Never A Memory

by Dotowe [archived by HPFandom_archivist]

Summary

Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

Notes

Note from SeparatriX, the archivist: this story was originally archived at HP Fandom, which was closed for health and financial reasons. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in August 2016. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on HP Fandom collection profile.
~Prologue~

The night sky was alight with fire and exploding magic. Flashes of Unforgivable Curses sprang from the wands of Death Eaters and Aurors alike. Wizards and witches dashed around one another on brooms; and giants, werewolves, and all manner of magical creatures churned below them amongst the scattered armies of both sides, howling their blood lust into the night.

Remnants of the Order of the Phoenix, some no older than children, fought bravely and wild-eyed, lost in the fever of the final battle. Fear, blood and death filled the air so thickly one could slice into parts with a knife. London, shaking with the fury of war, had become Voldemort's chosen battle field hours before. Now, as the battle rages on, the layers of magic that kept the wizarding world and the Muggle world safely separate began to stretch and shatter.

Muggles ran terrified, cars slammed into one another, and ear-splitting screams tore through the air as the horrific and wondrous magical battle started to materialize.

Hermione screamed a curse that sent a warted giant teetering sideways and crashing into a nearby building. Hermione barely registered the sound of a horn blaring before she was shoved violently out of the path of a swerving bus. Rolling into a crouch, she whipped her head around and took in what was happening. Ron dashed towards her and grabbed her arm.

"Hermione! What is going on?"

Hermione glanced over her shoulder, her eyes glazed with terror as she realized the two worlds were colliding. "Ron! This battle has to end soon. This city won't survive the magic. This war could wipe out the--"

An explosion behind them tore the last words from her mouth. Ron pulled her behind a toppled car, using his body to protect her from the shrapnel that flew from the explosion.

"Where's Harry?" Hermione hissed.

Ron looked down into her face, her features, like his own, indistinct under layers of dirt and ash. How they survived this long, Ron found was something to wonder at. Ron jerked his chin to the east. "Voldemort made his grand appearance twenty minutes ago. Harry's fighting him now."

Hermione's eyes widened a fraction. "We have to go there! He might need us!" she shouted over the din before sprinting off into the direction Ron had shown her.

Ron allowed himself half a second to roll his eyes. "That's why I came to get you," he muttered to himself in a sing-song voice.
Their journey down the next four blocks was mind numbing. Buildings groaned, glass shattered, and cars careened all around them. Somehow, they managed to make it there without being stopped by some blood thirsty Death Eater.

However, they quickly found out why when they found Harry and Voldemort.

The battle seemed to come to a slow pause as wizards, Death Eaters, and creatures alike stopped to watch the epic battle between The-Boy-Who-Lived and the Dark Lord.

Harry had destroyed all the Horcruxes and they laid in a burning pile of rubble near their feet. The two were circling the fiery mound, glaring at one another, wands raised and pointed.

Voldemort seemed calm despite the obliterated Horcruxes and the destruction of his long sought-after immortality. Though he seemed physically weaker, his black robes billowed around him majestically and his snake-like face glistened with dark amusement.

Harry was tense, his green eyes bright and darting around him, showing his confusion at the Horcruxes destroyed yet Voldemort lived.

And so they circled and Voldemort did not attack.

Gasping, Severus Snape pushed his way through the gathering crowd, Tonks hot on his heels, and stood peering over Hermione's shoulder at the scene below them.

"I don't understand," Tonks whispered. "Harry was certain that he found them all."

Severus remained quiet, assessing, as Ron and Hermione shifted uncomfortably, glancing around them as Muggles continued to scream and the Dark Army became even more still, silent, and watchful.

Voldemort paused in his circling and Harry halted almost immediately, his bright green eyes resting on Voldemort's pallid face.

"I find myself in the most unusual of predicaments," Voldemort said, barely concealed laughter rolling behind every word.

"Enlighten me," Harry growled. "Why won't you attack me?"

"Because, Harry," Voldemort sneered, as if speaking to a small child. "Unfortunately, it is now not in my best interest to do so."

Harry narrowed his eyes, frowning hard. Almost instantly he solved the riddle. However, before Harry could turn his wand on himself, Voldemort shouted "Expelliarmus!"

Voldemort laughed softly, the sound coming out like a snake's hiss. "Interesting, isn't it? That killing you would be my death? I made you my final Horcrux when I gave you that scar," he said pointing at Harry's forehead with Harry's wand.

A gasp resounded throughout those gathered. Severus clenched and unclenched his fingers.

"What am I going to do with you now?" Voldemort asked, sounding almost whimsical.

Slowly, Severus raised his wand, a muscle twitching his jaw.

"No," Hermione breathed as she saw it was pointed at Harry.
"Would you rather kill him yourself?" Severus grated out. "It has to be done."

Ron and Tonks simultaneously pressed the tips of their wands into Severus' back. "Don't even think about it," Ron growled.

"There has to be another way," Hermione pressed, careful to keep her voice low. She placed a hand on Ron's arm and pressed down, silently urging him to lower his wand.

"'Mione! You're not serious!" Ron hissed.

"There has to be another way," Hermione persisted, keeping her eyes on her old Potions teacher.

Severus was silent for a moment. "There is no other way."

Hermione's eyes darted back towards Harry, her eyes filling with frustrated tears. Severus raised his wand again and opened his mouth to utter the Killing Curse.

"SILENCIO!"

Hundreds of heads whipped towards the shouted spell as Severus is hit with it. His mouth moved but no sound came out. Out of the corner of his eye, Severus saw a shape speeding towards them on a broom, green and black robes rippling across the form. As the wizard drew nearer, shining silver hair catches the moonlight as he descended upon them at breakneck speed.

"EXPPELLIARMUS!" the wizard shouts again, his wand pointed at Voldemort. Catching both the Dark Lord and Harry's wands, the wizard crashes into Harry Potter.

Severus sucks in a breath and begins struggling through the crowd before him, recognizing his godson.

Draco Malfoy grappled with Harry for a moment before pinning The-Boy-Who-Lived beneath him. Voldemort lunged forward, screaming his wrath, but Severus threw himself between them. Hermione, Ron, and Tonks stared wide-eyed as they pushed their way through shell-shocked Aurors and Death Eaters.

A thunderous crack shook the earth as Draco manages to snap both Harry and Voldemort's wands over his knee. Then, Draco grabbed the back of Harry's neck, smashing their foreheads together. Harry quit fighting him when their eyes locked.

"For Dumbledore," Draco whispered before uttering a string of spells Harry didn't recognize.

Suddenly, Harry's scar exploded in white hot pain and streaks of fire coursed through his body. Harry didn't hear the last spell that fell from Draco's lips but, inexplicably, the pain began pulling out of him. White light, blinding anyone who looked at it, poured from Harry's mouth and scar and was sucked in by Draco. Draco's body convulsed and shook as the light went into him and with a final spasm, he let Harry go and fell to one side.

Harry scrambled away and turned in time to see Draco reach for his wand. Harry's heart stopped when he saw Draco's face clearly and saw *his* scar etched into Draco Malfoy's forehead. Immediately, Harry's hand shot up to his own forehead but the seeking fingers found nothing but smooth skin there.

Harry watched, dumbstruck, as Draco pointed his wand at himself.

Behind them, Severus struggled to keep a weakening Voldemort at bay. Aurors flanked them,
fighting off any Death Eater who tried to come to their Dark Lord's aid. The raging Voldemort met Draco's eyes in that last surreal moment.

"And for my mother," Draco growled with so much conviction and malice it made Voldemort pause in his struggling against Severus. "Avada Kedavra." A blaze of green magic shot from Draco's wand and through his body until he lay still, dead.

Voldemort's face twisted and contorted as silent magic swirled around him. His mouth curled in a large O before his body went rigid and then exploded.

Thrown back from the magic, Severus landed near his godson and as Aurors and friends rushed to Harry's side, Severus Snape crawled towards Draco's body. Harry watched as Severus gathered his godson into his arms, whispering about 'damn fools' and 'an idiot for trying to be a hero'.

Hermione glanced at the sky, noticing that the magical barrier between this world and the Muggles' was beginning to heal itself. Looking back at Harry, she saw him rise to his feet and walk unsteadily towards Severus. Dropping to his knees beside Severus' huddled form, Harry reached out and touched Draco's shoulder. Harry snatched his hand back as Draco's body began to glow.

Old magic swirled around them, winding around Draco's body and lifting him into the air. The magic grew denser and denser, until Draco's body looked like a burning star. Suddenly, the light brightened to a flash and then dimmed. Slowly, Draco's body descended back to the ground.

Everyone quieted and looked on as Severus once again took Draco into his arms.

Except, now, Draco Malfoy was breathing.

~*~

Never A Memory

Cast

~*~

Harry Potter ~ Wizard, Boy-Who-Lived, Lead Auror on the Malfoy Case; Son of Lily Evans and James Potter

Draco Malfoy ~ Wizard, Pureblood, Defeated Lord Voldemort; Son of Narcissa Black and Lucius Malfoy. Host of the Black Tulpa.

Ronald Weasley ~ Wizard, Pureblood, Partner to Harry Potter in the Auror’s Division of the Ministry of Magic, Lead Auror on the Malfoy Case; Son of Molly and Arthur Weasley
Hermione Granger ~ Witch, Muggle-Born, Fiancée of Ronald Weasley and best friend of Harry Potter, Head of Division for Muggle Affairs at the Ministry of Magic

Severus Snape ~ Wizard, Half-Blood, Godfather of Draco Malfoy, Potions Master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Minerva McGonagall ~ Witch, Animagus, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Rufus Scrimgeour ~ Wizard, Minister of Magic, acts and looks somewhat different than what is described in the books

Blaise Zabini ~ Wizard, Pureblood, Best Friend of Draco Malfoy. Double-Spy during second war, hid in Italy until news of Draco and the Secret Prophecy drew him out.

Pansy Parkinson ~ Witch, Pureblood, Once-Fiancée of Draco Malfoy; Niece and Goddaughter of Pandora Parkinson

Pandora Parkinson ~ Witch, Pureblood, Double Spy during Second War and granted Clemency from the Ministry of Magic; Aunt and Godmother to Pansy Parkinson

Walburga Black ~ (deceased) Draco Malfoy’s ancestor on his Mother’s side. Resides in a portrait at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

Lucius Malfoy ~ Wizard, Pureblood; Father to Draco Malfoy; Given the Dementor’s Kiss for actions as a Death Eater

Bellatrix LeStrange ~ Wizard, Pureblood, Sister to Narcissa Black, Death Eater for Lord Voldemort; warned Blaise Zabini of the Secret Prophecy

Crabbe and Goyle ~ Wizards, Death Eaters, former thugs of Draco Malfoy’s gang at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Luna Lovegood ~ Witch; friend of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ronald Weasley. Former member of Dumbledore’s Army.

Dr. Laeverton ~ Muggle; Head Psychologist at St. Mary’s Hospital

Lisa Murkwood ~ Muggle; Secretary at St. Mary’s Hospital

Betty or Betty-boy ~ Term used to address Staff Members of St. Mary’s Hospital

Will Mettle ~ Muggle; Patient at St. Mary’s Hospital; One of John Smith’s Thugs

Billy Bane ~ Muggle; Patient at St. Mary’s hospital; One of John Smith’s Thugs

Sally ~ Muggle; A Betty

Nina Rolter ~ Muggle; Patient at St. Mary’s Hospital

Michael Deans ~ Appointed Social Worker for John Smith upon release from St. Mary’s Hospital
Sergeant Bowler ~ Muggle; Member of Madison S.W.A.T.

Lieutenant Fitz ~ Muggle; Member of Madison S.W.A.T.

Agent Christian Hale, U.K.S.S. ~ Alias for Harry Potter in Madison, Wisconsin

Mackle, Anin, Boyle, Nadger, Heroth, Gasse, Lanel, Bishop, and Feerse ~ Wizards, Aurors for the Ministry of Magic and Veteran Members of the aurors Division. All become involved the Malfoy Case

Drew Williams ~ Wizard, Auror for U.S. MLED Madison, Wisconsin, Muggle Affairs Division, Detective. Partner to Joe Byrne. Husband to Martha Lane and Father of Tally and Crysta Williams.


Phil Lackey ~ Wizard, Member of U.S. MLED Madison Wisconsin, Muggle Affairs Division, Muggle Expert

Salene ~ U.S. MLED, Madison Wisconsin, Muggle Affairs Division Secretary

Mary Heart ~ Witch, Personal Secretary of Rufus Scrimgeour the Minister of Magic, U.K.

Trisha Knockwood ~ Witch, Member of Muggle Affairs in the Ministry of Magic

Sam Little ~ Wizard, Member of Muggle Affairs in the Ministry of Magic

Captain Whistle ~ Squib, Works as a Muggle on a Cruise Liner, former Ally of Lord Voldemort, Owes a Boon to Blaise Zabini for keeping his secret

Simon Heil ~ Muggle, Acquaintance of Captain Whistle, quiet transporter for hire

Father Ernst Alt ~ Wizard, Untrained. Exorcist for the Catholic Church. Convicted of Negligent Manslaughter with the death of Anneliese Michel.

Maul ~ Black Tulpa; center of the Secret Prophecy. Once gave Lord Voldemort the Seven Keys (Horcruxes) in exchange for a chosen mortal to possess at the End of Days.

The Gatherer ~ Cruent Mantle, Wizard, Maul’s Puppet. Ex-lover of Harry Potter. Hufflepuff graduate from Hogwart’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Maximus Cure ~ (Michael Deans) Wizard forbidden to use magic for hire; Master of the Inversion Enchantratem. Outlaw.

Winston Reakley ~ Squib, Azkaban Caretaker

Madame Leilane ~ Witch; Owner of the Stable for Magical Creatures

Slightly ~ House Elf of Malfoy Manor

Witherwings ~ (Buckbeak) Hippogriff; transports Harry Potter to the Tien Shen Pass where Draco Malfoy hid while brewing the Verve Channel Electron Elixir
Pan ~ Draco Malfoy’s Eagle Owl

Hedwig ~ Harry Potter’s Owl

Griphook ~ Goblin; Possesses the Sword of Godric Gryffindor

Hogarth Rivers ~ Wizard, Healer fro St. Mungo’s; Stationed at the Ministry of Magic

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Three years later...

Harry Potter sighed and ran a hand tiredly over his eyes. It was three o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon and the workday was nearly over. However, judging by the nature of the owl Harry had just received from his old Potions professor; Harry very much doubted his workday would be over at five pm sharp.

Tilting his head to the side and letting his green eyes take in his cluttered desk, Harry lifted a hand and lazily pet Hedwig behind her ears. Satisfied, Hedwig ruffled her feathers pleasantly and flew off.

Harry picked up the note from Snape and reread it.

'Potter,
I need to speak with you immediately. At Hogwarts. 6 o'clock.

~S.S.'

Severus Snape never requested an audience with Harry Potter unless it concerned Draco Malfoy. In fact, Harry hadn't heard from Snape in nearly two years--when the Healers at St. Mungo's made it clear that Malfoy wasn't going to wake up from his coma any time soon. The Healers had put their foot down more for Snape's benefit than Harry's.

Convinced that Draco Malfoy's single act of heroism in the entire time Harry had known him was centered around his need for redemption in being one of the main conspirators that led to Albus Dumbledore's death in their sixth year and revenge for the murder of his mother, Narcissa Malfoy, Harry's interest in Draco's well being was simply professional.

Voldemort had murdered Narcissa Malfoy because, even though Draco had kept his word by letting
Death eaters into Hogwarts, the Malfoy heir could not, in the last minutes of Dumbledore's life, kill his Head Master. For whatever reason, was still a mystery to Harry.

Draco had disappeared after Narcissa's funeral where Death Eaters had attacked him when Draco had appeared to pay his final respects. Draco Malfoy did not re-appear until the Eve Battle where he used his body as a conduit for the magical energy that caused Harry to be Voldemort's final Horcrux and killed himself.

Why Draco Malfoy survived the Killing Curse was still a mystery one of Harry's best friends, Hermione Granger, was obsessed to figuring out. Harry had the feeling it had something to do with why he survived the Killing Curse himself. Harry's mother had sacrificed herself to save Harry as an infant, which awoke--according to the late Albus Dumbledore--old magic that wrapped Harry in a cocoon of impenetrable energy that was strong enough to not only deflect Voldemort's Killing Curse, but also destroy the Dark Lord.

Regardless of Draco Malfoy's motives, Harry had to grudgingly concede that none of them were selfish and that his sacrifice was as pure as Lily Potter's; and that enough of it was embedded in the love for his mother, Narcissa Malfoy.

So, whatever the science that would explain away what happened that night, three years ago, Draco Malfoy survived the Killing Curse and though his sacrifice saved his life, Malfoy remained in a coma-like state since then. No matter what St. Mungo's Healers tried, he wouldn't wake up.

And though Severus Snape would never admit to holding affection for any breathing thing, it was no secret to Harry that his old Potions master cared for his godson. Snape was willing to kill Dumbledore in accordance with the vow he made with Draco's mother in order to protect the Malfoy heir. And Snape was holding Harry Potter to his Gryffindor nature. Though Harry did not believe any of Draco's actions were for Harry's benefit, that fact remained that he would not be alive if not for his old school rival. And so, Harry, his Gryffindor honor, and Ronald Weasley--his partner and longtime friend--remained Head Aurors on the Malfoy case.

A case that, though it remained open, was pretty lax...except for the incessant need to keep a minimum of five Aurors around the sleeping Malfoy at all times.

A year ago, Harry and Ron had stumbled on a bounty warrant for Draco Malfoy's assassination while chasing after Harold Werain, a Death Eater who managed to slip away during the last moments of the Eve Battle like so many others the Ministry had made first priority to catch and convict. Unfortunately, there were more Death Eaters in Voldemort's Army than originally anticipated and the cases for them were slow-going, at best.

Harry Potter had joined the Aurors immediately after that last battle and has made a career for himself in bringing these renegade Death Eaters to justice. Ron followed, like he always does, and managed to secure a spot for himself as Harry's partner; a position that was sought after by many Aurors.

Despite all of this, Ron had retained his cheery nature and was more interested in playing quidditch and hanging out with his new fiancée, Hermione Granger--as of a solid week ago--than selling his soul for the Ministry and dedicating every minute of his life to being an Auror as Harry had.

Coincidentally, Hermione had landed herself a job at the Ministry as well; however, not as an Auror. Hermione, in the last three years, had managed to create two new divisions at the Ministry and now headed the Muggle Affairs division. The newest additions to the Ministry, the Research and Comprehension of Old Magic division--headed by Luna Lovegood--and the Slavery Liberation Act division--headed by a sweet-faced witch named Marie Cellar--had caused quite a stir and not a few raised eyebrows two years ago. However, being a young veteran of the Eve Battle and...well, and
being Hermione Granger, she had had her way eventually. The new divisions actually did quite well…as long as they stayed within budget—which wasn't very often—and usually managed to stay beneath the radar.

Harry frowned and tossed Snape's note onto his cluttered desk. Harry wondered what was so urgent. None of the Aurors posted at St. Mungo's had reported anything unusual…and anything short of Malfoy waking up wasn't something that would grasp Snape's attention.

Shrugging, Harry bowed over a pile of paperwork and began completing the two hour task of filing reports for the last week.

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Harry huddled further into his robes and watched his breath frost in front of him. Harry had just Apparated outside of Hogwarts grounds and had to pause. It never ceased to amaze him that no matter how often...or infrequently, he visited, Harry was always flanked by a dizzying amount of memories at just the sight of the old castle.

Steadying himself against the sound of faint laughter and the ghostly visions of old friends dead and gone, Harry pulled open the large iron gates and began making his way to the school, snow crunching softly beneath his feet.

Once reaching the large double doors, Harry was immediately greeted by Head Mistress Minerva McGonagall.

"Good evening, Mr. Potter," McGonagall said, her eyes darting around the grounds behind Harry. "Do come in."

Harry was too suspicious of McGonagall's nervous behavior to be flanked again by memories but he did pause outside the Great Hall, listening to the sound of students eating, laughing, and talking to one another in loud, carefree voices. McGonagall stopped beside him and waited for Harry to turn to her.

"I'm here to see Snape," Harry said finally.

"Yes, yes, I know. This way."

Harry followed McGonagall to the dungeon where she paused outside of Snape's office. Looking once back at Harry, she rapped lightly on the door. Immediately the door opened, its hinges creaking slightly. Stepping in the dark room after the Head Mistress, Harry was slightly annoyed and even more curious to see that Ron was already there.

Snape's owl had asked specifically for Harry's presence so he hadn't bothered to owl Ron. Harry usually filled Ron in later with the details when he went off to do something on his own. Ron waved and his grin turned into a grimace when Harry mock-glared at him. Ron shrugged and jerked his chin toward Snape, who was sitting behind his desk with a less-than-tolerant look on his face. Harry looked back at Ron and shook his head warningly. Ron shrugged again and then his grin was back.

"Really," Snape drawled from behind his desk. "As much as I hate to interrupt this fascinating bit of communication between the Ministry's two most…prized Aurors, I must inquire if we could get down to business. I have papers to grade."

Harry stiffened and turned towards Snape, green eyes flashing with barely restrained spite. "So speak."
"My godson woke up this afternoon. Half past one."

Harry turned immediately back to Ron, who spread his hands in surrender while nodding the affirmation.

"And I wasn't informed because...?" Harry growled with unwarranted vehemence.

"Harry, we thought it would be better handled in private," Ron said.

Harry narrowed his eyes. "Why?"

McGonagall, who had remained silent until now, found this moment to speak up. "Please, Mr. Potter. We have everyone's best interests at heart...including your Aurors. Hear us out."

Harry eyed his old Transfiguration teacher and took a deep breath. "Alright, I'm listening."

