motionless with shock.

"What... how-" he tried but seemed to abandon the effort later on. Instead, he began to open the present, his gaze suspicious.

Harry watched him eagerly.

Draco's long fingers unwrapped the reindeer wrapping paper he'd borrowed by Teddy, smiling slightly at the pattern- and then went still as he saw what the present was.

Inside a long, thin box sat a hawthorn wand, precisely 10", with a unicorn core.

Draco gasped, but it came out as more of a sob, a choked, happy sound. His mouth moved as if he
were trying to say something, yet no sound came out and he ended up looking like an adorable goldfish. He looked up at Harry, tears shining in his eyes and an overjoyed smile gracing his lips. He looked just like a child. His gaze was questioning, but not in the least accusatory.

"Hermione managed to rally public opinion against the new law, forcing the Ministry to abolish it mere months after it was introduced," Harry clarified. "She used you as an example mainly, as well as some others who had been getting their lives on track, and one woman who wasn't allowed healthcare when she needed it. Hermione made people realise what the law actually meant, and some people you helped as an Auror even came forward in your defence. That was pretty great." Harry smiled. "But this is the best part."

Draco laughed slightly breathlessly, entwining his arms around Harry's neck. Harry's own arms lifted up to wrap tightly around his thin frame as he breathed in Draco's scent, his eyes closing.

"Can I be an Auror again?" Draco asked, his voice sounding hopeful even as his expression remained wary.

"Absolutely." Harry confirmed. "Kingsley wants to personally apologise for that. You can have your same desk and position, and whatever else you want. Within reason, obviously." Harry grinned at him.

Draco grinned back then suddenly fell silent. His expression slid into something surprisingly coy, almost reminiscent of the sneaky looks he used to sport in Hogwarts when he thought he'd bested Harry (which wasn't often). His mouth curled into a sly smile, maddeningly seductive. His hands remained clasped around Harry's neck, so that they were now close enough to lean in, and ...

"I want you." Draco whispered.

Harry grinned as they moved towards each other, lips almost touching... when Harry pulled away.

"You can have me. But first you have to move in with me. Permanently."

Draco laughed, and then tears were in Harry's eyes at the sound of it. "How very Slytherin of you. I'm impressed." He laughed again. "Okay, fine, I'll move in with you if you need me so badly."

His eyes were bright with mirth and happiness. Harry grinned into the kiss as their lips met in the distance between them. The kiss was perfect, like a gust of warm air on a Winter's day, or a gasp of air in the ocean. Draco's hands tangled in Harry's hair and Harry's hands cupped Draco's cheeks, sliding over the sharp cheekbones. Harry would never grow tired of his, he knew, as happiness overwhelmed him.

They drew apart, but their arms wrapped tighter around each other.

"Thank you." Draco whispered.

"Anything for you." Harry said honestly.

Draco drew back and raised one haughty, aristocratic eyebrow at him. Harry was insanely happy to see his old personality returning.

"So, do I get to see this new house anytime today or what?"

Harry nodded, smiling. "Obviously. But first, you need to pack and then we're going to the Burrow. I promised everyone I'd take you because they're all desperate to see you."
"Desperate?" Draco sounded sceptical.

"Yes. They were really worried about you, you know." Harry made a point of raising both his eyebrows. Draco grinned.

"But," Harry continued, "They'll just have to wait a little longer."

And it became routine for Harry Malfoy-Potter to pull Draco Malfoy-Potter close to him as snow began to fall on Christmas Day.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! Please kudos and comment if you liked it! :)

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