"I was visiting Neville, you know, to tell him about 'Mione and me," Ron began. "Neville burnt his hand handling some plant that he probably shouldn't've and now he's shacked up at St. Mungo's--"

"The point, Mr. Weasley," McGonagall interrupted tersely. Snape raised a brow and looked mildly annoyed but said nothing.

"Alright, anyway," Ron continued. "While I was there, I ran into Mitchel, one of the Aurors on staff for Mal--"

"I know who he is, Ron," Harry snapped.

"Would you let me finish!" Ron exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air. "I mean, really! Anyway, Mitchel was off to Apparate to the Ministry to tell us Malfoy was up and when he told me we went to see him. And, well, Malfoy acted like he'd never seen me before so I owled Snape, figuring maybe he could jog his memory--"

"He doesn't remember anything." The quietness in Snape's voice was unnerving. "He doesn't even remember his own name."

Harry took a moment to digest this information before speaking. "We have charms for that," Harry said finally. "Potions, even. Why...?"

McGonagall looked sharply at Snape and when he nodded to her, she cleared her throat. "Mr. Potter, Snape and I had discussed...in the event that...well, Mr. Malfoy may be safer among Muggles."

Harry couldn't help himself. He laughed.

Draco Malfoy, pureblood slime, Mr. I'm-too-good-for-anything-that-isn't-an-exact-replicate-of-me, living with Muggles. It was completely insane. Incredulous to a fault.

However, Harry quieted when he saw that the three assembled in front of him were quite serious.

Harry searched for a chair and sat down. Then he looked at Snape. "This couldn't have been your idea."

Snape scowled. "Of course not. However, Minerva has some valid points and Weasley has expressed the need for more Aurors in the field weeding out Death Eaters."

"Death Eaters who would see Mr. Malfoy dead," McGonagall added.
Harry glanced over at Ron who, though his freckled face was the perfect mask of seriousness, had eyes that shone with wicked humor. Harry bit back another smile.

"And where would we stash him?" Harry asked.

Snape opened his mouth, a retort ready to ridicule Harry's choice of words, but closed it at another sharp look from McGonagall.

"We were hoping Ms. Granger could help with that," McGonagall replied. "I hear she's quite the expert on Muggle comings and goings."

"He would still need to be hospitalized for a few weeks," Ron said.

Harry looked at Ron. "Yeah?"

Ron shrugged. "He's still really weak...and if he's going to live in the Muggle world, he's going to need to be in a place where they're willing to teach him basic stuff from scratch."

Harry nodded. "That's true..."

"So help me, Potter," Snape all but growled. "If you're not taking this seriously--"

Harry waved a hand dismissively at his old Potions teacher. "This is my case, Snape. I know how to do my job."

"You're protection is owed him, Potter," Snape said, his voice rising. "If one of the Dark Lord's little minions so much as sneezes within thirty feet of him--"

"I owe him nothing," Harry said quietly. "But I will do my job." One nicety does not change years of torment from that Malfoy git.

Snape slammed his fist on his desk. "He saved your life!"

"Yes," Harry said, rising to his feet. "And until you can brew some concoction that will wrap Malfoy in an impenetrable bubble for the next few years, we are going to do it my way. I think this Muggle thing is an excellent idea. No Death Eater would think to look for the Almighty Pureblood Malfoy Heir among 'Mudbloods'. We would only need one Auror to shadow him. We really could use the extra men."

"Mr. Potter," McGonagall said quietly, placing a thin hand on Harry's arm. "Please..." McGonagall glanced over at Snape, who was glowering darkly at them. "We're still all in this together."

Harry shrugged her hand off. "I'm sorry Head Mistress. I'm not as easily forgiving as you." Harry spared one last glance over his shoulder at Snape and thought of Dumbledore. "My trust has to be earned."

Ron followed Harry out the door and out of the dungeon. It wasn't until they were outside in the snow that Ron allowed himself a snigger. "You have to admit, it's damn funny."

Harry offered half a smile. "Yeah." Harry turned and looked back at the school. "I never would have thought Snape would agree to something like this, though."

Ron shrugged and grinned. "It's still damn funny. Can't wait 'till Hermione hears about this one."

Harry looked sidelong at his partner and allowed himself a full smile.
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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Chapter Two
~The Tell-Tale Scar~

The next day...
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If there was anyone who took their job more seriously than Harry, it was Hermione Granger.

As they usually did, Harry and Ron found Hermione on the fifth level of the Ministry of Magic Headquarters, where the Division for Muggle Affairs was now located, juggling a stack of vellum books with one hand while using her wand to levitate a pile of paperwork with the other. She was flushed, hurried, and determined to get to whatever destination she was headed when they stopped her.

Ron automatically stepped forward and relieved Hermione of her staggering heap of books, glancing at the title of the topmost. "History of Western Civilizations and the Rise of the Industrial Age" it read and Ron had to stop himself from rolling his eyes. Muggle Affairs was actually fairly new to the Ministry, even though Hermione often worked closely with his father, Arthur Weasley, and his partner division of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts. Hermione, being a stickler for facts, insisted that at least half her division study and research Muggles, their history, and the way their world worked in order for the Wizarding community to better understand them. Apparently, seeing London crumble while only patches of the barrier that separated the Wizarding world and the Muggles dissipate struck a nerve in Hermione. She won the rights to Muggle Affairs when the Ministry began struggling in finding all the Muggles that witnessed the Eve Battle and Obliviating them and completely repairing, without traces of suspicious magic, all damage done to the city. What was even more interesting, was how the Prime Minister and the Minister of Magic had simultaneously agreed to opening a discreet division that researched, day and night, ways to make sure what happened during the Eve Battle never happened again.

And while that security has yet to be created, Hermione made it clear that the ignorance of both
Ron thought that her vehemence towards the situation may have more to do with her protectiveness towards her parents than Hermione would like to admit. Still, Ron had grown up with a father who was fascinated with Muggles, fell in love with a woman who had Muggle parents, and still didn't understand a damn thing about the non-magical world. And asked if he cared, Ron would probably shrug while his eyes said definitely not.

"Thank you, Ron," Hermione said with a faint smile and running her hand distractedly through her hair. "But I'm terribly busy today and I think I may have to cancel our lunch. Oh, hello Harry."

Harry smiled genuinely at her while Ron's face fell slack. Ron had been looking forward to spending time with Hermione. It seemed that they rarely got to the past few weeks due to both their incredibly busy schedules. And while Ron felt he solidified their relationship when Hermione accepted his proposal, he still felt the incessant need to be around her all the time. Ron hoped that feeling never went away.

Quickly gathering himself, Ron offered a grin. "We actually need your help with something."

"Yeah?" Hermione asked, looking between the two. "With what?"

Ron looked over at Harry and then back at Hermione, taking a deep breath. "We need to stash Malfoy with Muggles because he lost his memory and we think he would be safer outside the Wizarding world and we could really use the extra man power and he lost his memory so it might work," Ron said, each word stumbling over the other.

Hermione let out a startled laugh but immediately sobered. "You're serious."

Harry nodded.

"Oh no," Hermione breathed. "No, no, no...we finally got the Muggles here under control...we can't send a Muggle-hating wizard out to them. It would never work. And we ARE talking about "Draco" Malfoy, right?"

"Yes, but he doesn't know he's a wizard, 'Mione," Ron insisted. "He doesn't even know his own name."

Hermione shook her head. "Even so, a wizard is a wizard. He has power, even if he may not remember how to use it right away. To send an amnesiac wizard out amongst Muggles isn't only foolish, it's dangerous. Malfoy will remember how to use his powers before he'll remember that he has them."

"We'll have an Auror on him twenty-four seven," Harry said quietly.

Hermione turned to Harry and then reared back her head. "Harry," she breathed. "Don't tell me this was your idea! If this is some kind of sick way to get back at Malfoy for Hogwarts--"

"It was McGonagall and Snape's idea," Harry interrupted, his voice still quiet.

Hermione opened her mouth and then closed it. Then she shook her head again. "It's a bad idea, Harry."

Ron stepped forward but Harry put a hand on his shoulder to stop him. "Your opinion is duly noted," Harry said as gently as he could. "But we're not here for your opinion; we're here for your
help."

Ron shot a despairing look Harry's way. Hermione stared hard at Harry but eventually sighed. Harry never spoke to her, or any of his friends, that way unless Harry was ultimately thinking twenty miles faster than them and was committed to whatever he'd set his mind to. Back at Hogwarts, it usually concerned Voldemort. Now, it was Draco Malfoy that had Harry on edge.

Hermione glanced once at Harry's forehead, where his tell-tale scar once was, a scar that now rested on Draco Malfoy's head, and nodded. "All right. Follow me."

***

"...Yes, I understand," Hermione said into her wand--where, on the other end of the communication, Lisa Murkwood of St. Mary's Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, chatted amiably into a telephone. "Absolutely. I agree. His name?"

Hermione glanced over at Ron and Harry, who were seated across from her desk in her office at Muggle Affairs. "...His name is...Smith. John Smith."

Ron snorted, Harry curled his lip in a cruel smile, and Hermione threw them both an exasperated look.

"Yes, yes, of course," Hermione continued. "I'm sorry? Oh, he'll be arriving this afternoon. Will do. Thank you, Mrs. Murkwood. Of course. Okay...o...okay Mrs. Murkwood. Mmhmm. OK, goodbye. Yes, yes, goodbye." Hermione restrained the urge to throw her wand across the room and placed it, with over-controlled severity, on her desk. Looking up at the two Aurors seated across from her, Hermione breathed in deeply and let it out slowly.

"John Smith?" Ron asked with a snarky grin. "What the hell kind of Muggle nonsense name--"

"Ronald!" Hermione snapped and gave him that look.

Ron quieted immediately.

"So..." Harry inquired.

Hermione ran a hand through her curls and sat back into her chair. "Mrs. Murkwood said that a patient of...Malfoy's nature, would be best served first in the Psychiatric Ward of the hospital, where he would learn to write down his dreams and memories and be taught fundamental basics...and then in the rehabilitation program, where they would eventually set him up with his own apartment and assign him a Social Worker."

"A what?"

"A Social Worker. Someone to check in on him every once in a while."

Harry nodded. "Good. That should buy us plenty of time..."

"There's a catch, Harry," Hermione said.

Harry raised his dark eyebrows questioningly.

"I set him up in a hospital in the US."

Silence greeted her revelation.
Harry and Ron, having completed the task of Obliviating the Healers who had watched over Draco Malfoy during his stay at St. Mungo's—after, of course, convincing them to sign waivers giving their permission—entered the room Draco was staying at. If there was anything more uncomfortable to Harry than escorting an amnesiac Draco Malfoy to a Muggle Psychiatric Ward, it was escorting him to an American Psychiatric Ward.

Harry knew next to nothing about the American Wizarding world— they didn't even play Quidditch—and even less about American Muggles. Harry wondered if this was Hermione's way of getting back at him for the way he pressured her into helping them even if Hermione had explained that she would not endanger the fragile stability she had established in the English Wizarding world over the last few years off of a whim Harry and her fiancée seemed so eager to go along with. So, Hermione had arranged for 'John Smith' to have a Social Security number, perfect alias Draco would learn about during his stay at St. Mary's, and American Citizenship.

Ron had insisted that it was poetic justice that Malfoy was to be stashed in an American Muggle loony bin. And as much as Harry wanted to concede the point, a nagging feeling in the pit of his stomach wouldn't let him. Harry had to admit, however, that it was the perfect cover up for Draco Malfoy. When—and if—Draco regained his memory, he may even come to grudgingly agree. Not that what Draco Malfoy thought or felt was anything to Harry Potter.

Amid white sheets and countless pillows on the tiny twin-sized bed, Draco Malfoy lay propped up and dozing. He woke instantly and stared silently back at the two Aurors. His eyes flashed silver when they recognized Ron as the red-haired man who had come to see him the day before, but they turned a slate grey when they took in Harry.

Draco blinked, then winced, and his hand came up to his forehead where wisps of white-blond hair covered the lightening-bolt scar that once was Harry's.

Harry frowned and felt a pull in his mind, like a hazy fog was trying to intercept his thoughts. Harry shook his head and glared at Draco. Draco's eyes widened a fraction and he looked away, lowering his hand.

Ron tossed some folded clothes onto Draco's bed. "You have five minutes to get dressed."

Draco looked back up immediately. "Where am I going?"

"You're being transferred," Ron said and turned to leave.

Harry, immobile beside him, continued to glare at Draco. Draco flicked his grey eyes to Harry's face, answering his stare for an icy one of his own.

Ron grasped Harry's arm. "Five minutes," Ron repeated forcefully, more for Harry's benefit than Draco's.

Harry finally looked away and followed Ron outside the room.

Ron glanced sidelong at his partner and best mate. "You okay?"

"I'm fine."

Ron raised an auburn brow. "You didn't look fine in there," Ron said, jabbing his thumb behind him at the closed door.
"I'm fine," Harry repeated.

Minutes later, the two young Aurors heard a rap on the door. "I'm ready," called Draco's voice from inside.

Ron opened the door and stepped aside to let Draco through. Draco emerged from the hospital room with a somewhat dazed look on his face, sharp grey eyes taking in everything.

"This way," Ron said, walking toward the exit. Draco followed and Harry took up the rear, looking at anything except the back of Draco's head.

***

Once Disapparating the three of them to the entrance of St. Mary's, Harry and Ron paused to let Draco catch his breath. Draco seemed shocked at the revelation of Apparition...however, Draco felt more vertigo and the nagging sense of déjà vu than anything else. Shaking his head to clear it, Draco nodded to his two chaperones and Harry and Ron walked him to the front doors.

Draco paused again before Ron went to open the door and looked back at Harry, who, up to this point, had trailed behind Draco on their journey. Harry returned his stare and was slightly unnerved to see Draco Malfoy's face when it wasn't twisted in a malicious sneer. He seemed inquisitive; some simple question hovering behind his slate eyes.

"I dreamed of you," Draco said finally. "I remember you hated me in my dreams too."

Harry frowned and immediately looked over at Ron, who was staring at them with unmasked shock...and a bit of residual dismay. Ron had hoped they would get the Malfoy git here without an incident.

When Harry finally looked back at Draco, whose eyes never left his face, he had his wand out. Draco looked at the wand and frowned, feeling the disconcerting pull of déjà vu all over again. When he looked back up into the dark-haired young man's face, he felt himself grow dizzy with confusion and tried to shake his head clear again.

"No," Harry whispered. "You didn't. Obliviate!"

***

Lisa Murkwood looked up and smiled toothily when the three...rather nice looking young men approached the front desk.

The red-head smiled easily and proffered a file of documents. She took the file and began flipping through the pages. Mrs. Murkwood smiled again and called for a nurse.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Smith. I can take it from here gentlemen."

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Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Eagle Owl~

Three days later...
***

Draco Malfoy leaned against the window pane of the room that was allotted him at St. Mary's and pressed his forehead against the cold glass. It was snowing outside and the chill seeping through the barred window cooled his burning scar; a lightening bolt scar that ached like fury every time he woke from a dream.

A tapping sounded through the glass and Draco raised his gray eyes, a gray as cold as the winter outside. He blinked and lifted his head fully when he saw an Eagle Owl staring back at him expectantly.

The bird was massive, with large, shrewd yellow eyes, tawny gold and black feathers, and a face as gray as Draco's eyes. Draco lifted his fingers and touched the glass separating him and the majestic owl. The bird responded with a loud hooting and raised his black ear tufts.

Something pulled in Draco's mind as he stared at the Eagle Owl through the window. It felt heavy and dark, but became clearer and clearer as he stared. Draco sucked in a breath and held it, trying to hold on to the feeling in his mind as he did so.

Draco could remember everything that had happened in the past three days, down to the very second. He could not, however, remember anything prior. It was driving him certifiably insane. And three days in St. Mary's could give a person a very clear depiction on what certifiably insane looked like.

Draco wouldn't eat the food given to him. He would sneer in disgust when a nurse would bring in a tray and an hour later the nurse would return to collect the tray untouched. Draco didn't understand why he knew he wouldn't like the food, but he knew.

He also knew that John Smith was not his name. And again, he couldn't explain it. The staff in this ward of St. Mary's would smile condescendingly when he would demand they desist calling him that absurd name and inquire what else to call him. Having no answer to provide them, they continued to call him "Mr. Smith."
Nothing sparked his memory save for the residual spasms of clarity from dreams that wouldn't solidify themselves in his waking hours and Draco took to wandering aimlessly around his room for hours trying to remember...anything.

The staff urged him to spend his time in the common room with the other patients...but Draco suspected that was more for their benefit than his. Draco had overheard the nurses complaining on numerous occasions about what "a hassle" it was to check on patients individually in their rooms when they could all be herded into the common room.

Finding a small measure of satisfaction from annoying his caretakers, Draco stubbornly remained in his room and drank only water. And even the water, in Draco's opinion, was questionable. For some reason, Draco was convinced water shouldn't have so many bubbles still floating around minutes after the water became still. Again, with no explanation for his complaints, the staff ignored them and continued to complain--not so discreetly--to one another.

Three days and not a single memory from before three days ago.

Draco scowled and the Eagle Owl ruffled his feathers and hooted indignantly.

"I don't know what you want, bird," Draco murmured. "Leave me be."

The owl cocked his head to the side and peered at him. Draco continued to feel the shifting in his thoughts, but now it felt more like pressure than something pulling at him. Draco closed his eyes and saw flashes of floating candles, long tables with children eating merrily, and owls soaring above his head.

A knock sounded at his door.

Instantly, the images were gone and his scowl turned downright malicious as he turned towards the door.

Will Mettle poked his chubby, gruff head through the door frame. Mettle was a patient here who, with his comrade Billy Bane--a wiry, pointed fellow who was rumored to have claimed insanity for killing an entire family south of here--took to following Draco where ever he went and spent hours guarding his door from the wailing, miserable loonies that crowded the main hall outside his door. Whatever their reasons, Draco almost appreciated the peace and quiet they usually provided him...but Draco would really have to make an attempt to appreciate anything about this place.

Draco continued to level Mettle with his glare while watching the stocky fellow begin to tremble and look nervous. Draco almost wondered what landed him a spot at St. Mary's Psyche Ward. Draco would never ask, of course. That would implicate that Draco actually gave damn about another human being; and that just didn't seem natural either.

"What is it, Mettle?" Draco asked coldly and had to stop himself from smiling a little when Mettle nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of Draco's voice.

Mettle jerked his chin to the side. "Betty says that the Doc sent for ya, man. You need to come out. I don't even say no to the Doc."

Draco drew his brows together and looked back at the window, seeing that the bird had flown off. 'The Doc' was Dr. Laeverton, the Ward's main Psychiatrist. 'Betty' was what the patients called anyone on Staff, male or female. Draco refused to wonder why. Draco did wonder, however, that if he wasn't crazy he would be if he had to put up with much more of this place.

Draco nodded to Mettle and watched as he closed the door in a hurry. Draco slowly went to his
closet and fished out a black turtleneck from the clothes that had been provided for him. Something else that had been gnawing at his mind was why all his clothes were expensive, fit perfectly and seemed as if they were all tailored just for him. The shipment of clothes had arrived a day after he'd, according to one of the Betty's, been transferred from another hospital. Draco had no memory of this other hospital or the clothes that seemed so uniquely his and no one would allow him to study his file for clues to his past.

Finally, Dr. Laeverton seemed ready to meet Draco himself, which he hadn't been inclined to since Draco had been transferred. A chance to speak with someone who had studied his file wasn't something Draco was willing to pass up so he opened the door and stepped out into the white hall.

The main hall was garish. White walls, white tiled floor, and ugly pastel paintings spaced evenly down the long stretch of the hall...all in all, another very good reason Draco didn't venture from his room often. Draco found he liked it when his eyes didn't feel like they were going to bleed out of his head.

His own room was simple, with mild green furniture and bland white walls; and while Draco wouldn't go so far as to say it was tasteful, he definitely preferred it from this horrid main hall and all its garish wonder.

A Betty-boy with an innocent face and large brown eyes met him outside his room with Bane and Mettle. Bane nodded to him, his icy blue eyes hollow and devoid of any humane emotion. Draco nodded back but remained silent.

Draco hated Bane. He couldn't figure why, but just looking at him made bile rise up the back of Draco's throat. Mettle was insignificant and hardly worrisome once you got past his sheer size, but Bane was downright evil.

Draco knew that he was familiar with evil. He was reminded of that nagging feeling every time he looked at Bane; however, Draco felt that he had become something different even though everything around him had once urged him to be as dark and foreboding as the people and things he'd once surrounded himself with. When he looked at Bane, there was a cold stone in the pit of his stomach that stirred and told him that Bane was what he might once have been.

And that he chose to be something else.

Now, Draco felt he was nothing at all.

Somehow, Bane and Mettle felt the urge to look up to him, to walk in his shadow, and that felt familiar too; two dark, simple bodyguards always hovering at his shoulders. What was it about him that made that a reality? Why would it seem natural and disconcerting in the same breathe to have evil shadow Draco's very footsteps?

Draco's eyes finally left Bane's and rested on the Betty-boy's open face.

"You ready?" he asked.

Draco didn't grace him with a response but followed the Betty-boy down the hall and through the Ward as Bane and Mettle fell into step behind him.

Finally reaching Dr. Laeverton's office, the Betty-boy's face grew grave and unsmiling when he turned to regard Bane and Mettle. "This is as far as you two go," he said. "Mr. Smith"--Draco scowled--"wait here for Dr. Laeverton to come out for you."

The Betty-boy walked passed Draco and ushered Bane and Mettle back down the hall while Draco
gazed at the office door's handle. Draco reached down and tried to turn the knob. It was locked. Something pressed into his mind again as Draco ran his fingers over the door knob once more. Draco felt a tingling run down his spine and through his arm as words whispered through his mind, only to be swallowed by the blackness that held the rest of his memories; and with a resounding 'click', the door unlocked itself and swung open.

Draco watched the door slam against the nearest wall with mild interest, more surprised that he wasn't surprised, and added it to his list of things to ponder in his room later.

Dr. Laeverton stared at Draco, his mouth slack, as the silent, platinum blond made his way into the room and took a seat in a comfortable, brown leather chair.

"That door was locked," the Doc said, his trimmed, salt and pepper beard tickling around his nose and mouth. Dr. Laeverton, a practical man who had studied human development and psychology since living in his birthplace, New Zealand, at a very young age, and who prided himself on having an answer for pretty much anything, could not fathom what had happened with his office door. Dr. Laeverton finally decided the he must have forgotten to lock it earlier after his last patient left and settled in to study the newest edition to St. Mary's Psychiatric Ward.

John Smith's file said he was on a strict rehabilitation program and that the sooner he could moved from the State program to the Federal, the better. That being said, Dr. Laeverton wasn't going to move Smith into any Social Services program until he was certain he had retained enough of his memory to operate properly.

Dr. Laeverton watched Smith settle himself into the leather seat, crossing one leg over the other, placing both arms on the armrests, letting his long hands dangle over the edge, placing the back of his head on the back of the seat and closing his eyes.

"I asked Steven to tell you to wait outside," Dr. Laeverton said, watching for a reaction. Receiving none, he scribbled down a few notes and looked back at Smith.

Truth be told, John Smith was not much older than a boy. According to his file, Smith had turned twenty one some seven months prior. Technically, the Department of Social Services had referred Smith to St. Mary's instead of taking him into custody immediately, which they could have done. This may mean that, somewhere along the up line, someone had decided that this boy was either dangerous or in danger.

St. Mary's Psychiatric Ward, located in the actual hospital of St. Mary's Medical Institute of Wisconsin, was a branch stemmed from the study of rehabilitation of the criminally insane. Not many made it to their particular Ward, unless by fault, experiment, or someone knew someone who knew someone.

This John Smith was undoubtedly English...and while his file came with a Social Security number that checked out, Dr. Laeverton didn't believe for a second that Smith was who his file said he was.

Sure, Dr. Laeverton believed he suffered from amnesia and that Smith had all the signs of being freshly woken from a long coma. Smith didn't eat, isolated himself, and preferred silence unless it was absolutely necessary. What Dr. Laeverton had to do was unlock enough memories for Smith to operate in the outside world without becoming harmful to himself or his community.

Which could take weeks or even years to do properly. No one walked out of his Ward without his complete and utter confidence.

"How do you like St. Mary's so far, Mr. Smith?" Dr. Laeverton tried again.
Draco opened his eyes slowly and closed them again, saying nothing.

"The nurses say you haven't been eating, Mr. Smi--" 

"Your staff shows a level of ineptitude that borders on the *imbecilic*," Draco murmured in a slow, monotone drawl. Draco opened his eyes again and peered at the man seated across from him. Suddenly, Draco's teeth flashed brilliant white in a rogue's smile. "And I mean that in a very caring way," Draco added after some deliberation.

A muscle twitched in Dr. Laeverton's jaw.

Draco heard water trickling to the side of him and smelled something less than desirable. Draco turned and saw a small tank with turtles in it against a far wall, set in a bookshelf with a number of hardbacks on psychology and the inner workings of the human mind. Draco curled his lip in disgust and turned back to the doctor. He was writing something.

When Dr. Laeverton finally looked back up at Draco, his gray eyes were leveled on the older man's face with a distinctly veiled look. "So doctor," Draco said quietly. "Why don't you tell me something about myself?"

Dr. Laeverton pursed his lips and rubbed at his beard before obliging. "Well, your name is John Smith"--Draco snorted--"you are 21, and your birthday is June 5th--"

"Where was I born?"

"It doesn't say. You arrived at St. Jude's Medical Institute roughly three years ago, suffering a blow to the head that rendered you comatose. When you became conscious, you were sent here. While you were comatose, your file was researched and this is what we know of you." Dr. Laeverton paused for effect, watching Smith closely. "You moved to the States when you were five--we believe, illegally because we could find absolutely no trace of your parents whatsoever. You were a ward of the state until you graduated Chesapeake High School in Maryland at age seventeen where you disappeared and were not seen again until arriving at St. Jude's. How you became injured is still unconfirmed and probably will remain so until you regain your memory."

Draco's frown slowly turned into a sneer. "Do you *pay* people to make that bollocks up or do you just do it yourself, mate?"

Dr. Laeverton returned his gaze steadily, clasping his tanned, gnarled hands in front of him. "That's your file, Mr. Smith. If it is incorrect, I urge you to rectify the situation with the truth."

Draco glared. "And a comedian, too. Isn't this just my lucky day?"

Dr. Laeverton looked away for a moment, apparently counting to ten in his head. "I'm here to aid you in recovering what is lost, Mr. Smith. If or when you remember something that differentiates what I have to go off of, I would hope you report this to me immediately. Until then, we're just going to have to play it by ear, you and I."

Draco took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I don't even think that's my name," Draco whispered. "In fact, I know it's not."

Dr. Laeverton nodded. "The second you give me something else to call you, I will."

Draco scowled and leaned back in his chair.

"Something that often helps amnesiacs is a notebook," Dr. Laeverton continued. "Things often try to
trick from our subconscious into our conscious when we sleep, and vice versa. Your subconscious is where your memories are stored. In order to pull them from there into your conscious, you need to write down everything that is familiar to you, everything that you feel reminds of something else, and every time you feel a sense of déjà vu. And it is especially important, Mr. Smith, to write down everything you can remember about your dreams. I trust you dream at night?"

Draco nodded, eyeing the doctor and the notebook he had produced while speaking.

"And every week, we will discuss what you have written down," Dr. Laeverton said.

Draco stood and reached out his hand for Dr. Laeverton to place the notebook in it. When the doctor hovered the notebook above Draco's hand, his gray eyes flashed with silver when they glared at Dr. Laeverton.

"You must eat, Mr. Smith," Dr. Laeverton said firmly. "The second I hear you're not eating, I'll take this away."

Draco scoffed. "Have you tried the food here? It's unbelievable! It smells worse than your turtles do!"

Dr. Laeverton laughed when Smith's face scrunched up like he'd eaten a bug. "You'll manage."

"Fine," Draco said, plainly disgusted.

Dr. Laeverton handed him the notebook and walked the pale young man to the door. "I'll see you next week, Mr. Smith."

***

Draco closed the door to his bedroom behind him. He tossed the notebook on his bed and went to the small table by the bathroom and, grabbing the table and a nearby chair, he dragged the furniture across the bedroom until it sat directly under the barred window. Then, using only the light from his bathroom and the pale light of the pitted moon above the hospital, Draco set the notebook and a pen on the table, seated himself, and opened it up to the first page.

Like Draco somehow knew he would, the Eagle Owl flew down and perched on the windowsill, watching Draco write over his shoulder, through the barred window.

Draco glanced once at the magnificent bird. "My first entry is about you, my friend," Draco murmured with a light smile.

The Eagle Owl made no sound, his shrewd yellow eyes watching patiently from the other side of the glass as he waited for his master.

~*~
The Last Kiss

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Last Kiss~

One week later...
***

Ron Weasley stood and peered over his cubicle at his partner, Harry Potter, who was seated behind his desk, fiddling with his wand with some far away look crowding his features.

Harry had become incredibly moody the past couple of weeks--if he wasn't already incredibly moody. Especially this week. Harry seemed to space out more often, staring into places Ron couldn't see and neglecting his paperwork; a thing Harry rarely did. Ron often tried to snap him out of it. Yesterday, Ron took him to The Mild Brew, a pub down the street, for a few drinks; however, a few drinks turned into many and Ron ended up dragging an incoherent Boy-Who-Lived (Twice) from the pub within a few hours. An ex-lover of Harry's, a Hogwarts Hufflepuff graduate by the name of Cruent Mantle, was sighted with some other bloke by the pair of them the second they had walked in.

Not one to want to make scene, Harry had perched on a barstool at the other end of the pub and quietly drained three schooners by the time Ron had ordered his first. Harry's reaction had honestly surprised Ron. Ron had thought Harry was over the Hufflepuff bloke. They hadn't dated in some six months and Harry never spoke of him.

Truth be told, Harry never mentioned that seeing Cruent had bothered him, but Ron would never call himself an expert on ponce inclination. In fact, even being Harry's best mate hadn’t ever clued him in that Harry was bi or gay or whatever the hell he was. The shock of Harry taking a shine to blokes as well as women had passed as quickly as it came though. Hermione had thought it was wonderful news when Harry had quietly announced that Cruent was his lover. Ron thought it was strange but didn't give it much energy. Harry was his best mate and whatever or whoever he was shagging was his own business. It was just...Ron had really, really hoped Harry and Ginny were going to re-establish their relationship after the Eve War.

Ron remembered the look on Harry's face when Ginny had shown up to their Auror Graduation with some bloke named Lenor Remuin, a cousin of Luna Lovegood's. There was this sardonic, half-smile that hovered on his lips for half a moment before he smiled genuinely at Ginny and introduced himself to Lenor.
Since then, Harry moved back and forth between sexes and his longer relationships were quiet, almost surfacey ones with this bloke or that bloke. Even so, Harry had been even more distant with his lovers than he was with his friends. Ron and Hermione were still the only two he confided in about his feelings; and even that was less and less frequently.

Harry raised his green eyes to Ron and raised his black brows inquisitively. Ron gave him a pained, helpless grin, having no real explanation for standing over Harry for nearly a full five minutes. Harry pushed at the bridge of his nose habitually. Harry was still, even after the three years of no longer wearing his glasses, not used to not having them. He dropped his hand and waited for Ron to say something.

"You hung-over, mate?" Ron asked finally.

"No," Harry replied.

Ron was quiet for a moment. "Muggles call this depression, Harry. Maybe we sent the wrong wizard to St. Mary's."

Harry smiled a little. "Cute."

Ron shrugged. "You want to go home early?"

Harry raised one raven-colored brow. "I think the real question is: Do you want to go home early?"

Ron made a face but managed to grin back. "Well, Hermione wants to cook me some Muggle something or another. She says dinner's at six sharp and I wanted to...you know..."

Harry raised his chin and Ron turned beet red.

"Well, you know," Ron stammered. "I want to bring her flowers and Merlin save me if I'm late...And don't look at me like that."

Harry laughed softly. "How can you still be shy when talking about her?"

Ron didn't answer immediately. "I...just can't believe she's mine. That she chose me and she hasn't run away screaming yet. She makes me want to pull my hair out sometimes, mate, to be sure. But...I wouldn't want her any other way."

Harry nodded slowly. "That's incredibly romantic, Ron."

"Shut up, you git," Ron said laughing as he lunged for to swat at Harry's head.

Harry moved his head to the side and stood up. "You go ahead home, Ron. Azkaban allotted time for one more interrogation before Lucius Malfoy gets the Kiss. I'll head over there and then I'll go home."

Ron chewed on the inside of his cheek for a moment. "I forgot about that."

Harry snorted softly. "No, you didn't."

Ron looked away for a moment. It was something to wonder at that Ron was able to find it in his heart to show a level of tolerance towards Draco Malfoy while working on the Malfoy case; but Ron refused to acknowledge anything about Lucius Malfoy.

The Death Eater had tried to assassinate his parents before the Eve War and was captured by Snape, who, coincidentally, had been speaking to Molly, Ron's mother about something to do with the
Order of the Phoenix through The Burrow's fireplace. Snape had instantly Apparated in, Stupefied Lucius Malfoy, and handed him over to the Ministry who immediately sent him to Azkaban. It was rumored that Lucius was present when Voldemort murdered his wife, Narcissa, and did nothing.

After a condemning testimonial by Severus Snape in a hearing after the Eve War, Lucius had received an order for the Dementor's Kiss and his execution was later this evening.

Ron could find no sympathy in his heart for someone who tried to murder his parents. None at all. And that was probably the only thing he had in common with Lucius' son, Draco Malfoy.

"I'll go with you if you need me," Ron said finally.

"I don't," Harry said softly but firmly. "You go home to Hermione."

"You're sure?"

Harry responded by nodding, putting on his cloak, and walking away.

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Azkaban wouldn't exactly be Harry's choice to spend a holiday, but walking through its dank halls, he couldn't help but feel a measure of satisfaction. There were Death Eaters here that he and Ron had personally arrested, as well as many dark wizards other Aurors had a hand in taking down. The wailing and howling of the imprisoned even made Harry smile grimly, knowing that these wizards had and are getting what they deserved.

The Dementors crowding the halls made way for him. Harry had realized, upon his first visit to Azkaban that the Dementors all seemed to shy away from him, apparently knowing he could conjure the Patronus and having no desire to instigate it. Harry turned a corner and approached Lucius Malfoy's cell. Winston Reakley, a crooked, shrunken creature of a man, stood by the cell door with two Dementors on either side. Reakley, a Squib who took to being a sort of caretaker for the Wizarding prison, was unaffected by the Dementors' magical ability to suck the cheer from anyone near it and moved forward instantly when seeing Harry and offered him a smile that had more teeth missing than not.

"Ah, Mr. Potter, always on time, always on time," Reakley said in his high-pitched, raspy voice. "Must be quick, Mr. Potter. We're always on time too, always on time."

"Thank you for letting me here, Mr. Reakley," Harry said softly. "It's important for the case I'm working on."

"I see," Reakley rasped. "Hurry in, Mr. Potter. Hurry in."

Harry Potter, used to Reakley's madness and obsession with time, allowed Reakley to open the cell door for him and walked in.

Lucius Malfoy still managed to look impeccably groomed despite the years in this worst circle of hell and when he looked up at Harry, he realized Lucius was quite as mad as Reakley. Harry figured he would be a bit off his rocker too if he had to live here. Harry waited for Reakley to close the door and leaned against a damp wall of the dirty cell.

"Harry Potter," Lucius drawled, his lip curling into a sneer. "How sweet of you to visit on my Execution Day. Paying your last respects?"

"Hardly," Harry responded, crossing his arms deep within the folds of his robes. "I came to speak to
“I have no son,” Lucius replied instantly, his eyes flashing silver in his madness. “No son at all. Pity that the Malfoy legacy must end with me. But, alas, all great things must come to an end.”

“Draco Malfoy,” Harry said slowly, trying to trigger a memory. “Draco, your son, is in danger from your colleagues. I know you know of the price on his head. Who sent out the warrant, Lucius?”

“Is it is up to one million galleons yet?”

Harry frowned. “Lucius...all I want is a name.”

Lucius laughed. It began softly and then erupted into something awful and unpleasant, ringing off the walls of his cell. Harry wondered how often Lucius had to practice the laugh before he mastered that particular effect.

“And will you be gracious and convince the Dementors to hold off their Kiss for one more day if I tell you?” Lucius cackled. “Or perhaps you’ll show mercy and kill me yourself, saving me from the indignity of losing my soul? What say you, Harry Potter? What say you? I’m quite literally dying to find out.”

“He’s your son, Lucius,” Harry grated. “That should mean something to you.”

“HE MURDERED MY WIFE!” Lucius exploded.

Harry shook his head, wondering if Lucius’ thoughts were really that warped or if he was faking it. “No, Voldemort did.”

“It’s because of him that Narcissa is dead,” Lucius spat. “That weak disgrace is no son of mine.”

“He is and Death Eaters will murder him too if you don’t tell me who sent out the warrant,” Harry said quietly. “You could prevent that...like you could have prevented what happened to your wife.”

The cackle was back and Lucius’ eyes gleamed maniacally. "Narcissa got what was coming to her for breeding such a son."

“So you acknowledge Draco is your son?”

“Was hers, never mine. Never mine.”

Harry was quiet for a long moment and the silence made Lucius shift nervously. "He worshipped you,” Harry said finally.

"Apparently not enough,” Lucius replied with a lift of his chin. "He destroyed everything we stood for single handedly."

A muscle in Harry's jaw twitched. "Not single handedly, Harry thought."

"One last chance, Lucius,” Harry said.

"Life is abundant with last chances."

Harry turned and knocked on the door. Reakley came in the cell and the pair of Dementors followed, floating mere inches from above the ground and hidden in their ragged black cloaks. Reakley grinned at Harry. "Always on time, Mr. Potter. Always on time. Will you watch?”
"Draco resented you for being everything he wanted to be," Lucius said suddenly, his eyes dark and shaded, pushing himself as far against the wall and away from the two Dementors as possible. "And irony would have it that you resent him for the one thing he could do that you couldn't. Jealousy is a renowned Slytherin trait, Harry Potter."

Harry focused all his hatred for Lucius Malfoy into the single nod he gave Reakley before he turned back to Lucius, who was cringing in the corner of his cell. The Dementors advanced on Lucius Malfoy and he began to whimper.

"Who sent out the warrant to kill your son, Draco Malfoy?" Harry called out one last time.

"He is no son of mine," Lucius repeated a final time. "The answer lies within Slytherin..."

Harry watched as the Dementors pulled their hoods down to perform the Kiss with lidded eyes. Lucius screamed once before the two black figures obscured Lucius from Harry's view. A pale light flashed and was swallowed immediately, and Harry heard the distinct sound of a body slumping to the ground. Reakley beckoned to the two Dementors and they followed him from the cell, leaving Harry to peer through the darkness at the dead, soulless father of Draco Malfoy.

And Harry wondered if Lucius Malfoy had been dead and soulless all along.

~*~
Happy Nightmares, Mr. Smith

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: Oh, by the by, in case you all haven't figured it out already, I started writing this story before Deathly Hallows came out, so it's not exactly compatible. I do, however, refer to bits and pieces of the seventh book in later chapters. Sorry for the confusion. I probably should have warned about that at the beginning of the Prologue. My mistake.

~Happy Nightmares, Mr. Smith~

On the other side of the world...

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Draco watched the raven-haired man with the brilliant green eyes gaze at the dead man who looked so much like him. He wanted to scream in frustration but couldn't make a sound.

Draco didn't know why he was so angry at the dead, white-haired man but a loathing that bordered on hate churned inside of him. Draco turned his glare towards the dark figure with the green eyes. His mind screamed that he knew both of them, but no solid memory was forthcoming. Suddenly, the green-eyed man turned towards Draco, his handsome features troubled with a mixture of surprise and confusion. Draco's scar exploded with white hot pain and he struggled not to lose sight of the man through the fire searing through his head.

The man's hair tumbled in unruly, black locks all around his face and his bright green eyes fairly gleamed while they searched the darkness. Draco tried to call out to him but no sound came out of his mouth. Something moved in Draco's mind and his scar erupted with a fresh wave of pain. Trembling, Draco tried to move forward towards the searching green eyes and the moving thing in his mind pushed him back.

The man frowned, his eyes turning a grave sort of forest green, and turned away, leaving the cell and Draco's sight of him. Draco roared in his mind, rattling his surroundings until they shimmered and dissipated. Shouting his anger, Draco woke from his dream and clawed at his scar.

A Betty rushed into the room and grabbed Draco's arm, inquiring urgently if he was all right.

"I'm fine!" Draco screamed and jerked his arm away, frustrated tears gathering in his eyes. "Get away from me!"
A Betty-boy stumbled into the room and the Betty turned and whispered urgently to him. Draco sat up and threw his legs over the side of the bed, burying his head in his hands. He squeezed his eyes shut against the pain emanating from his scar and tried to concentrate on breathing.

"Mr. Smith," the Betty called softly. "Alex is going to fetch you some water and something that will help you rest. Will you be all right while he's away?"

Draco nodded but didn't look up until he heard the door shut behind them. Draco stood up on trembling legs and went to his window. The Eagle Owl peered back at him, the shrewd yellow eyes bright and intelligent.

"Please," Draco whispered. "Please...bring me something that will help me remember."

The magnificent bird bellowed a hoot before spreading his massive wings and taking flight. Draco sat at the table by the window and reached for his notebook, hugging it to his chest for a moment before placing it on the table to write in it. He opened the notebook to the second page and, in his elegant scrawl, began to jot down what he remembered from his dream.

He quickly wrote about the cell, the green-eyed man who was already in it talking to the silver-haired man in the corner, the hunchbacked, shriveled man who came in with the black-clad monsters, how they sucked something pearly and white from the silver-haired man, and how the green-eyed man had acted like he felt Draco in the room even though he couldn't see him.

And Draco wrote about how he hated the silver-haired man that looked like an older version of himself. The man's hair was much longer than Draco's, but the pale, pointed face was the same. They shared the same cold, gray eyes, the slender yet powerful build, and the same white-blond hair. The man even looked like Draco when he sneered.

And Draco hated him. It ate at Draco that he didn't understand why, but he knew. He knew that knew that he knew.

He finished the passage with a description of how his scar burned when the green-eyed man looked at him. The green-eyed man. Draco remembered that everything about this man hit him as extremely intense. The perfect angles of his face were intense. The pure green of his eyes were intense. Even his coloring was intense; black hair, pale skin, and green, green eyes.

It was the green he remembered the most. No one at St. Mary's had eyes that color. Usually, "green eyes" were dusted and tamed by a myriad of other colors. Not this green. It was pure and bright and wild.

Draco closed his notebook and looked around his room, searching the darkness for an answer that was not forthcoming.

Alex, the Betty-boy, knocked on his door once before entering. Draco looked up expectantly and the Betty-boy took a step inside the room, carrying a cup of water and a large blue pill. Draco eyed the pill warily but took it when the Betty-boy handed it to him. He placed the chalk-tasting thing in his mouth and used the water in the cup to help him swallow.

Suddenly, a woman shrieked behind the Betty-boy and the Eagle Owl swooped into Draco's room from the main hall. The owl flew around Draco once before dropping something at Draco's feet. The Betty-boy shouted and jumped back when they saw it was a snake. The snake twisted and hissed before rearing back his head and glaring around him. The snake's yellow eyes came to rest on Draco's surprised face and hissed.
Draco tilted his head to one side, watching the snake watch him and suddenly images began banging through Draco's mind. Images of a young, black-haired boy with round glasses and a thin stick in his hand, standing before him on a blue table with golden moon patterns embroidered into it, staring and hissing back at a snake similar to this one. Then images of green and black snakes buffeted him. Everywhere were decorations of green, black, and white. Snakes and dragons were painted on walls, stitched into banners, and engraved into bed posters. The images were gone as quickly as they came and Draco found himself stepping back as the Eagle Owl swooped back through, picked up the snake, and ripped its throat out with his large, sharp talons.

The Betty-boy lunged forward, trying to grab the owl, but Draco grabbed his arm and threw him back. "No!" Draco shouted. "Don't!"

The Eagle Owl circled the room once more before flying back out into the main hall and disappearing in the Ward. Draco found himself praying that the bird made out without an altercation with any of the Betties.

Draco let go of the Betty-boy and turned to look at him, confused that his face was swimming in his gaze. Draco's knees buckled and gave out. The Betty-boy caught him and carried him to his bed.

"Sweet dreams, Mr. Smith," was the last thing Draco heard before the darkness claimed him.

***

The next day, Draco chewed thoughtfully on a spoonful of oatmeal and tried to remember if he'd tasted anything as terrible as the pile of mush in the bowl before him. Of course he could. It was the pile of mush he'd had for breakfast yesterday. It was a different kind of 'terrible' though. Mettle had called it 'grits' and gobbled his up right away. It had taken Draco a full hour of choking past his gag-reflex long enough to consume most of the bowl's contents. Today seemed a little better in that it may only take roughly three quarters of an hour to choke past his gag-reflex.

Draco sighed and looked up when he heard a bit of commotion towards the entrance of the Cafeteria. Draco stood, happy for an excuse to get away from the terrible pile of mush; and Mettle and Bane were instantly up and pushing a way through the gathering crowd for Draco. Approaching the Cafeteria's entrance, Draco could make out the figure of Nina Rolter, one of the few female patients in the Ward, following three Betty-boys who were carrying her luggage towards the Ward's entrance.

Catching her eye and seeing her pause, Draco walked up to her and offered her an interested smile. Nina smiled shyly back at him. "They're releasing me today."

Draco's fair brows arched skywards. "Are they, now? I had heard they didn't do that often."

Nina was quiet for a moment, her soft brown eyes darting around them. Finally she leaned in. "They won't let you go if they think you're crazy," she whispered. "You mustn't let them think you're crazy."

Draco nodded gravely as she stepped away again. The Betty-boys had paused and were calling for her. Nina started towards them but stopped again and returned to Draco. Nina reached out and grasped both of Draco's hands. "Nobility isn't about being better than others," Nina said in a hushed voice. "It's about being better than you used to be."

Draco blinked and tried to his pull his hands away but she wouldn't release him.

"You must understand," Nina whispered fiercely. "You must understand."
"All right, Nina," Draco murmured.

Nina let his hands go as suddenly as she had taken them, turned on her heel, and walked away. Draco stared after her and thought about what he'd written in his notebook this morning and the night before. The more he thought about it, the madder it sounded.

Draco knew he wasn't crazy...but his memories definitely sounded crazy.

Draco turned and strode back to Bane and Mettle. He glanced once at Mettle before lifting his eyes to Bane's cruel, icy blue ones. "I need a notebook. A blank one. One that looks identical to the one the Doc gave me."

"Consider it done," Bane replied.

***

Later that evening, after Draco had showered and brushed his teeth, a Betty knocked on his door and came in. She handed him a glass of water and a large blue pill.

"I don't want it," Draco said.

"Doc's orders," the Betty replied cheerfully. "You can take it up with him next week."

Draco grabbed the pill and the glass of water, put the pill to his lips, and drained the glass of water. The Betty lifted her chin to inspect Draco's mouth. Satisfied, the Betty took the glass and left the room, closing the door neatly behind her. Draco walked back into his bathroom and tossed the pill, having never left his fingers, into the toilet. As he flushed the toilet he heard his bedroom door open and close again. When Draco emerged from the bathroom he saw a new notebook had been place on his bed.

Quickly, he sat on his bed and scribbled a few notes about random things, pretending those things may have triggered some memory and lying about déjà vu. Then Draco placed the notebook on his nightstand and looked over at his window in time to see the Eagle Owl land on his window sill. Draco smiled mischievously at the owl and the bird responded by raising his black ear tufts.

"Good night, bird," Draco murmured, pulling the bed covers over his body and laying back against the pillows. "Let's see what other little pearls my dreams will have for me tonight, eh?"

The Eagle Owl hooted softly but made no other movement, ever the patient one.

***
The following day...

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"The answer lies within Slytherin?" Ron mused, tossing a paper ball into the air and catching it distractedly. "Doesn't get much more ambiguous then that, does it?"

Harry, who was seated in his chair behind his desk, his head back and staring at the ceiling, and using his legs to swivel himself around and around, grunted noncommittally. "I think he meant it to be. He wasn't exactly falling over himself to save his son."

Ron eyed Harry as his best mate twirled himself faster and faster in the chair. "What was it Lucius had said before that again?"

Harry placed his feet flat on the ground, causing his spinning to come to an abrupt stop, and tried to remember Lucius Malfoy's exact words. "Something about Draco being jealous of me during Hogwarts," Harry said slowly. "Which doesn't make much sense. Malfoy never wanted for anything. Then Lucius accused me of being jealous of Draco killing Voldemort...and that jealousy was a renowned Slytherin trait."

Ron placed the paper ball on Harry's desk, sat backwards in a near by chair, and peered at his partner. "Are you?"

"No!" Harry answered quickly. "I'd be dead, right?"

Ron continued to peer at him but said nothing.

"Ron," Harry said, irritation growing in his voice as he stood up and looked down at his life long friend. "Don't be a ridiculous prat. The goal was always to defeat Voldemort. It shouldn't matter who actually did it."

"You're right," Ron conceded softly. "It shouldn't."

Harry made a disgusted noise in the back of his throat and tossed his head back. "Whatever, Ron," Harry said, grabbing his cloak and throwing it over his shoulders. "I'm going to Hogwarts to talk to Snape. The Head of Slytherin House might know what direction to point us in."
Ron nodded and rose to his feet. "I'll stay here and wait for Nickle to file his report." Nickle was the first Auror they had sent to the U.S. to check on Malfoy, and should be returning later this afternoon.

"All right," Harry said, grabbing his wand and stuffing it in one of his sleeves. "I'll see you in a few."

"In a few," Ron echoed.

***

Severus Snape sighed when Harry Potter walked into his office behind the Potions section of the Hogwarts Dungeon. "To what, pray tell, do I owe the pleasure, Potter?" Snape said, adding the extra special sneer when pronouncing Harry's last name.

Harry's smile was condescending and filled with barely restrained malevolence as he took a seat across from Snape's desk. The civility between them stemmed from necessity during their stand in the Order of the Phoenix; however, a few years of fighting on the same side didn't change six years of ever-present hostility. It was the strangest feeling to Harry, trusting Snape without ever actually giving a damn about him. Their civil rivalry and the charade they always exploited of nearly hating one another was almost their way of clinging to the simple familiarity of the past. It was a nicety they played with, their version of ceremonial exchange, and it suited them just fine.

Ron and Snape liked to ignore one another whenever possible but Hermione would often owl Snape for advice on this potion or that potion; which, of course, complimented Snape just enough for him to be civil with the Muggle-born best friend of Harry Potter.

"Your godson, of course," Harry answered, lidding his brilliant green eyes. "Why else would I trouble you with my presence?"

"I never took you for a poet, Potter," Snape replied, without missing a beat. "How is Draco?"

Harry paused before answering. Nickle would be returning to the Ministry that afternoon with a full report and they hadn't heard anything suspicious yet. Hermione, of course, having the Muggle-worthy Excuse Committee with the Muggle Protection Act and the International Code of Wizard Secrecy on the brain breathing down her neck these past two weeks, had kept a special eye on St. Mary's and had sent daily reports that all was quiet.

"Fine," Harry said finally. "We'll know more later this afternoon."

Snape nodded, not able to bring himself to show an actual measure of gratitude. "And?"

"I spoke to Lucius before he received the Kiss," Harry continued. "He wouldn't reveal who sent out the warrant for Malfoy, but he said the 'answer lies within Slytherin'."

Snape stood and walked to the far side of his office, arms folded deep within his robes, like they usually were, and his back facing Harry. Lucius Malfoy had once been a kind of friend to Severus Snape. Technically, Snape had used Lucius more than Lucius had used him, but there had always been something more to the dynamic between them. Lucius had, in fact, named Snape Draco's godfather. Harry suspected it had less to do with Lucius than it did with Narcissa. Harry had often wondered if Snape and Draco's mother had once been lovers. Narcissa's death had been a blow to Snape; almost as heavily as it had been to Draco Malfoy. Snape would never speak of it but since her death, a framed picture of Narcissa Malfoy with a cool smile was an ever-present decoration on Snape's desk. The only one, in fact.

"I am not so naive as to believe that all Death Eaters in allegiance with Voldemort were once of Slytherin House," Harry said after a while. "As evident with Pettigrew, Sloper, Edgecombe, and
Cadwallader. That being said, if 'the answer lies within Slytherin', we may have a slimmer list."

Snape turned back to Harry and stared at him, his beady, black eyes cold and unrepentant.

"Ron has made a list of all the Death Eaters on record who have graduated from Slytherin House," Harry went on saying, matching his stare. "I was hoping you would be able to give your professional opinion as Head of Slytherin House."

Harry handed him a scroll that had hundreds of names scribbled on it in Ron's tell-tale handwriting. Snape took it from him but continued to level Harry with his stare.

"I'm not here to debate the honor of the Slytherin House and the tendencies of those within, Snape," Harry said tiredly.

"No," Snape said coldly. "You've made your opinion quite clear."

Snape unrolled the scroll and skimmed the list of names. A few that popped up more than once were the bloodlines of Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, and, of course, Malfoy. Others were Vaisey, Flint, Pucey, Higgs, Warrington, Harper, and many, many more.

"I'll ponder these names and let you know if I remember anything overly remarkable," Snape said quietly after some time.

"Thank you," Harry said, standing. Harry turned to the door but stopped and came back. "Snape, have you...learned how he did it? You had thought it was a potion."

Snape resumed his seat behind his desk before answering and pulled a large book from the shelf behind him. He opened it to a marked page and slid it across the desk.

Harry sat back down and peered over the dusty pages.

"Horcruxes can only be made by murder," Snape said. "But Draco's intention was never to create a Horcrux. He wanted to use his body as a conduit for the Horcrux that was already in existence. That either requires a dangerous bit of Alchemy that I am fairly certain Draco had no knowledge of...or a very complex potion, called The Verve Channel Electron Elixir."

Harry lifted his eyes and met Snape's black ones. "Sounds a bit scientific for a potion."

Snape nodded slowly as he eased back into his chair, a contemptuous sneer curling his lip. "Potion making is a science. Really, Potter, sometimes I wonder if I taught you anything."

Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek to keep from responding.

Snape flicked his wrist dismissively. "Either way, the VCE Elixir doesn't make sense for the time Draco would have had to make it."

Harry draw his brows together. "What do you mean?"

Snape leaned forward and tapped on the page he had opened the book to that showed how to make the Verve Channel Electron Elixir. "It takes four years and nine months to make, Potter."

Harry glanced at the page and then back at Snape. "So does that mean Draco Malfoy is an Alchemist?" Hermione Granger is just going to LOVE that one...

Snape lifted his shoulders minutely in a small shrug. "Either that or Dumbledore had told Draco about the Horcruxes in his second year." Snape shook his head. "He barely knew how to ride a
broom back then, let alone create a complex elixir like the VCE."

Harry frowned and studied the list of required ingredients. He stopped when he saw the Elixir called for the Leerdog Root. "I don't recognize this one," Harry stated, tapping his finger on the page.

"It's a root that only grows at the south west tip of the Tien Shen Pass. That's another factor to consider as the Leerdog Root withers within seconds of leaving the dirt and must be placed directly into the cauldron precisely when it is needed."

"This means if he did figure a way to make the elixir," Harry mused, "he would have had to make in the Tien Shen Pass."

Snape nodded. "Precisely."

Harry was quiet for a moment. "How good was Malfoy at making potions?"

"Better than most," Snape said. "It's still not probable, though."

Harry tsked tsked as he thought to himself. "If there's anything I've learned, Snape, it's that anything is probable in the Wizarding World."

Snape snorted. "But then, learning was never your forte, was it?"

Harry glared at his former Potions Professor. "And prolonging intelligent, civil discussions was never yours," Harry replied.

Snape sneered but said nothing, satisfied that he’d gotten under Harry’s skin.

Harry sat back in his chair and looked around Snape’s office. "Still," Harry said slowly. "Is there anything to suggest that Draco would have the means and ability to make this potion?"

Snape was quiet for a moment. "Yes," he said finally.

"Like what?"

"Draco Malfoy was always focused on something," Snape murmured, remembering. "Always studying, always was pushing himself.” Snape glanced once at Harry’s disbelieving face. "His tendency to torment you and your Gryffindor friends was an outlet for him, I think."

Harry made a face but said nothing.

"He studied on holidays, during summer holiday even; he would lock himself in his room and only eat if the house elves pestered him.” Snape paused. "Draco excelled at potion making because he had a knack for it, and not, though I’m sure you would claim otherwise, because of my preference for my godson."

Harry raised an eyebrow and bit back the snarky remark hovering around his thin, disbelieving smile. "Malfoy never hit me as the studying type,” Harry said instead.

"Of course not,” Snape snapped. "You were too busy copying off of Granger or wallowing in the misery of your stardom."

Harry crossed his arms and glared at his former Potions Professor, feeling like student again under Snape’s withering glare.

"Draco never made real friends because of his habit of locking himself away with this book or that
one--except, perhaps, Zabini...but that was more a social agreement then anything else," Snape continued, "and Crabbe, Goyle, and Parkinson followed him around because...well, because that's just the way it was."

Snape glanced at the framed picture of Narcissa Malfoy. "Malfoys always have this aura about them," Snape murmured. "If you're not a Malfoy, and you are Slytherin...it's always in your best interest just to do the Malfoy's bidding."

Harry snorted and the glare Snape sent him could have set the Womping Willow aflame. "Why do you think Granger, Weasley, and Longbottom gravitated to you, Potter? Because they could just tell, instantly, that they would be life long friends with you?! No! It was because there was something they sensed about you that seemed right. They knew instinctually that if they walked in your shadow, everything would be fine. It is the same in Slytherin House. There is the Prince, and then there is everyone else."

Harry was silent for a moment, tossing this logic around in his head. He thought of the Houses and how there always seemed to be a shining star. Cedric Diggory, Cho Chang, Oliver Wood, Draco Malfoy...and, perhaps, even himself, Harry Potter.

"And for Slytherin," Snape said, "it was always a Malfoy."

"Why?" Harry asked darkly. "Because they were Pureblood?"

It was Snape's turn to smile. "No one is really a Pureblood, Potter. Draco even realized this in his fourth year."

"Then why did he insist on all the blood slurs?"

Snape slammed his fist on his desk, rattling the frame of Narcissa Malfoy. "Because it angered you, you moron! Why else would he bother you?"

Harry scowled and sat back. "It's childish."

Snape laughed--a sound Harry hadn't known he was capable of. "Very true, Potter. And believe me; I am in no way making excuses for my godson. Draco is a spoiled brat of a Malfoy who received a measure of satisfaction, and maybe even pleasure, in tormenting you and your friends. He is a perfect git when he wants to be; however, my godson is always more than meets the eye. He is more than his father ever was and keeping up the pretense that he wanted to be just like Lucius nearly killed him...Long before the Eve War and more than once."

Harry blinked and remembered Draco as a trembling teenager with his wand pointed directly at Dumbledore. The Slytherin Prince had planned the assassination perfectly but he couldn't kill the Hogwarts Headmaster. Draco was a hollow, tired, and terrified look that twisted Draco's features when he had lowered his wand, defeated by his own conscience. And Harry wondered if what Snape was telling him had actual merit.

Harry ran a hand over his face and stood. The two exchanged one more long glance, a look that was filled with silent understanding even if they would never admit anything but contempt for one another. Finally, Harry pointed to the book and asked if he could borrow it.

Snape nodded and watched Harry mark his place in the vellum text and carefully close it. Without a word, Harry left the Dungeon and strode up the long windy staircase. Harry walked through the old castle with ease, even though something was trying to make itself known in the back of Harry's mind.
Harry nodded to Nearly Headless Nick when he floated by and then stopped abruptly in front of the Great Hall. Instantly, Harry turned on his heel and barged through the large double doors and into the Great Hall. All four houses and most of the Professors instantly quieted and turned to stare at him when Harry stopped just inside the Great Hall, seeing that the school was in the middle of their midday meal. Harry turned bright red. He hadn't realized he was going to make such a scene. Harry's eyes quickly searched the Head table and located McGonagall. Beckoning to her, Harry quickly stepped back out of the hall and waited for her.

McGonagall was next to him within moments with a bewildered expression splayed across her thin features. "Mr. Potter! What is the meaning of this?"

"The Time-Turner," Harry said in a rushed voice. "The one you gave Hermione; where is it?"

"Oh!" McGonagall exclaimed. "Well, I'm sure it's in my office. I haven't needed that thing in years and Granger gave it back to me in your fourth year--"

"We need to go check," Harry said, his eyes taking on a bright shade of green. "Now!"

Harry led a protesting Headmistress McGonagall up to Dumbledore's old office and waited for her to say the password. Once inside the room, Harry waited impatiently as McGonagall rummaged through her things, looking for the small box that held the Time-Turner.

Harry had thought all the Time-Turners at the Ministry were destroyed during his battle with the Death Eaters over the Prophecy in his fifth year so he had discarded the idea of Draco using one to make the VCE Elixir the second it had come to him; but he had completely forgotten about the one McGonagall had in her possession. If Draco had found out about it, it was very possible he actually created the Verve Channel Electron Elixir in the Tien Shen Pass during the months of his disappearance.

"Here it is," McGonagall said, holding up a box. She opened it and let out a little squeak of a gasp. The box was empty.

~*~
The Hidden Dark-Mark

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Hidden Dark Mark~

Six days later...

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Draco Malfoy sat at the table by the window, in his room at St. Mary's, and wrote at a furious pace into the notebook he would bring with him to his appointment with Dr. Laeverton. The week prior, Dr. Laeverton had read his passages over and remarked that Mr. Smith was remembering at a faster rate than he would have expected; and that he looked forward to reading this week's memories. Draco knew that his notebook would have to be convincing in order to get out of this place, so he had spent the morning revising and rethinking all his written passages like his life depended on it.

Bane and Mettle watched him write from Draco's doorway. Mettle kept an eye on the Betties in the hall and ushered them away if they came too close. Bane kept his frosty blue eyes on Mr. Smith, watching how his white-blond hair fell into his cold, gray eyes and how he would suck in his bottom lip and draw his brows together in barely restrained annoyance when he ferociously began scribbling down something else into his notebook. Heat pooled in Bane's stomach and he shifted to hide his growing erection within the folds of his loose pants, all the while never taking his eyes from the man who drove him wild with his English snobbery and eyes as cold as the winter dawn.

Draco paused in his writing, his hand stilling over his notebook, feeling Bane's eyes on him like a pair of ice cubes sliding down his back. Draco raised his eyes and answered Bane's stare through the white-blond strands of his long bangs. Their obdurate stare was arctic and only when Draco stood to his feet did Bane look away.

Draco went to his closet and pulled out a white button-down shirt and a black, cashmere blazer and threw both articles of clothing on the bed. Draco shamelessly pulled off his shirt and Bane watched him through his dark lashes, like Draco knew he would. Draco reached for the white shirt on his bed but paused when he heard Mettle gasp behind him.

"Your tat, boss," Mettle murmured nervously, his beady eyes darting between Bane and Draco. "Just didn't know you had one, 's all."
Draco frowned and tried to look over his shoulder at the skin of his back. When that didn't help, Draco moved into the bathroom and opened the mirrored medicine cabinet at an angle so he could get a clearer picture of his back. Mettle was right; a small tattoo of a serpent twining out of a skull's mouth was etched into the skin between his shoulder blades. Draco glanced at the inner part of his forearm and noticed for the first time what looked like a myriad of criss-crossing scars, so faint, one could barely notice the jagged lines across Draco's skin. Draco looked at the tattoo on his back in the mirror's reflection and thought it was about the same size as the scarring on his forearm.

Suddenly, Draco felt a burst of sensation across his back, an echo of pain rather than the real thing, and Draco saw himself in a bathroom, speaking to a transparent girl, and trying to cut something out of his arm. Then the black-haired boy with the round glasses was there and Draco lifted a small stick and pointed it at him, fear and anger knotting his insides.

Draco blinked and the images were gone. Draco reemerged from the bathroom to find Bane staring openly at him again. Draco ignored him and went to his bed, picking up the shirt and the blazer and putting them on. After fixing the collar to lay just so around his neck, Draco picked up the notebook filled with lies and walked across the room. Mettle went into the hall but Draco grabbed Bane's arm, stopping him and forcing him to look into Draco's gray and unforgiving eyes.

"There is only one thing you need to know about me, you miserable piece of wank," Draco hissed in a voice so low, only the two of them could hear it. "I am untouchable. Keep your filthy fantasies to yourself."

Bane's thin lips curved into a cruel smile and Draco wondered why his blood beat faster at the sight of it. "No one is untouchable in St. Mary's," Bane murmured.

Draco was quiet for half a moment before he shoved Bane against the doorframe. Draco's eyes burned like ashen coal in a fire as he glared at Bane. "The second I perceive that as a threat, I'll kill you myself, mate."

Abruptly letting Bane go, Draco turned on his heel and strode down the hall, disappearing into the Ward.

"What the hell was that all about?" Mettle asked worriedly.

Bane turned his cruel smile on Mettle but said nothing.

***

"So, what have you discovered about yourself during these past two weeks?" Dr. Laeverton inquired, closing Draco's notebook.

Draco stopped himself from snorting dismissively and placed his elbows on his knees, peering through his bangs at the Doc. "That I've always hated jello, I have an extreme low tolerance for stupidity, and that I must've been quite popular during grade school," Draco said, the lies pouring from his mouth close enough to truths to keep him from batting an eye as he spoke them.

Dr. Laeverton nodded slowly. "And what does that mean to you, Mr. Smith?"

Draco shrugged. "Who doesn't hate jello?"

Dr. Laeverton smiled indulgently. "I quite enjoy it myself, Mr. Smith."

"You would," Draco muttered under his breath, sitting back in his seat.
"What I mean to ask is," Dr. Laeverton continued, "what does that mean to you about your own personality?"

Draco sighed. "I don't know."

"Sure you do," Dr. Laeverton prodded.

Draco spread his hands in an exasperated fashion. "That I'm a snob? That feeling nothing but disdain for you and everyone else here makes me a conceited prat? I don't know Doctor, you tell me. You're the expert."

Dr. Laeverton's smile widened. "It seems you are discovering more about yourself than you give yourself credit for, Mr. Smith."

Draco's lip curled. "Oh, piss off. I can't help what I am."

Dr. Laeverton nodded. "Yes, but it is your choices that define you. How have your choices defined you here St. Mary's?"

Draco thought of Bane; and then he thought of Nina. "That I can show a level of tolerance to anyone...as long as I feel they may be able to serve me in some way or another."

"Which is natural to every human being I've ever encountered," Dr. Laeverton mused. "Your honesty on the matter tells me that you've often pondered this."

Draco said nothing.

Dr. Laeverton re-opened the notebook and flipped to a certain page. "It seems here that something Nina said to you struck a nerve."

Draco leaned forward to read the passage. "...and then she said, "Nobility isn't about being better than others, it's about being better than you used to be." I understood it somehow, but, at the same time, it frightened me..."

Draco frowned. He had thought he placed that passage in his other notebook. Draco shrugged at the Doc and remained silent.

"Are you trying to be noble?" Dr. Laeverton asked. "Is that a goal for you?"

Draco didn't answer right away but Dr. Laeverton was patient and waited. "I know I'm trying to be different," Draco said slowly. "Not necessarily 'good', in the strictest sense of the word...but different. Better, maybe. And I know I've felt this way long before I lost my memory. That it's an ongoing struggle for me, to differentiate between what was expected of me and what I want...and what I want to be."

Dr. Laeverton nodded and scribbled down a few notes.

"I'm always going to be a snob, Doctor, that much is clear to me," Draco continued softly, staring off into some place Dr. Laeverton couldn't see. "I'm always going to look down my nose at people I feel I am better than. I'm always going to be a sneak and use my resourcefulness to manipulate others and lean towards the darker pleasures in life."

Draco thought of how his heart had beat so excitedly in his ears when Bane had turned his cruel smile on him, how that smile had hinted towards dark, unspoken things and that it made his blood quicken and set his body on fire with masochistic desire. Draco took in a deep breath and let it out
shakily. He knew that it was those darker, unspoken things that beckoned to him when he was most quiet with himself. When he was silent in his room and heard his mind whisper tauntingly to him, trying to convince him that he was kidding himself for trying to be more than what everyone had always thought he was.

"And that's what frightens me the most," Draco said, his voice barely more than a whisper. "I can't be completely hateful...and I can't be completely good, either. So what does that make me? Sometimes I'm afraid of remembering. I'm afraid that my memories will tell me that I'm a terrible person without any hope of redeeming myself. And I can't help feeling that I wasn't supposed to survive. That whatever happened that gave me this--"Draco gestured to his scar."--was my coward's way of making up for what I was before. And now that I am alive, I have to figure myself out all over again. Doctor, I don't know if I can do that."

Dr. Laeverton was writing rapidly in his notes when Draco had finished and looked up at the young man. His gray eyes looked dull and beaten and his whole body spoke of extreme exhaustion. Dr. Laeverton put his pen down and laced his fingers in front of him. "What would it mean to you if you tried?"

Draco closed his eyes and briefly saw the man with the green eyes and the tattoo etched into his own back. "That I will be alone."

"And why do you feel that?"

"Because everyone who knew me as I was either worshipped me or hated me. If I am different now, no one will trust me."

***

Draco returned to his room more annoyed than when he left it and threw his notebook as hard as he could against the far wall. The Eagle Owl, alarmed, raised his black ear tufts and bellowed a worried hoot.

"Shut up," Draco spat at the bird. "You're not helping."

The Eagle Owl ruffled his feathers indignantly before spreading his massive wings and flying off. Draco sat on the edge of the bed and stared at his hands. Slowly, Draco's eyes ran the length of his left forearm until they rested on the patch of skin that was marred with faint scarring. Draco reached to the night stand by his bed and grabbed a pen in the top drawer. Shaking it for a moment to get the ink inside to slide to the point, Draco put the ball point to the scarred skin and began drawing the tattoo on his back onto his arm. When he was finished, a boiling mix of horror and hate churned his stomach and rose up the back of his throat as he stared at the snake pouring from the skull’s mouth. Jumping to his feet, Draco ran to the bathroom and vomited into the toilet. He retched and retched until there was nothing left and he was succumbed to sobbing against the porcelain. His wracking sobs were interrupted by the sound of someone entering his room. Quickly, Draco wiped at his face and stood to his feet by the time the intruder came into view.

Bane stared at Draco with a mixture of curiosity and residual contempt, his mouth a thin line on his face. Draco glared back at Bane, his whole body trembling with rage.

"I warned you, Bane," Draco whispered, the sound of his voice like shattering glass. "I warned you."

Bane smiled his cruel smile and took a step forward, the gleam in his eye predatory and maniacal.
Suddenly, the bedroom and the bathroom began to shake. The light from the bathroom and the lamp on the nightstand began to flicker sporadically. Anything that wasn’t bolted to the floor rose into the air and sped around the rooms in strange, frantic patterns. Energy snapped and sizzled around Draco as his rage began to manifest itself as wandless, uncontrollable magic.

Draco raised his hand and closed it into a fist, while doing so; Bane rose into the air and clawed at his throat. As Draco tightened his fingers, Bane’s air supply was cut off and his pale, blue eyes bulged. Bane began kicking his feet wildly as Draco held him there and Draco took a step forward, out of the bathroom, pushing Bane towards his bedroom’s door as he did so.

Abruptly, Draco shook his head and tried to get a handle on what was happening to him. Draco abruptly flicked his wrist, releasing his magical hold on Bane and sending Bane staggering against the door. Draco approached the gasping Bane and reached out, curling his fingers around the older man’s throat. "Get out," Draco spat before letting him go and backing away.

Terrified, Bane stared back up at Draco as the room around them began to calm and the levitating objects and flickering lights returned to normal. Finally, Bane scrambled to his feet, opened the door, threw himself out, and closed the door behind him with a resounding thud.

Draco looked at his hands, energy still spiking around them, and saw black stars creep into the edge of his gaze. Draco looked around his room and swayed as the room swam in his gaze.

Draco lifted his hand to his scar and promptly passed out.

~*~
An Unlikely Pensieve

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~An Unlikely Pensieve~

The following day...
***

Hermione paced back and forth across her office of Muggle Affairs, shooting the Malfoy Case's head Aurors dirty looks every time she passed them. Ron and Harry, for their part, and being used to Hermione's temper, remained quiet.

Hermione abruptly stopped her pacing and whirled on them, her brown eyes positively spitting fire. "I CANNOT believe you two did not confiscate Malfoy's owl!"

Ron spread his hands helplessly. "'Mione, really, it's not like things like this haven't happened bef--"

"Ronald, don't you start!" Hermione interrupted him with a stamp of her foot. "YOU two were the ones that insisted that I make sure everything stayed completely 'hush hush', YOU two were the ones that forgot about an owl's tendency to follow their Wizard anywhere he or she happened to go, and now YOU two are the ones who will clean this mess up with the Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee!"

"'Mione, we really can't afford for anything like this get out," Ron said as he moved forward and rested both hands on his fiancée’s shoulders. "If they find out that that owl is Malfoy's, then everyone will know where we stashed him. You've got to help us cover this up--"

"No, Ron," Hermione said, shaking her head vigorously. "This is your mess and I have too much to do--"

"But you know those prats in the Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee better than I do, 'Mione," Ron persisted. "And you're the genius here, remember?"

Hermione glared at him. "What, precisely, am I going to say to cover this up? And why should I? You just stood there and told me Nickle reported overhearing some Muggle say that Malfoy tried to choke the life out of him without touching him! I still maintain that it's not safe for Malfoy to be locked up with Muggles, Ron! That owl is helping him remember and now he's harming Muggles!"
Ron shook his head and offered her a light smile. "They're crazies, 'Mione. Nobody believed him and who says Malfoy knows how to do wandless magic anyway?"

Hermione jerked away from Ron and looked at him like if he had two brain cells to rub together, he'd be dangerous. "Ron! Malfoy is a Wizard. Making him disappear with a bunch a Muggles isn't going to change that! His magic is going to come out and if he doesn't have his wand to control it, imagine what he could do! Really, Ron, I wonder if you've thought this out at all."

"Well, you agreed to help us, 'Mione," Ron pointed out. "You must've thought that it would have done some good."

"Against my better judgment, Ron, if you remember correctly," Hermione snapped. "I cannot believe you forgot about his owl. I thought you two were professional Aurors!"

Harry, who had been hiding his smile behind his hand, finally stepped forward. "What do you think we should do, Hermione?"

Hermione, startled, whipped her head towards Harry, having forgotten that he was there. "I think you should get him out of there immediately. That Muggle obviously did something to him to set him off. You need to get Malfoy out of confinement, Harry. How would you feel?"

Harry breathed in deeply and shook his head. "We designed this so he wouldn't get out for a while, 'Mione, remember? If he started to remember, they would think he was mad and keep him longer."

"Nickle said the Ward's therapist had high hopes for his case," Hermione countered. "This doctor doesn't believe Malfoy's crazy at all."

"Still..." Harry ran his hands through his hair. "It's too soon."

Ron, recognizing the ambiguous look on his partner's face, turned to Harry. "Mate, what are you playing at?"

Harry glanced at Ron. "I need more time."

"For what?" Ron asked. "As long as we keep him hidden, we'll have plenty of time to fish out those Death Eaters who want to kill the little git."

"And he won't be hidden for much longer if you keep him in there, Harry," Hermione said. "He's already causing too much of a fuss."

Harry was silent for a long moment. "I have a lead," Harry said finally.

Ron drew his brows together in a frown. "And you didn't tell me?"

Harry gave Ron a pointed look. "I did. The VCE Elixir."

Ron rolled his eyes exasperatedly. "You're not serious, Harry! You're telling me you want to hop on a broom to China to find out how Malfoy did it?"

"No," Harry said with a shake of his head.

Ron let out a sigh of relief.

"I'm going to take Witherwings."

"What?!"
"Just give me a week, Ron. I'll be back before you know it."

"No, Harry!" Ron nearly shouted. "We've got too much to do. You can't just go to...to CHINA!"

"I'm going, Ron," Harry said with a stubborn set of his chin.

Hermione groaned and buried her head in her hands.

"How is this going to help Malfoy?" Ron exclaimed. "Really? This is not influential, in any way, to this case. What do you expect to find there?"

"Answers."

"To what?!"

Harry shrugged. "I have to know, Ron."

Ron crossed his arms and leant against a wall with a dark look on his face. "Why can't you just let it be, Harry? WHY do you have to know?"

"I don't know."

"That's bollocks, Harry, and you know it."

"No, it's not."

Ron pushed himself off the wall and glared at his best mate. "Then why?"

"Because," Harry murmured, not quite looking at Ron or Hermione. "Because I have to know why he didn't just kill me. I have to know why he spent almost five years making a potion so I didn't have to die."

Ron ran a hand through his red locks. "He couldn't kill Dumbledore, remember Harry? Maybe it's just not in him to kill. It happens to the best of us."

"He killed Voldemort."

Silence fell heavily around the three of them after Harry said this. Ron glanced at Hermione, who tilted her head to one side and shrugged.

"Fine," Ron murmured. "You have one week."

***

Harry landed his broom outside of Madam Leilane's Stable for Magical Creatures and paid a stable boy to care for his broom. He went inside the office briefly to speak to Madam Leilane, notifying her that he would be taking Witherwings out and would be back in a week's time. Inside the stable, Harry respectfully bowed to the majestic Hippogriff, keeping eye contact until Witherwings nodded to him, and then approached him.

Harry quickly readied the large creature for the long journey they would take, saddling the Hippogriff and attaching a rolled blanket, some powdered packets Fred and George, Ron's inventive brothers, had made that would turn into three course meals once adding water and uttering a quick, uncomplicated spell, and then called for his broom. Once Harry had fastened that as well, he smiled fondly at Witherwings, who tilted his head at Harry.
"I need you to take me to the south west corner of the Tien Shen Pass, Witherwings," Harry murmured. "It's in China and we're looking specifically for an area that grows Leerdog Root."

Witherwings nodded and bowed so that Harry could mount him. Once astride, Harry made a noise of encouragement and Witherwings took off at a gallop, leaping into the air and heading east.

***

It only took a handful of hours to reach the Tien Shen Pass, where, with an exultant cry, Witherwings swooped down between the rows and rows of imperial mountains and Harry, feeding off of the Hippogriff's excitement, let loose a triumphant shout of his own. Locating the Leerdog Field, however, consumed the rest of the day.

And so, sore, hungry, and minutely agitated, Harry and Witherwings finally spotted the Leerdog Field as the sun was setting in the western sky. The shadows were growing long and ominous when they touched the ground and Harry fought with himself on whether he should continue his search or postpone it for the next day.

However, once Harry jumped off of Witherwings' back, the Hippogriff caught a scent of something that beguiled him northwards. Groaning his complaints, Harry followed the massive creature as it bee-lined through the Leerdog Field towards a stretch of trees. Once inside the forest, Witherwings continued to walk at an unhurried pace until the Hippogriff located a small lake. Harry watched uninterestedly as Witherwings paused to drink his fill and, becoming bored with that, began to wander around the lake.

Harry paused when Witherwings splashed into the lake after a large fish and allowed himself a small laugh as the Hippogriff pranced through the shallow water. Suddenly, Harry squinted, spotting something across the lake. He silently summoned his broom from Witherwings' back and flew towards the object.

Upon reaching it, Harry saw that it was a pile of moth-eaten clothing and further on was a clothesline connected to two trees with a cloak and a pair of pants hanging from it. Everything looked old and tattered, as if it hadn't been touched in years. Searching the ground for human foot steps or anything else to track, Harry began noticing other things on shaded dirt. A pair of shoes, some old runes, an unopened packet of Exploding Snap, and even an abandoned book.

When Harry looked back up, he could make out the outline of a small hut behind some trees. Approaching the hut, Harry discovered that, not only did it have a makeshift door, but a chimney and few windows as well. Harry called out before opening the door and, receiving no reply, entered the hut. Inside, the small hut gave way to a large, magicked, and surprisingly well-furnished room; complete with a kitchenette, a sort of bed room, and an open space where a large cauldron sat surrounded by books on potion-making, genealogies, and ancient magic incantations.

Harry sat on his heels by the cauldron and checked the ash underneath, rubbing it between his fingers. Harry decided this cauldron had not been lit a long, long time and stood up. Harry walked around the room, running his fingers carefully on books and counters, and using his wand to check out anything that looked questionable. While the magic that furnished this room and expanded it to be larger than the hut that contained it kept the room safe from insects and animals, there was a thick layer of dust coating everything. Harry walked over to the where a small cot was laid out, no doubt the inhabitant's bedroom, and sat down.

Harry's beryl eyes searched around the cot and inspected the little chest of drawers beside it. Harry opened the topmost drawer and retrieved a small bag made of dark silk. He opened the bag and pulled out a small object, nodding to himself as he did so. It was McGonagall's Time-Turner.
Harry drew in a breath and let it out slowly. He rose to his feet and walked back over to the cauldron. He bent down and began shifting through the dusty stacks of books. Harry abruptly froze, causing a teetering stack of vellum parchment to topple sideways and scatter across the floor. Harry squinted, his eyes taking in and recognizing the runes etched into the stone receptacle hidden in the far right corner of the room behind a pile of books. Harry moved forward slowly and looked down into the basin.

There, inside the stone basin's middle, were dozens of glowing threads, swimming and floating around one another; not quite gas and not quite water-like substances. Harry continued to stare, stunned despite himself, as he sat cross-legged in front of the object, remembering one identical in Dumbledore's office and having used it with the late Headmaster on more than one occasion.

Draco Malfoy had had himself a Pensieve.

~*~
Unwarranted Guessing Games

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Unwarranted Guessing Games~

The following morning...

Ron opened his bright blue eyes and was welcomed by the sight of Hermione gazing fondly at him. He reached out and pushed back an unruly curl from her face. Hermione smiled and snuggled closer to her fiancée, wrapping an arm around Ron's slim waist.

"'Morning," Ron murmured and stretched languidly. Hermione grunted and buried her face into her lover's shoulder.

Hermione had moved into Ron's small flat the night he had proposed to her and though their moments together were few and far between, Ron never tired of waking up to her.

"Do you have a lot to do today?" Ron asked, running his fingers through her untidy curls.

Hermione nodded against his shoulder. "I have a meeting with your dad at nine and then a budget meeting at eleven," Hermione mumbled groggily.

"Sounds terribly exciting," Ron said and was rewarded with Hermione digging her fingers into his ribs in an attempt to tickle him.

Ron squirmed until he fell out of the bed, laughing. Hermione, grinning, sat up and placed her bare feet on the hardwood floor. Hermione stretched and Ron watched her with a wicked gleam in his blue eyes. Hermione, wearing nothing but one of Ron's oversized shirts, frowned at him and shook her head.

Scowling, Ron stood to his feet and held his hand out for her. Taking it, she let out a surprised squeak when Ron pulled on her hand roughly, causing her to crash into Ron. Ron grasped her shoulders and gave her a noisy, passionate kiss before swatting her behind and walking into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

Hermione left the bedroom and went into the kitchen to prepare them their ceremonial pot of coffee.

"Do you think Harry found the Leerdog Field yet?" Hermione called from the kitchen.
Ron grunted around a mouthful of foamy toothpaste and shrugged, though she couldn't see him.

"Well, I think he did," Hermione said in that haughty voice that was so uniquely Hermione Granger. "He found all those Horcruxes, remember?"

Ron spit out his toothpaste and snorted before pouring himself a little cup of minty green mouthwash. "With our help," Ron said before gargling the mouthwash. "And one of them wasn't even a Horcrux 'cause there were only supposed to be seven; and Harry was the seventh," Ron said after he had spit out the mouthwash and wiped his mouth with a towel. He splashed some cold water on his face before pulling off his t-shirt and walking into the bedroom and discarding the article of clothing into the clothes bin.

Hermione leant against a counter in the kitchen, listening to the coffee gurgle as it brewed. "How do you suppose Malfoy knew that? None of us did."

Ron shrugged into a black button-down shirt and pulled on some dark slacks before putting on his Auror robes. "I don't know, 'Mione," Ron called back with a dismissive roll of his eyes. "Maybe he used McGonagall's Time-Turner to see what would happen when Harry fought ol' Voldy."

Hermione blinked before turning to retrieve two mugs from a cupboard. "Wow, Ron. I never thought of that," Hermione said as she poured them some coffee into the mugs.

Ron turned the corner and entered the kitchen, a snarky grin plastered across his freckled features. "Yeah, and I think it's about time you admitted that, after all this time, I am, in fact, smarter than you."

Hermione laughed in his face as she handed him his coffee. "In your dreams, Weasley."

Ron made a face at her before taking a sip of his coffee.

"So, what are you doing today?" Hermione inquired, taking a sip from her own mug.

"Well," Ron said, his blue eyes twinkling. "I thought I'd fancy a walk in the park--something I never get to do with Harry around. Then, maybe, I'll go to the pub and get pissed. After that...I'll meet up with you for a quick shag before playing Quidditch with Victor Krum until my arse gets sore."

Hermione punched him the shoulder, laughing. "You're a right dolt, you know that?"

Ron chuckled and pulled Hermione into a warm hug. "No, really, I think I'd better get started on moving Malfoy."

"To where?"

"His own flat, I suppose," Ron said, resting his chin Hermione's head. "That was the plan, right?"

Hermione nodded and pulled away so she could see Ron's face. "Why don't you think Malfoy wouldn't have been able to handle staying hidden with his memory intact?"

"Because he hates Muggles."

Hermione frowned. "But, if Malfoy actually used McGonagall's Time-Turner to make the VCE, then that's almost five years of Draco we don't know about. Who's to say that...that maybe...?"

"That what?" Ron scoffed. "That Malfoy had some soul changing journey during that time and now he's miraculously this Muggle-loving angel?"
"No," Hermione said slowly. "Just that...maybe he's a little more responsible. That he's more mature than we're giving him credit for. And that the stress of only remembering bits of pieces from his former life is more stressful than the alternative that no one seemed inclined to consider."

"What alternative?"

"To allow Malfoy the right to choose."

Ron sighed and took another swallow from his coffee. "I don't know, 'Mione. Hind sight's always 20/20."

Hermione gasped. "Ron! That's a Muggle saying!"

Ron shrugged. "Heard it from my dad once. Don't ask me what it means."

Laughing, Hermione placed her now-empty mug into the kitchen sink and wandered back into the bedroom to get dressed.

"You'll need help," Hermione called from the bedroom.

"With what?"

"Relocating Malfoy."

Ron finished his coffee and placed the mug into the sink. "Yeah, that's why I was hoping you could squeeze me into your busy schedule before nine."

***

Dr. Laeverton stared at the file on his desk, trying, for the thousandth time, to figure out what made Mr. John Smith seem so very different from every other patient he had ever encountered before. Dr. Laeverton took out a photo of Mr. Smith and stared at it contemplatively.

Mr. Smith's coloring was definitely odd. The platinum, nearly white hair that was so long when he had arrived here was actually his natural hair color, and not dyed as the Doc had previously suspected. Mr. Smith had insisted on getting his hair trimmed within his first week's stay, and now Mr. Smith was always seen in immaculate and refined clothing, his hair laying about his face just so, and his posture emanating an easy grace that so few people on this planet could pull off.

Mr. Smith's pale skin and slender jaw was set off by a pair of pale, gray eyes that took in everything, held many secrets, and drove right into the heart of a person when he looked at them. To be honest, Dr. Laeverton was actually increasingly uncomfortable around the young man.

Just by watching him, the Doc could surmise that Smith was bred from a wealthy family. The way he walked, the cultivated British drawl with which he spoke, and the way his dark gray eyebrows raised ever so slightly whenever something surprised him, the only inclination, in fact, that he was ever taken off guard. Even after all this, Dr. Laeverton would have to say that it was Smith's way of slipping into a charisma that swept anyone, man or woman, of their feet so easily it was like Smith could switch it on and off with a snap of his fingers. Seeing this about Smith made the Doc even more certain that Smith's file stating that he was raised in an American Foster Home was complete and utter crap.

The way Smith acted wasn't a show. These things were engrained into him, trained into him by someone or a group of people who raised him. Dr. Laeverton was convinced of this and could only curl his fingers in frustration at the fact an amnesiac patient of his was sent to his Ward with a false
file. Why someone would do that for an innocent reason eluded him. It was a mystery to the Doc that he was committed to resolving before letting the white-haired boy out of his sight.

And another thing that confused Dr. Laeverton was Smith's age. He couldn't put his finger on exactly why, but Smith seemed so much older than twenty-one. His cold, gray eyes told the Doc he was soul weary and wary of everything and everyone. As if something told him that he was different and that things and people he was not familiar with were not to be trusted.

And Dr. Laeverton was certain he was remembering more than what Smith was telling him. Which bothered him in the sense that he was afraid Smith was not going to know how to do deal with these secret memories; and not in the sense that Smith was lying to him. Dr. Laeverton was never all that certain if Smith was lying to him or not. Everything about their sessions seemed open and honest, albeit a bit sarcastic at times, but that was to be expected during honest and vulnerable communication. What they did discuss left Dr. Laeverton with the feeling that Smith was really progressing in assessing and understanding his thoughts and feelings towards his surroundings. However, what they didn't discuss, those secret things hovering behind, Smith's cold, gray eyes, was what worried the Doc. Why didn't Smith want to talk about those things? Why did Smith feel he had to keep them secret? Was Smith remembering things that would potentially place him and others in danger if anyone found out?

Dr. Laeverton sighed and tossed the photo back into the file and closed his eyes, rubbing at his temples with his index fingers. The mystery that surrounded John Smith was beginning to get under his skin. And patients rarely did that to the Doc.

Sally, a Betty and Dr. Laeverton's secretary, knocked softly on the door to his office.

"Yes?"

"You have a call on line one," Sally called from the other side of the door.

"Thank you, Sally."

Dr. Laeverton picked up the phone and pressed the blinking red button. "This is Dr. Laeverton."

"Hello doctor," a male voice said on the other line. "My name is Christian Hale and I am with the Department of Social Services. I understand you have a John Smith in custody?"

Dr. Laeverton frowned. "Yes, I do. He is a patient here."

"Good," the male voice said. "I was calling to inform you that Benjamin...er, Worcestershire..." The man's voice was abruptly muffled when he inquired to an unknown party if he had said the name right. "Yes," the man said, returning, "Benjamin Worcestershire, a Social Worker here, will be visiting St. Mary's in two weeks time to discuss the rehabilitation prospects for one Mr. Smith."

Dr. Laeverton raised an incredulous, salt and pepper brow. "And when did you plan on sending him here?"

There was a sound of ruffling papers, and then: "How does Wednesday at 2pm work for you, Dr. Laeverton?"

Dr. Laeverton glanced at his calendar. "I am free but--"

"Excellent! You have a wonderful day, Dr. Laeverton!"

The call abruptly ended and the Doc found himself staring at the receiver as if it would suddenly
come alive and devour him whole.

***

Ron pulled his wand away from his throat and smiled cheerfully. "Well, that went well." Ron glanced at Hermione, whose eyes were alight with silent laughter. "Oh, come off it! You're the one coming up with all these ridiculous names. So what if I can't pronounce Worcesessh...Worcestshire, no...Worcestershire...you know what? I loathe you, you criminal."

Hermione was now laughing so hard she had tears running down her face. "Go on, darling," Hermione said, wiping at her face. "Do say something else."

Ron glared at the love of his life, his ears turning red as an embarrassed flush crawled up his neck. "No, really. I loathe you."

***
Later that afternoon...

"Finally!"

It took hours for Harry to find the small journal that held the whispered incantations that would unlock Draco Malfoy's Pensieve, hidden beneath it under the floorboards, and even longer, after uttering a series of complex unlocking charms, to figure out that a simple "Alohomora" would open the unmarked journal. Harry stared at the first page of the journal, squinting to make out the small, elegant scrawl.

'My Will' was written at the top of the page and, directly below it, the incantation that would seclude that particular memory in the Malfoy heir's Pensieve. Harry sat cross-legged on the floor in front of the Pensieve, the journal in his lap and his heart racing so quickly he actually paused to wonder why. No reasonable answer forthcoming, Harry murmured the short incantation and watched the blue-green string-like memory rise to the top of the basin. Dipping his head in and concentrating on that particular memory, Harry felt the familiar fall and sway of merging into another person's memory.

Blinking to take in his surroundings, Harry found himself staring at Draco Malfoy; seated in front of a dusty mirror near the cot of the very same room Draco had hidden his Pensieve. His hair was long and wild, nearly to his shoulders and framing his long face in almost a bedraggled way. Harry had never seen him look so unkempt. His black robes were tattered and frayed, lying around his long, thin frame like an oversized blanket, and his eyes were tired and bloodshot.

Draco ran a hand through his hair, perhaps in an attempt to tame the frazzled, platinum locks, and glanced once into the mirror before averting his eyes. Draco took in a deep breath and began to speak, his voice low and raw.

"Congratulations", Draco murmured. "If you are watching this, it means I have been successful and the Dark Lord is dead. No Death Eater bearing the Dark Mark can use my Pensieve save I, and I am assuming you are an Auror; but then, like so many things, my assumption is left to chance."
"I will not explain why I have adjusted my Will. There will be many adjustments and they will be strange, especially for a Malfoy. All the same, I am leaving this as my last testament and perhaps it will have the Daily Prophet speculating for years to come and pureblood families screaming denial for even longer. Even so, this is as it is.

"First, my godfather, Severus Snape, should he survive, will be awarded all of my inheritance except the Malfoy Manor and the Malfoy Library. The Manor will be given to Molly Weasley, a distant cousin of my godfather's, but a cousin just the same. The Library will be given to the Muggle-born Hermione Granger. Be sure to tell her not to trust the genealogies for I have found they can be most deceiving, but everything else may be used to her digression."

Draco smiled, his lips curving in a wry, secret smile, and his lips twinkling with mysterious mirth. Draco allowed himself a small laugh before continuing, his voice once again so soft Harry found himself straining to hear it.

"Harry Potter may have my Nimbus Two Thousand One, who was quite green with jealousy over it in our second year."

Harry snorted really hard and rolled his eyes.

"And, if my body survives the battle," Draco continued, the mischievous glint in his gray eyes vanishing suddenly as he leans forward towards the mirror. "I wish to be buried outside of Malfoy hollowed ground. I am not attached to where. Just...not there." Draco leaned back, chewing on the inside of his cheek as his eyes took on a faraway look. "And if there is confusion about my inheritance even still being mine, trust that even if my father would deny me verbally, he would never, ever do so officially. Malfoys are never that way. Until my name is scratched out of the Malfoy Tree, my inheritance is mine to do with as I will. And it is; this is my Will. And it is final."

Draco took in a shuddering breath and let it out slowly, as if the words he had spoken took an incredible amount of strength and courage. Harry watched as the image of Draco shimmered and faded as the memory came to an end and Harry was thrust out of the Pensieve. Harry glanced down at the journal in his lap, the confused, rabid thoughts in his head racing around, bumping, and crashing into one another. What the hell is Malfoy playing at? Is he actually serious? He would give the Weasley family the Malfoy Manor with his final wish? And the Malfoy Library to Hermione, who he had tormented with blood slurs for years and years at Hogwarts? Why?

Harry's fingers trembled as he turned the page and read the words written there. 'My Mother's Funeral'. Harry quickly murmured the incantation that would unlock the memory and bent into the Pensieve.

Draco Malfoy walked slowly towards the open casket, paying no heed to the cold stares of those gathered around the coffin. The day was gray with steady drizzle and most of those assembled were hidden beneath wide, black umbrellas. They parted for him as Draco stepped unhurriedly towards the body of his mother, Narcissa Malfoy, a single white rose clutched in his hand. Draco's hair was trimmed and styled as it usually was but slightly damp from the weather, causing his bangs to fall into his eyes. His suit was black and simple, his shoes shiny and polished, and his walk as graceful and proud as it ever was. The only evidence of anxiety was in his white-knuckled grip on the rose in his hand. Slowly, as the thorns on the stem bit into the soft flesh of Draco's palm, red, red blood began to seep through his fingers as he made his way slowly down the aisle the people around him made for him, adding a splash of color to the dreary gray world that surrounded them.

Finally, Draco reached the casket and gazed down on his mother's pale, still face. He seemed to stand there forever and when he finally lifted his hand, and the rose within it, the people crowded around him shifted and peered closer, their black eyes revealed from under the rim of their umbrellas.
Placing the rose carefully into the other hand, Draco smeared the blood from his hand across the pure white of the rose’s petals before setting the rose atop his mother's carefully clasped hands. Draco leaned over the rim of the casket to place a kiss on Narcissa's brow but a Wizard clad in dark, billowing robes moved forward and pressed the tip of his wand against the back of Draco's neck and Draco whirled, his wand ready in his hand, pointed directly back at the assailant.

Instantly, thirty wands were pointed at the Malfoy heir and Harry found himself moving forward to aid him. Remembering that he was inside the Pensieve, Harry paused while reaching for his wand and watched carefully as Draco coldly stared back at the nameless Wizard.

"You may not touch her," the nameless Wizard said.

Draco smiled cruelly but said nothing.

"It's your fault she's dead and your father's in Azkaban," the Wizard continued. "You are a blood-traitor of the worst kind, Draco."

Draco raised his chin and looked down his nose at the wizard. "Oh?"

"Yes!" the Wizard hissed and murmurs of agreement sounded throughout those assembled. Harry looked around for the first time, recognizing dozens of Death Eaters and their families. Harry still couldn't place the wizard speaking to Draco, having never seen him before; however, Draco seemed like he knew him.

"So, tell me, All Knowing One," Draco whispered through his teeth, emotion in the shape and color of anger surfacing in him for the first time. "How many of you must I kill before I can kiss my mother goodbye?"

"That is enough!"

Draco stiffened and the nameless Wizard flicked his beady eyes toward the source of the exclamation. Bellatrix Lestrange lowered her umbrella and glared around her.

"Let the boy say his goodbyes," she said, her voice icy and commanding. "In honor of Narcissa Malfoy, no one here will utter a single curse or provoke one. This day is for grieving. However, after this day, Draco Malfoy, you are forthwith exiled from the Dark Lord's circle and no longer a Death Eater. By his order, from the second you leave this place, you are to be killed on sight. Do you understand?"

Slowly and one by one, the wizards and witches around Draco lowered their wands and Draco turned to Bellatrix and regarded her solemnly. "I understand."

Bellatrix nodded curtly, her gaze still unforgiving and ice cold, and turned away. Draco once again approached the casket and placed a chaste kiss on his mother's pallid forehead. Draco swallowed a gulp of emotion back down his throat, shutting his eyes briefly as he silently wished Narcissa a final farewell.

In a burst of swirling black magic, Voldemort suddenly appeared, flanked by three more Death Eaters. Draco straightened and stared back at the Dark Lord as his snake's face sneered at the Malfoy heir. "Hello, Draco."

Rage burned behind Draco's eyes as he glared at Voldemort. "How dare you speak to me at my mother's funeral, you illegitimate Half-blood filth!" Draco spat, his features sharpening dramatically as his wrath boiled just beneath the surface.
Instantly, Voldemort's sneer vanished amidst a blazing glare and his long fingers twitched around his wand. But then, a wide, knowing smile curved maliciously along the lower half of his frightening face. "Our little dragon is having a tantrum," Voldemort said. "Don't you worry, Draco. Your time will come."

Draco's fingers curled into fists. "Yes, it will," Draco replied icily. "And when it does, those minutes will be your last. I swear it, Voldemort."

Voldemort hissed a demeaning laugh and was rewarded with a murmur of chuckles from his Death Eaters. "We will see," Voldemort said with a flick of his wrist. "Go on then. Run away, Draco. It is, after all, what you are best at."

Draco took a step forward but Bellatrix caught his eye with a meaningful glare.

"Fine," Draco whispered and Disapparated.

Instantly, the memory vanished and Harry was more forcefully thrown from the Pensieve. Landing heavily on the floor, Harry winced as he sat up, his eyes wide and processing.

Harry remembered feeling empathy for Draco Malfoy the night of Dumbledore's death, knowing that Draco's end of the deal was as shite as the rest of theirs. Harry also distinctly recalled the mixture of shock and awe that had welled up inside of him the night of the Eve Battle as he watched ancient magic bless Draco with a second chance at life for his sacrifice.

Over the years, even after taking on Malfoy's case in a response to Harry Potter's expected honor, Harry had convinced himself that whatever Draco's motives for killing Voldemort, that it had to be somehow selfish. That it had to be stemmed from some sort of cowardice or fame searching glory.

After witnessing only two of Draco's memories, Harry found himself cursing his Gryffindor nature for reminding him that perhaps Draco Malfoy was more than had ever met the eye.

Harry had been in the Dark Lord's presence multiple times before Voldemort's death three years prior and knew the automatic terror that would take a hold a person and nearly choke the life out of him by just looking at the Dark Lord. That Draco was able to remain cold and thoroughly composed while his mother's murderer defiled her funeral with his presence and not fly of the handle and do something that would inevitably get him killed was completely amazing. Draco was even able to remind Voldemort that he was the son of a Squib and a Muggle without, in turn, receiving the Killing Curse. That too, was something to wonder at.

Harry knew that there was more to the riddle of why Voldemort did not kill Draco, and that he let him escape from his presence and was left alone for nearly a year. Though, even after all of this, Harry couldn't help but acknowledge Draco for the incredible willpower it must have taken for him to walk through a crowd of Death Eaters who would see him dead to pay his final respects to his mother, and then keep his cool when Voldemort taunted him.

Harry Potter was no stranger to grieving a parent. He understood the awful, digging pain of knowing that he was, in some part, responsible for his mother's death. So, Harry, as much as it seemed unnatural to do so, sympathized with the Malfoy heir.

When Harry thought about Draco's Will, his frown grew so fierce it hurt his face. After all of this, Harry still could not fathom why he would become so charitable towards the Weasleys and Hermione Granger. Maybe Draco's journey actually did shift something his soul. Why else would he do that? And what actually shifted?
And why Hermione and the Weasleys?

Why, for the love of Merlin, did Draco Malfoy save him?

Perhaps more color lay behind those cold, one-dimensional gray eyes than originally anticipated.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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Poem Draco recites is from ~410, T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land ~

~Color Behind the Gray~
Part II

The next morning...
***

Harry woke with a start and blinked, his head turning this way and that as he tried to remember falling asleep. His eyes rested on the Pensieve and for a long moment, his thoughts of the previous night flooded his mind. Silently, Harry shook his head and dispelled the screaming war between his Gryffindor conscience and the darker part of him he refused to acknowledge.

Strange thing was, Harry had a distinct impression that both sides were screaming for the same thing even if he wasn't sure what it was exactly. Harry swallowed and ran a hand through his jet-black hair. Every muscle in his body hurt like hell for falling asleep on the floor and he stood to his feet, his legs shaky beneath him.

Harry fixed himself a small breakfast before resuming his seat in front of the Pensieve. Opening the journal to the third page, Harry nearly dropped the journal after reading the title of the page.

'A Visit to Dumbledore'.

Harry bit his lip and muttered the incantation, throwing himself into the memory with more vigor than before.

Harry followed an older Draco, perhaps twenty, through the secret stone passages of the Hogwarts castle. Draco glanced around him before turning the corner and quietly murmured the password that would lift Draco to Dumbledore's office. Once inside, Dumbledore looked up from his own Pensieve and they stared at one another for many minutes.

Harry glanced out of one of the windows and noticed first years being boated across the lake. It must be the first day of his sixth year.
That knowledge made his head spin.

Dumbledore finally nodded. "You found McGonagall's Time-Turner, didn't you?"

Draco remained still by the stairs, as if afraid he may have to flee at any moment, but his eyes gave the affirmation. "I did."

Dumbledore was quiet for half a moment longer before waving Draco to a chair. "Have a seat, Draco."

Draco stared at the chair like it was a vile thing ready to come alive and devour him, but he finally made his way over and sat down.

Draco Malfoy had taken on that wild, frayed look again, and Harry concluded that as he continued to live in the Tien Shen Pass, Draco gradually cared less and less about his appearance. His journey here with the Time-Turner must have taken an incredible amount of planning and Harry suspected he understood the device much better by now.

Harry wondered how old Draco actually was. If he was continually going back and forth through time to create the VCE, visit Dumbledore before his death, and who knew what else, there really was no telling how old Draco was now. If Harry had to guess, he would say somewhere between twenty-four or twenty-five.

Draco was staring at his finger nails like they were foreign things, the once vainly polished and kept fingers now cracked and dirty. Dumbledore gazed down at him with his soft eyes and the office grew extremely quiet.

Finally, the Hogwarts Headmaster cleared his throat. "I have first-years to sort, Draco," Dumbledore said gently. "I am assuming that you came here to tell me something."

Draco inclined his head and looked up; the dark smudges under his eyes making the gray irises look brighter and more fevered. "Voldemort orders me to kill you this year."

Dumbledore sits back in his chair. "I see."

"He threatens to kill my parents," Draco continued in a hollow, miserable voice. "And so I use the Room of Requirement to let Death Eaters into the school. My godfather swears an Unbreakable Vow to my mother to protect me. And...I cannot bring myself to kill you so Snape does." Draco raised his eyes and met Dumbledore's. "But he's loyal to you, I swear it."

Dumbledore's sharp eyes fasten on Draco's and the Headmaster tries to decipher the hidden pain there. "And what becomes of your mother?"

"I do not kill you," Draco whispers as Dumbledore’s eyes bore into his own. "So, the Dark Lord punishes me with her death."

"Oh, Draco..."
"Don't pity me, Dumbledore," Draco bit out. "I believe I did the right thing by not harming you, Headmaster, but every day, I regret it."

Dumbledore's sharp eyes soften as he regards the near-adult version of Draco Malfoy; the tired hunch of his shoulders, the weary pull of his eyes.

"And what are you doing now?"

"I am exiled."

"The Order of the Phoenix will take you in."

Draco began laughing aloud, the pitch of his voice harsh and unforgiving. "As a refugee? I bet Potter would just love that."

"There's more to him than you realize," Dumbledore argued.

Draco snorted. "Like forgiveness? Really, Headmaster, Potter is better at pity and mercy. Forgiveness has never been one of his outstanding qualities."

Harry swallowed and glanced away, knowing it was true.

"All the same, you need to be protected."

"No, Dumbledore," Draco murmured, his voice taking on a quietness that chilled Harry to the bones. "This time, I will be doing the protecting. No more people will die for me."

"It's not your fault for being a good person, Draco."

Draco chuckled sarcastically. "It's amazing how much effort I put into trying to be the contrary, Headmaster. Why couldn't I just be like my father?"

"You are just like your father," Dumbledore countered. "You only differ in your choices, Draco. You will always be what you are and you will always suffer because you will choose what you feel is right in your heart. You are Syltherin and that choice will always be harder for you than for a Hufflepuff or a Ravenclaw, and especially a Gryffindor."

Draco looked away. "That is why I cannot go to the Ministry or to the Order of the Phoenix. They would never understand me as you do. They would never trust me. Potter is their hero, not I."

"Assumptions are the workings of a lazy mind."

Draco looked back at Dumbledore and smiled. "I suppose so. But I am stubborn."

"That you are."

"Good bye, Headmaster," Draco said softly as he and Dumbledore rose to their feet.

Dumbledore walked toward the staircase and paused before exiting. "You may visit me any time you like, Draco, if you would care for my boorish company."

Draco smiled and watched Dumbledore leave. The image shimmered and faded, leaving Harry outside of the Pensieve and staring at the footnote at the bottom of the page.

'--from this day onward, I met frequently with Albus Dumbledore. It wasn't until the winter that I realized that this was why Dumbledore had acted so strangely to me the night I let the Death Eaters
Harry turned the page and read 'Being Re-Marked' at the top of the page. Harry whispered the incantation, quickly becoming addicted to Draco's memories, and leaned forward into the Pensieve.

Harry found himself in a cold, stone room with minimal furniture. Harry turned in a circle and spotted a young, seventeen year old shivering Draco Malfoy huddled in the corner, his gray eyes bright and wild with fear. His eyes were red-rimmed and blood shot from recent tears and blood ran down the fingers of his left hand in thin streams and dripped on the stone floor to pool by his feet. Harry moved and crouched down beside him and looked up into his face.

Harry had an overwhelming urge to console him, to wrap the terrified teenager up in his arms and rock him to sleep. Draco looked so pathetic it pulled at Harry's heart and made him angry at whoever was doing this to him. A feeling that would have been most unwelcome during his own sixth year.

Draco's lips parted and his eyes glazed over. He began rocking back and forth as whispers fell from his lips. Harry leaned closer and found that the Malfoy heir was reciting poetry, probably in an attempt to calm his frayed nerves.

"Datta: What have we given?" Draco murmured in a shaky voice as he continued to rock back and forth. "My friend, blood shaking my heart, the awful daring of a moment's surrender."

Harry couldn't remember the poet's name, but the words sounded familiar. Harry had a sneaking suspicion that it was a Muggle poet.

"Which an age of prudence can never retract," Draco continued, his voice becoming clearer and stronger as he recalled the words. "The awful daring of a moment's surrender."

Draco closed his eyes briefly, letting the words resonate and echo off of the stone walls of the room. "Which is not to be found in our obituaries," Draco whispered, continuing his recitation with his eyes shut. "Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider...or under seals broken by the lean solicitor..."

Suddenly the door to the room swung open and Lucius Malfoy stormed into the room, followed soon after by Lord Voldemort. They towered over Draco and watched him shudder convulsively in their shadow.

Draco opened his eyes and gazed back up at them, his gray eyes glazed and calm from the words he had spoken against the stone room. "In out empty rooms," Draco finished in a hushed voice.

Lucius reached down and clutched Draco's left arm, drawing back the sleeve of his son's robes to reveal the bloody mess that was once Voldemort's brand on him, the Dark Mark scratched out and haggard.

Voldemort lifted his chin and gazed cruelly down at Draco. "I see," Voldemort murmured. "And this is your son, Lucius? I thought even you might do better."

"So had I," Lucius growled, glaring at his son.

"Why did you do this?" Voldemort asked with deceiving gentleness. "I had thought you considered it an honor."

Draco looked at his arm. "I cannot Apparate to you when you call, Lord. The burning was driving me mad."

"So you defiled my Mark," Voldemort said, his words falling on Draco like blows.
"Yes, my Lord."

"Stupid, stupid boy," Voldemort hissed. "Remove your robes."

Draco blanched and pressed himself against the wall. "My Lord?"

"Do it, Draco," Lucius all but spat at him. "Do it now!"

Shaking so badly he looked like he was seizing, Draco unlaced the front of his robes and pulled them off.

"And your shirt," Voldemort said.

Draco discarded his shirt near his robes and stood before the Dark Lord and his father in nothing but trousers. He shook as Voldemort instructed him to turn around and kneel. Voldemort drew out his wand and roughly pressed it into Draco's spine, the area on his back between his shoulder blades.

"Consider me merciful," Voldemort said against Draco's screams as he dug his wand into the skin of Draco's back. "For I do not often afford second chances."

Leaving Lucius and Draco behind, when Voldemort was finished he swept out of the room, leaving it colder than ever. Draco was curled into a ball and twitching on the stone floor and Lucius gazed down at his son impassively.

"You will finish your mission at Hogwarts, Draco."

"Yes, Father," Draco stammered.

"You will kill Albus Dumbledore."

"Yes, Father."

"And you will not disappoint me again."

"Yes, Father."

Lucius turned and walked towards the exit. He paused before leaving and glanced back his son, his gray eyes so cold they were nearly white. "You are a disgrace to me."

With a slam, Lucius shut the door behind him and Draco listened to Lucius' heavy footsteps as they marched back down the hall.

The memory came to an end so abruptly, Harry felt like someone had punched in the stomach.

***

Draco shouted as he woke from the dream. He was lying in his bed at St. Mary's, trembling so fiercely the mattress shook, and curled into a ball. His back was alight with the echo of pain rather than the real thing but his lightning bolt scar burned like fury. Hot tears leaked past his eyes as he buried his face into the pillows.

Confused sobs wracked his body long into the night.

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Beyond The Invisible

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Beyond the Invisible~

At dawn...
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'I know I'm connected to him.

The man with those green eyes is always there in my dreams. I watch him watch me and it really feels like neither of us are supposed to be there.

'Nobody sees him in my dreams save I; isn't that strange? And he watches a different version of me. Sometimes I'm a boy cowering in front of a snake of a man with evil, terrible eyes and the man I am convinced now is my father; the one with the long white hair, and the merciless, angry, gray eyes.

'Sometimes I'm a man with wild hair. I am brewing something in a large pot, or speaking tiredly into a mirror, or talking to an old, old man with half-moon spectacles...a man that makes my heart clench with sadness every time I look at him. Once, I saw myself groomed and brave. I was a boy still, no more than seventeen, but I seemed so much older as I stared down the snake of a man when he arrived at the funeral. I called the dead woman my mother. I wonder if I am an orphan now. I must be, if my visions are true. And there is always at least two of me in the room...including the man with the green eyes, the green eyes that show so much emotion when he thinks no one is looking.

'The more and more I think about it, the more I believe that I wouldn't see these things if he wasn't there. Well, because he's always there. I have a feeling that he's trying to understand me too.

'Regardless, I am unsure whether or not I should count these dreams as memories. They are so extreme and so bizarre. Yet, what I did to Bane was also extreme and bizarre. There is familiar magic surrounding my dreams. They frighten me so badly that I often wake to the sound of my own screams; even if I wasn't asleep when I began having them in the first place. I am growing increasingly terrified of my own memories and I wonder if it is better to remain naive and just try to start a new life. Maybe actually becoming this John Smith person everyone insists on calling me is better than the person I am in my dreams.

'I know my name now.

'At least, according to my dreams. Draco Malfoy.
'Such an odd name, to be sure, but it feels...right...somehow.

'I am the same in my dreams, in a way, but also so very different. The people in my dreams are different. They seem to be surrounded with a different kind of energy. I want to say magic, but I know I'll sound crazy. Even Mettle says there's no such thing as magic.

'Bane avoids me now. I like it better that way, though it does seem strange to have only one person following me around and protecting my doorway. The Betties locked Bane up for days because he wouldn't quit screaming about how I tried to kill him with magic.

'They asked me once if his claims had any merit and I laughed in their faces. What exactly am I supposed to say? Yes, Betty, I am a murderous magician who can manipulate forces of nature beyond your reckoning. Right. If that doesn't get me a life sentence here, nothing will.

'I'm pretty certain they will let me out soon. I hear Betties whispering about an apartment being set up for me. I am worried about the dreams, though. They do not always attack me when I sleep. Sometimes the images flood my brain when I am wakeful and they will not release their hold on me until they are finished. I must get a hold on these visions. If a Betty catches me during one, they will lock me up like Bane for sure.

'I meet with Dr. Laeverton today. Perhaps I can get a definitive answer on when I'll be released from this God forsaken place.'

Draco closed his journal and gazed out of the window. The snow outside was melting and the days were getting warmer. Though Draco hadn't seen the Eagle Owl for days, Draco knew he was out there somewhere. Maybe the bird was being cautious after the incident with the snake.

Draco drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

Mettle knocked at the door and Draco answered. "What is it, Mettle?"

"Betty says the Doc's ready for ya," Mettle replied.

Draco nodded. "I'll be out momentarily," Draco said before closing the door again. Draco went to his nightstand and retrieved the other notebook he kept for Dr. Laeverton's sessions with him. Draco threw on a light blazer and righted his hair before stepping from the room.

Mettle, who was an avid baseball fan, began chattering straight away about this team and that, excited the sport's season was beginning. Draco paused by the Betties' office, trying to pick up their whispers as he usually did.

He caught "...Smith..." and "...I don't think he's ready..." but it was incredibly difficult to discern what exactly they were saying with Mettle jabbering away next to him. Draco swatted Mettle across his head with the notebook in his right hand.

"Bloody well shut your howling screamer, you twat," Draco hissed as he leaned closer to the whispers. Mettle instantly pressed his lips together, rubbing at his head with chubby fingers.

"Well, I don't really care if he's got his memory back or not," a female voice said. "That young man's unnatural. I don't think he's crazy, but somethin' about him makes my skin crawl. I want him outta here. Crazies I can handle. Smith? He's just too much."

"You have a point, Leti," a male voice concurred. "But I think somethin' even stranger is going on here. I mean, why was he sent here in the first place? And then, all a sudden, the Doc gets a phone call out of nothing sayin' we got to set him loose! I tell you, Leti, I sleep better at night knowing
he's locked up here. When he's out and about...I just don't know. Somethin' ain't right."

Draco smirked, a satisfaction he couldn't explain making his smile wider and wider, before he frowned and then scowled. Dr. Laeverton had received a phone call urging him to release Smith? Why?

Draco moved forward through the Ward until he reached the Doc’s office. Turning to Mettle and nodding curtly at him, Draco reached for the doorknob, energy from his fingers automatically unlocking the simple mechanism, and opened the door.

Inside, Dr. Laeverton was speaking to a man with dark brown hair, olive skin, and hazel eyes. The man turned and regarded Draco quietly when he entered the room and sat in his usual seat.

Draco raised his eyes and met the man's hazel ones with an expectant expression. The man smiled genuinely and Dr. Laeverton came to his feet.

"Mr. Smith, this is your new social worker, an old friend of mine," Dr. Laeverton said with a smile. "I took the liberty of arranging one for you as a certain Mr. Worcestershire came down with a nasty bout of influenza.

Draco raised a pale brow. Being a pro at lies and deceit, Draco could spot one straight away. "His name, doctor? Or should I just call him 'Social Worker'?" The Doc had been so busy formulating and delivering his lie, he had forgotten to properly introduce the man.

"Deans," the man said offering his hand. "Michael Deans. Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Smith."

Draco accepted his hand and shook it firmly, an easy smile curving his lips. "I'm sure," Draco murmured, his gray eyes taking in Deans' features a second time. The man wasn't bad looking.

Deans paused when he noticed Draco sizing him up and watched a mischievous glint spread through the younger man's eyes.

Draco suddenly shifted his attention back to Dr. Laeverton, allowing his fingers to slip away from Deans' grasp, and settled back into the chair. The two other men remained standing.

"Yes, I know I'm early," Draco said. "I've heard some interesting rumors from your staff. I couldn't resist, mate."

"I see," Dr. Laeverton said, exchanging a glance with Deans. "Well, Mr. Smith, in little over a week, you may be released and Deans is here to assist you in any way possible."

Draco's teasing, mischievous eyes went back up to roam Deans' face. "Really?" Deans shifted uncomfortably.

Draco smoothed over the pointed look with a charming smile and a flash of perfectly white teeth before looking back at the Doc. "I've heard more than that, Doc," Draco pressed.

"Well, maybe you would like to enlighten me," Dr. Laeverton replied.

"Someone on the outside wants me out," Draco said, getting to the point as his charisma vanished and was replaced with he dark intuitiveness that usually surrounded Draco Malfoy. "And, judging by this bloke," Draco added, jerking his chin towards Deans, "you don't trust it. Or, perhaps, you don't think I'm ready."
Dr. Laeverton nodded and exchanged another glance with Deans. "A little of both, I suppose."

Draco laced his fingers in front of him. "So, what do we do now?"

Dr. Laeverton sighed. "I'm going to request your cooperation--"

"And why would I give you that, Doc? You just lied to me."

"Mr. Smith, please. You and I both know you haven't been completely honest with me either. Your entire file is a lie."

Draco snorted. "You and I both know I bloody well would have chosen a better name for myself if I had made that bollocks up, mate," Draco replied.

"Like your journal?"

Draco's mouth quirked and then he grinned. "Yeah, like my journal, Doc."

"Mr. Smith, I have to insist--"

"Doctor, really," Draco interrupted, leaning closer. "I'll go along. You people are the only ones I know. Why wouldn't I?"

Dr. Laeverton allowed himself a small smile. "Very good, Mr. Smith. Deans, I trust you can show yourself out?"

Deans nodded and tried to catch Draco's eye. Draco smiled but did not look at him.

After Deans left the room, Dr. Laeverton took a seat. "Have you made any plans?"

"Plans?"

"Yes," Dr. Laeverton said. "Like where you're going to look for work, what you would like to do once you get out, and the like."

Draco frowned. "I'll probably just research my past. Do I need to work?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith," Dr. Laeverton said with small laugh. "You'll find that life is quite difficult without a job."

Draco wrinkled his nose. "I don't recall ever having to before."

"You're still young, Mr. Smith. Many things change as you become older."

Draco ran his tongue over his teeth and chewed on the inside of his cheek, thinking.

"Deans, will help you acquire a job, should you ask," Dr. Laeverton offered.

Draco nodded before a wicked grin spread along his face. "Pretty little ponce, isn't he?"

Dr. Laeverton nearly choked on his own saliva. "Excuse me?"

"Deans," Draco clarified with a lazy flick of his wrist. "Never mind, doctor."

Dr. Laeverton asked for Draco's notebook and looked it over. When he was finished, he closed it and handed it back. "My staff tells me you have nightmares," the Doc said quietly. "Strange to see none of them recorded."
Draco shrugged. "I'm not even supposed to have them, remember?"

Dr. Laeverton raised a salt and pepper brow.

"The lovely little blue pills that are supposed to make me sleep soundly..." Draco reminded him.

Dr. Laeverton scoffed at his patient. "I know you haven't taken them for weeks, Mr. Smith."

Draco laughed and opened his mouth to say something before wincing. Draco let out a little gasp and his hand flew to his the lightening bolt scar that began burning on his forehead.

"Mr. Smith?"

Draco winced again as he felt himself being torn from the room before him. He hung in a black void, connected to nothing, before a bright flash nearly blinded and suddenly, he was speeding towards it.

Dr. Laeverton leaned forward and snapped his fingers in front of Draco's face, the vacant expression immobile.

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It was the only memory in the journal labeled 'Harry Potter'.

Harry was shocked to find that it stretched over nearly three hours of memory blocks and pieces...and that they were all centered around both their first day at Hogwarts. Except for the first stretch of it.

It began with the young Draco Malfoy meeting Harry Potter for the first time in Diagon Alley and then lurched forward to Lucius giving Draco a final lecture before allowing him to board Hogwarts Express. Then there was an initial meeting with Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, and Pansy Parkinson. Then Draco roamed around the train by himself for nearly an hour before speaking to a ten year old Harry Potter.

There was special focus on the young Draco offering his hand as he offered his friendship. When Harry refuses both, Draco seems merely confused and Harry realized for the first time that Draco Malfoy was the only child from Hogwarts who tried to befriend Harry before knowing who he was in Diagon Alley. The offered hand of friendship after learning Harry's name was done for public reasons on Draco's part. Being rejected hadn't actually angered him, it confused him.

Then the memory fast forwarded to the Sorting Hat inside Hogwarts. Harry watched Draco's young face grow darker and darker with anger as the ten year old Harry Potter begged the Sorting Hat not to place him in Slytherin. Someone murmured something into Draco's ear, but Draco jerked his head away, his eyes never leaving Harry as the Sorting Hat tried to explain why he would do well in Slytherin. But the Hat finally conceded and placed Harry in Gryffindor and Draco's gray eyes fairly spit fire as they watched Harry take his seat at the Gryffindor table.

The image shimmered and faded and Harry found himself staring at his hands outside of the Pensieve. If it was the Sorting and not the denied friendship that had caused Draco to hate and torment him for years, what did that mean?

Was it possible that Draco Malfoy had resented Harry Potter for being able to choose outside of his nature, and not for all the other petty things that he had originally suspected?

Harry moved his fingers to his forehead to brush away a stray lock of hair that was tickling his skin. Finding no stray lock, Harry scratched at his forehead, over the patch of skin that used to bear his
scar, trying to make the tingling sensation go away. Suddenly, he felt someone move past him and Harry whirled around.

Seeing no one, Harry called out. "Hello?"

Harry heard an echo of a gasp and strained his ears toward it.

In an instant, the presence vanished and Harry felt the loss of it like a blow. The tingling sensation was gone from his forehead and all was quiet.

Harry leaned over the journal and flipped through pages, trying to locate another important memory.

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Draco blinked and shook his head.

"Welcome back," Dr. Laeverton murmured severely. "Memory or a blackout?"

Draco swallowed and cleared his throat as the burning in his scar faded and the feeling of being back in his skin washed over him. "Memory, I think."

"Good," the Doc said. "Let's talk about it."

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Cruelty, The Ultimate Intimacy

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Cruelty, the Ultimate Intimacy~

Four days later...
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Witherwings dipped below the clouds and felt Harry Potter shift between his wings. Harry leaned down and searched the British countryside for the house. Spotting it, Harry pulls out his broom and jumps on it. Witherwings lets out a cry of indignation and Harry flies the broom near his head so he could speak to the massive Hippogriff over the roaring winds.

"I need to speak to the Parkinson’s," Harry shouted. "I need you to return to the Madam Leilane's and guard the objects I've entrusted to you with your life."

Witherwings blinked and tossed his head back.

"Thank you," Harry said as he turned his broom northeast. "I'll owe you one."

Harry twisted and shot down through the atmosphere, the wind whipping around his body, the cold frosting around his nose and mouth. Down and down, at breakneck speed, until the houses down below did not look so much like toys anymore. Harry lurched left and swept through a small forest, dodging around the trees, his heartbeat gone with the rushing wind.

Finally, Harry was through the brush and saw the Parkinson country estate straight ahead.

Pandora Parkinson, Pansy Parkinson's aunt and godmother, had inherited the estate and taken Pansy in when Pansy's mother passed away abruptly two years ago. The cause of death was mysterious in some ways. Patricia Parkinson had been ill with bilateral pneumonia for nearly sixteen months before she died; however, while the Wizarding World had numerous charms and medicinal herbs that would instantly clear out the woman's lungs and recharge her immune system, Patricia had refused any treatment and suffered until she died in her sleep a year and a half ago. The Parkinson family refused to comment on the matter.

The Parkinson’s escaped any affiliation with Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters, except, of course, through Draco as his birth engagement to Pansy had always been known. Suspicion had warranted the Parkinson’s to hide among their own circles until society's nerves had calmed and they could roam freely once again. Yet, all the same, suspicion was never enough to convict and the Parkinson family was left alone with the repeated comment that, "This, too, shall pass."
Harry Potter had mild and sometimes a bit strong, distaste for Pansy and her family but knew they were a pureblood family that had chosen no side during the Eve War and had escaped unscathed. Harry and Ron would often trade information with them, also knowing, that the Parkinson’s had never been naive to Death Eaters and Lord Voldemort’s circle.

Today, Harry Potter had questions about Draco Malfoy.

Harry landed his broom thirty feet from the main gate, feeling the press of the wards around the estate, and waited. A house elf popped out, took Harry's broom, and quietly led the young Auror inside the Manor. The house elf left Harry inside a receiving room where a roaring fire warmed the plush furniture near it. Harry turned in a circle, his eyes searching, and finally spotted Pandora Parkinson seated in a corner, watching him over the rim of her book.

"Mr. Potter," Pandora murmured, closing her book and setting it aside. "Be welcome."

Pandora had a wealth of blue-black, wavy hair that she often piled atop her head, exposing the curve of her throat and causing her features to look slender and more refined. Today, her hair was coiled at the nape of her neck, loose, in a simple Lover's Knot and renegade tendrils brushed against her cheeks and left her liquid pools of dark blue eyes in flickering shadow.

Harry thought she looked five years younger with her hair down, and was going to tell her so, when she spoke again.

"You look terrible, Mr. Potter," Pandora said, leaning forward in her seat to peer at him. "Where on earth did you fly in from?"

"China, actually," Harry said, glancing down at his windblown, tattered, and extremely dirty flying robes.

"Ahh," Pandora said, sitting back. "Beautiful country."

"Yes, it is," Harry said, fixing a buckle on his glove. "Been there recently?"

"Not for years," Pandora replied softly, steadily returning Harry's gaze.

"Right," Harry said. "I'll get straight to the point then."

Pandora smiled indulgently.

"Mrs. Parkinson--"

"Miss, please, I am not yet married," Pandora said in a wistful voice as her heavy-lidded eyes gazed through her dark lashes at Harry.

"Ms. Parkinson," Harry reiterated with a sigh. "What is the significance of Malfoy spreading blood over a white rose at his mother's funeral?"

"You mean Draco," Pandora said, her shadowed eyes giving nothing away. Harry always thought her eyes looked like the ocean at night.

"Yes."

"How do you know about that?"

Harry did not respond and he stood there stoically, trying to stare the answer out of her.
"He afforded her an honor and a curse simultaneously," a quiet voice said behind Harry.

Harry turned and regarded Pansy Parkinson, thin features and small, pug-like face giving her a frail air that she wasn't. Her black hair had grown and her eyes had softened, but Pansy Parkinson was always going to be the Pansy Parkinson from Hogwarts to Harry. Cruel, smug, and very much pureblood.

Pansy wore creamy white robes and her black-gray eyes were as shadowed as her aunt's. "He proclaimed her the final pureblood from the Black Legacy. The blood on the rose means that the Black line ended with her."

Harry frowned. "I don't understand."

Pansy smiled, a gesture that was not unkind. "Of course not, Harry Potter. That is what separates us."

"Why would it be a curse?" Harry clarified.

"Because Draco stated that he would not continue the Black line in front of her sister, her uncle, and many other pureblood families." Pansy's mouth pulled down and she glanced away and stared into the fire. What she left unsaid was that Draco also publicly refused the engagement between himself and Pansy, who had fawned over him since before their first year.

"But he isn't a Black, he's a Malfoy," Harry murmured and immediately felt foolish for saying so. Draco Malfoy is the offspring of Narcissa Black and Lucius Malfoy, and while Draco wouldn't carry the Black name into the next generation it was still a part of his heritage and prestige. It was a powerful union, the day Lucius and Narcissa married, and an exciting day for pureblood families when Draco was born.

"Malfoy loved his mother," Harry said. "Why would he do that?"

Pansy glanced at her aunt who stared back at her for minutes at a time. Harry began to shift nervously before Pandora made a minute movement with a finger and Pansy began to speak.

"It was more than a curse, Potter," Pansy murmured, still gazing into the fire. "It was an insult to the entire Black family and especially the Malfoy family."

"Draco had discovered a book that described pureblood family trees much differently than the ones at his home," Pandora said quietly. "Draco was outraged and destroyed it. Then his curiosity got the better of him and he began researching through other books. He would travel over the summer to library after library, comparing genealogies and family trees."

"Draco found out what all pureblood heirs are told when they come of age," Pansy whispered, the words nearly swallowed by the angry flames of the fire. "We are pure by default."

"What?"

"Most pureblood families have renegade heirs who sympathize with Muggles and are called blood-traitors," Pandora explained. "They are blasted from the Family Tree and thereby disowned. It is our way of keeping our lines filtered and sanctified."

Harry thought of the Black Family Tree at Grimauld Place and the names that were blasted from it. Isla Black, Phineas Black, Marius Black, Cedrella, Alphard, Andromeda--Tonks' mother, and Sirius--Harry's own deceased godfather.
A Wizard had called Draco "...a blood-traitor of the worst kind..." at Draco's memory of Narcissa's funeral. Harry turned to Pansy and nodded for her to continue.

"Even so," Pansy whispered and Harry leaned closer to hear her. "Some ancestors were devious. We should have been more careful with so many Slytherin blood relatives."

"Most pureblood families have ancestors who snuck in a Muggle-born wife or husband, had an heir, and was not found out until generations after that," Pandora said in her quiet voice. "It's happened a time or two, but even that is enough to taint what we have considered pure."

"Draco realized this and he hated his father for lying to him," Pansy murmured. "Even more than he hated him for following a mad Wizard who was the son of a Squib and a Muggle. Draco claimed that Lucius was the real blood-traitor."

"And yet, young Draco obeyed his father out of fear," Pandora said, "even though his rebellion sparked in secret times."

"He even defied the Dark Lord," Pansy said in a hushed voice.

Harry nodded. "He tried to cut out the Dark Mark."

Pansy nodded, eyes wide.

"So what does all this have to do with his mother?"

"Narcissa was a true pureblood," Pandora murmured. "The Black Family was untainted, so shrewd were they with their generations. After Voldemorte murdered his mother, Draco spat back in the faces of those of us who claim purity, those who did not come to his mother's aid, and prophesied with a few drops of blood that blood purity would soon come to an end for all wizards and witches. He damned us all."

"And then he killed the Dark Lord," Pansy said.

"So, Lucius was a...a what?"

Pandora smiled, her teeth flashing white from the shadows. "A Malfoy."

"And he wasn't a pureblood?"

"He was a pureblood as we consider it."

Harry was becoming frustrated. Pureblood intrigue had always confused him and now it was getting worse. "And how do you consider it?"

"For hundreds of years," Pandora explained, while Pansy remained silent. "We are considered pureblood by who we are and not so much by what we are. Some families were not so lenient, like the Black's. The Parkinson's shared those traits with the Malfoy's and the Crabbe's and the Zabini's. We are cruel and merciless. We get what we want when we want it. And we are better."

Harry snorted.

"Laugh if you must, Potter," Pansy said gently. "But know this is why we are royalty among peasants. It is the legacy in our blood, not the magic."

"You people are crazy."
Pandora's smile widened. "Is it mad to honor your generations?"

"I want to know why Draco rebelled against purebloods and all you are telling me is that his anger was actually spurned from genuine pureblood fanaticism and that purebloods are better for other reasons besides the lies you have been screaming at Muggle-borns and Half-bloods for years and years!" Harry's eyes blazed as he regarded the two women.

"Please listen," Pandora murmured. "Lucius and Narcissa wished to right the tainted blood of the Malfoy family with Draco. They wished to create a wizard so powerful that even the Dark Lord would think twice before crossing him. They intended to make Draco a mirror image of his father."

Harry nodded. That, he understood.

"Draco was taught to hate Muggles, to torment Half-bloods and despise Muggle-borns," Pansy added.

"Yes, and then Lucius begins to follow one. Voldemort. Draco learns later that Severus, his beloved godfather, was also a half-blood."

"And isn't that strange?" Pansy said, turning to look at Harry for the first time in nearly twenty minutes.

"Confused, Draco searches for and discovers many, many new things. Mr. Potter, it was never that Draco hated Muggles that spurned his rebellion against his father. It was that Lucius gave Draco something to be proud of when he lied to Draco about being pureblood. It was stripped away from him when he discovered the truth about the Malfoy family and the heritage of the Dark Lord. Would it matter at all that Draco was a pureblood if the strongest wizards in the world were Half-bloods and Muggle-borns?" Pandora clasped her long fingers in front of her and allowed Harry a moment to soak it in.

Harry nodded, beginning to understand Draco's frustration. His so-called purity was all he really had.

"And then his rebellion turned to blind hate when Voldemort murdered his mother and his father continued to serve the Dark Lord." Pansy's eyes were back on the flames and her face glowed in the firelight.

"Draco is considered a blood-traitor because he did not kill Dumbledore," Pandora said. "And he made it ever so much worse when he claimed Narcissa as the last of the Black Family. This is why he is exiled and this is why he is pure."

Harry blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Purebloods are always cruel to those they love; it is our way, Potter. Compassion and kindness are done in secret places." Pansy's black eyes began misting over.

"Purebloods are cruel to everyone, then," Harry remarked.

Pandora laughed softly. "No, no, no, Mr. Potter. Hate and contempt is reserved for everyone else, hidden beneath a mask of beauty and tolerance. Cruelty is our way of communicating with those within our circle."

Harry shook his head, not understanding.

"Would you like a piece of candy?" Pansy asked suddenly.
Harry stared at her. "Not if it is poison."

Pansy laughed as if it was the funniest thing she had ever heard from him and handed Harry a small piece of spicy, cinnamon hard candy. Pansy popped one into her own mouth and watched Harry open the foil wrapping and carefully place it in his mouth. Spicy, sweet, and savory juices flooded his mouth. Harry closed his eyes and concentrated on the taste in his mouth. He loved how something could be candy and enjoyable and yet almost painful to eat.

When Harry opened his eyes, the two Parkinson women were smiling at him.

"You begin to understand, Potter," Pansy whispered. "Why is it that we scratch are nails through yielding flesh during the throes of passion, Potter? Why is the sound of our screams so similar when we climax or feel the bite of the whiplash? Why do we always hurt those closest to our hearts so much more deeply than those we do not know? Why is it such a sweet, sweet torture to spend a few seconds savoring cinnamon candy?"

Harry looked away.

"This is what makes us what we are, Potter," Pansy whispered, her eyes gleaming. "Evil does not automatically come hand in had with being Slytherin. Draco wanted so badly for you to understand that."

Harry frowned. "Why?"

"Because you begged the Sorting Hat for any House but Slytherin."

Pandora flicked her dark sapphire eyes between the two old school mates and smiled. "What we have spoken of here today is usually only said in back rooms and in secret. Be courteous and do not repeat any of it."

Harry turned to her. "What if I had a Slytherin side to me that caused such cruelty in exposing you and your tainted blood?"

"Cruelty and honesty do come hand in hand," Pandora said, inclining her head. "Though you are mistaken if you view us as being disloyal. It was loyalty and not pity that stayed Draco's wand when he was sent to kill Albus Dumbledore."

"You're wrong," Harry said, shaking his head. "I was there. I saw nothing but fear."

"Wouldn't you be afraid too, knowing that families upon families would label you a blood-traitor for failing so miserably?" Pansy interjected. "Of course he was afraid."

"If Draco was loyal, he would have killed Dumbledore," Harry said.

Pandora's smile turned sad as her eyes darkened. "You sound like his father."

"At least he understands what it means to be cruel," Pansy said in a dead voice, turning back to the fire.

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Hermione walked towards the door of her and Ron's flat as the pounding became louder and louder. "I'm coming," she yelled, annoyed.

With a flick of her wand, she dispelled ward after ward and pulled the door open. Hermione gasped
when her brown eyes took in Harry's appearance. He was filthy and tired but it was his eyes that scared her the most. They were dark and shadowy, swirling with thoughts that sped through his mind. Hermione had only seen his eyes that dark once before; and it was the night his godfather was killed by Bellatrix.

"No questions until tomorrow, 'Mione," Harry whispered. "May I stay here tonight?"

Hermione stepped back and ushered him inside the flat. "Of course, Harry. Of course."

Ron came around the corner, brushing his teeth, to see what the commotion by the door was. Ron spotted Harry and stopped in his tracks, toothbrush hanging limply from his mouth.

"What the hell happened to you, Harry?"

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a/n: As you can see, I took a bit of creative license here. I loosely base it off of JK Rowling’s 'opinion' of purebloods and what she's stated in interviews; and not so much on actual fact from the books. It is the same with St. Mary's. God help me, but I have never been to Wisconsin and really have no idea whether or not a St. Mary's exists, lol. While the Black Family Tree is available for study, most of the so-called 'pureblood families' are not. Creative license is a beautiful thing :-) .
A Somewhat Untimely Change of Heart

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~A Somewhat Untimely Change of Heart~

The following morning...
***

"I don't know what to do," Harry muttered over coffee at Ron and Hermione's breakfast table.

Ron took a seat opposite of Harry and exchanged a glance with Hermione, who was already seated. Harry had not spoken a word the previous night and the couple had woken to the sight of Harry huddled over a cup of coffee before the sun had even graced the eastern sky.

Harry swallowed and shifted in his seat, bringing his eyes up to regard his two friends solemnly. "I still don't know why he saved my life, I still don't know how he knew about the Horcruxes, and we are still no closer finding out who wants Malfoy dead."

"From what you've explained, Harry," Hermione said gently, "it seems every pureblood family has reason to. Pandora made it clear that what Malfoy did at the funeral was a grave insult to the Wizarding pureblood community."

"I don't even get why he did that," Harry mumbled before jabbing a finger at the two of them. "By the way, Malfoy left an updated will in his Pensieve and it seems he felt it was important to leave the Malfoy Manor to your mother, Ron, and the Malfoy Library to you, Hermione. Why would he do that?"

Ron's mouth hung slack as he stared hard at Harry. "I have no buggering clue, mate."

Harry shifted his eyes to Hermione, who had turned bright pink. "Hermione?"

"Well, I...I...I don't think," Hermione stammered. "Well, I don't know. He had once asked for my assistance in looking up some books at Hogwarts...um, I think it was fifth year. But, I don't know. That couldn't possibly warrant an entire library...Harry, stop looking at me like that!"

"Like what?"

"Like I did something wrong!" Hermione was clearly upset by the news so Harry dropped the subject.
"I guess it doesn't matter, anyway. Malfoy's alive." Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Still, when Malfoy put the memory into the Pensieve, he clearly thought he was going to die. I wonder if he was trying to make some sort of statement."

Ron shook his head, not in disagreement, but more in a fashion like he was trying to dispel runaway thoughts. "What else was in the Pensieve?"

Harry shrugged and looked away.

"Harry?"

"Malfoy's alive," Harry murmured. "Perhaps it should stay private."

Ron blinked and exchanged another glance with Hermione. "You feeling sorry for him, mate?"

"Yeah. No. I don't know." Harry covered his face with hands and groaned. "I don't know!"

Hermione placed a restraining hand on Ron's arm. "Harry...what's going on?"

Harry removed his hands and looked back at Hermione. They stared at one another until Harry's green eyes glistened with unwelcome tears and he looked away, dashing the palms of his hands roughly against his eyes. "I never thought I'd see the day when I would feel bad about Malfoy," Harry muttered. "The things they did to him, the things he went through, and the fact that he never, ever complained...I feel like complete shite for hating the bastard."

"Harry," Hermione murmured. "Do you remember when you used to be able to see into Voldemort's head when he was in a highly emotional state?"

Harry's eyes widened a fraction and he nodded. "I know what you're talking about, 'Mione. I think he can see me."

"Who?" Ron asked, looking between the two. "Voldemort? He's back from the dead?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and glared at Ron. "No, you moron! Malfoy."

"Why would Malfoy be able to...oh," Ron said as he watched Hermione tap at her forehead. "Oh...bugger that."

Harry swallowed past a rush of emotion. "I felt someone watching me all week; especially when I was in his Pensieve. Malfoy's memories aren't pretty."

Hermione nodded. "I suspected that may happen...but it seemed so far fetched..."

"Between his owl helping him remember and him watching me swim around in his Pensieve..."

Harry shook his head. "We've got to get him out of there."

Ron cleared his throat. "I took the liberty of arranging that. That damn doctor at St. Mary's chose his own Social Worker for Malfoy, but I think we can still figure a way to check in on him."

Harry nodded slowly. "I want to see him."

Hermione peered at him. "Why?"

Harry didn't answer.

Ron shook his head. "I don't think that's a good idea, Harry."
"Then just add it to 'Harry Potter's Crap Ideas' list," Harry muttered. "I'm not asking your permission."

Ron scoffed at him. "Yes, you are. Otherwise you would've just done it already instead of telling us. Where's the Pensieve?"

Harry gave him a pointed look. "I hid it...at the Order's old Head Quarters." Number Twelve Grimmauld place; Sirius Black's old house.

Ron and Hermione nodded their agreement.

"I think we should give Malfoy his memory back in full," Harry murmured after a moment's pause.

Hermione blinked. "Really?"

"Yes," Harry said. "I think he's safe in America...but he should be able to choose. Malfoy will know what's at stake...and I think the answers we're looking for are locked up in is head."

Ron chewed on the inside of his lip. "All right, 'Mione, could you whip up a Memory Draught for us?"

"It'll take a few days," Hermione said. "But, yes, I can."

"Great," Ron said. "Harry, do us a favor and wait to go see Malfoy until it's done?"

Harry did not answer but inclined his head a fraction.

"Right, then, we have a lot of work to do," Ron grumbled as he stood to his feet.

***

Draco paused in his mad scribbling of notes in his notebook at a knock on his door. A Betty entered and Draco scowled, wondering where the hell Mettle was. "Yes?"

"You are being released today," the Betty said. "Pack your things."

Draco shook his head when she made her exit, trying to shake off the feeling of déjà vu. He had the strongest feeling that someone had said something very similar to him a few weeks ago. Draco stood to his feet and closed his notebook and wondered for the thousandth time where the hell the Eagle Owl was.

***

Harry paced back and forth in the Ministry’s Mess Hall and Ron watched him as he munched on a deli sandwich.

"What's got you in a fix now, mate?" Ron asked over a mouthful of turkey and pickle.

"Bellatrix."

"She's dead, Harry." Harry had killed her over a Horcrux she was sent to guard.

Harry sent a despairing look Ron's way as he continued his pacing. "But she was at Narcissa's funeral."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."
Harry stopped pacing and went to the table, ignoring the strange looks other Aurors sent his way. It wasn't often that they saw Harry Potter lose his cool. "When Malfoy called Narcissa the end of the Black line, Bellatrix was still alive, Ron. Bellatrix was Narcissa's sister."

"But didn't she marry that Lestrange bloke?"

"That's not the point, Ron."

"Then bloody well get to it, Harry!"

"Bellatrix was the only one who stepped in and let Malfoy say goodbye to his mother after he gave her the rose, Ron," Harry said as his voice raised a pitch or two. "After he insulted the Black family line, Ron! Why would she have been so consoling? Technically, after Narcissa died, Bellatrix was the remaining Black descendant."

"I don't know, Harry."

Harry resumed his pacing and Ron finished his sandwich.

"Maybe," Ron said thoughtfully, taking a swig of pumpkin juice. "Maybe he knew she was going to die anyway. You know, from the Time-Turner."

"Time-Turners don't explain everything, Ron," Harry muttered.

***

Draco watched as the Betties gathered his luggage and took it outside where a yellow...contraption on wheels sat in the graveled driveway, waiting to take Draco to his destination. A man cleared his throat behind him and Draco turned, greeted by the sight of Dr. Laeverton and Deans.

"Come to see me off, Doc?" Draco inquired, his gray eyes grave and serious.

Dr. Laeverton nodded. They had not spoken much about the incident in his office a few days ago when Draco had spaced out. Dr. Laeverton had tried to get him to speak about it, but Draco, worried that the Doc would label him delusional and call it a day, had refused other than saying it was sort of flashback.

Dr. Laeverton had grounded Deans on the fact that Mr. Smith was to be watched shrewdly and, if anything came up--anything at all--he was to be informed immediately. Dr. Laeverton didn't like the idea of John Smith leaving St. Mary's so soon, but Smith's funding was abruptly cut and he had received another...interesting phone call from Mr. Hale, saying Smith was to be rehabilitated immediately.

Draco glanced at Deans, sending him a disarming smile, before looking back at the Doc. "Well?"

"If you are not certain you can handle this," Dr. Laeverton said quietly, "you can remain here indefinitely. I'll find a way."

"That's quite touching, doctor, really," Draco said with a minute lift of his blond brows. "I am more than capable, however. Thank you."

Dr. Laeverton nodded again. "Have it your way, then. Best of luck to you, Mr. Smith. Deans, he's all yours now."

Draco grinned and Deans shifted uncomfortably, averting his gaze.
Inside the 'cab'--as Draco found out the contraption wheels was called a car--Draco gazed out the window. The early spring outside was still cold and the windows of the vehicle were foggy. Draco watched trees fly by as the cab lurched forward and pulled out onto the street.

Like it did more often this past week than his entire stay at St. Mary’s, Draco’s mind went blank and uncontrollable images began replaying themselves uninhibited; and Draco’s eyes glazed over as he submitted to them.

***

Harry finished his beer and ordered another, thoughts still on the mystery that surrounded Draco Malfoy. In fact, Harry’s thoughts seemed to be obsessed with the Malfoy heir.

Guilt so extreme kept pressing against his chest and Harry tried to drown out the taste of it with his fifth mug of ale. Harry closed his eyes and saw the image of a terrified sixteen year old Draco Malfoy standing his ground in a cold, dirty stone room while two of the darkest wizards of all time glared down at him. Harry knew that at that moment, Harry had thought nothing more of the Slytherin prince than of a spoiled brat of Malfoy who became a Death Eater for glory and joined Umbridge’s Inquisitorial Squad just to make his life even more miserable.

Harry wondered what it had to be like to have a father so evil. Sure, his own parents had been murdered by Voldemort when Harry was an infant, but Harry had the luxury of knowing they were good, kindhearted people. Honorable people.

Harry took another swig of his beer and sent a startled glance over at the man who took a seat next him at the bar at The Mild Brew. Cruent smiled at him from under his mop of light brown curls.

"How are you, Harry?"

Harry blinked at him and looked away. "Fine. You?"

"Better now."

"Don't do that," Harry said.

"Do what?"

Harry scowled. "Act like you're happy to see me."

Cruent was quiet for a moment. "Am I not allowed to be happy to see you?"

Harry didn't respond but turned and looked into Cruent's light blue eyes, loosing himself--like he always did--in their depths as he searched for the tell-tale signs of a lie. Cruent reached out and pushed back a stray lock of jet-black hair from Harry's face and Harry flinched away violently. Cruent sighed and looked away. When he turned back, his sunny blue eyes were angry. "I don't understand why we can't be friends, Harry."

"You left me, remember?"

Cruent ordered a glass of chilled pumpkin juice. "I was trying to get you to wake up, Harry."

"I wasn't asleep," Harry muttered.

"No, Harry, I was trying to get you to wake up to me," Cruent murmured, staring at his pumpkin juice.
Harry snorted. "What did you expect me to do? Chase after you?"

Cruent turned to Harry, his blue eyes intense and hurt. "Yes, Harry. I kinda did."

Harry frowned and looked away. "Sorry."

"For what? Not wanting me?"

"I wanted you."

"I'm not talking about sex, Harry. I wanted you to want all of me."

"If I wanted to hear this shite, I'd date girls," Harry muttered.

Cruent laughed. "Not all girls are infatuated saps like me, Harry."

Harry grinned and thought of Hermione. "All right. I'll give you that one."

"It's good to see you smile, Harry. It takes off five years, you know."

"Yeah?"

Cruent nodded, his blue eyes light again.

Harry bit his lip. "It's good to see you too, Cruent."

Cruent smiled, his eyes softening. "You know, Harry. There's nothing so bad that a little guilt won't make worse...and there's nothing so good a little guilt won't make better. It's inherent nobility that we all share.[1] Something we are all born with, Muggle or Wizard."

Harry nodded slowly and didn't look up when Cruent stood to his feet. "I'll see you around, Harry," Cruent murmured, squeezing Harry's shoulder briefly before turning and walking away.

Harry shifted so he could watch Cruent exit the pub and the moment Cruent was out of sight; Harry's ears became deaf to the noises of The Mild Brew and his mind fixated, once again, on Draco Malfoy.

Harry closed his eyes.

***

Draco wrinkled his nose as he looked around the small apartment.

Deans laughed at the look on Smith's face and moved past him down the hall. "It's not much, but once you start working, you can begin to furnish this place and make it look decent," Deans called over his shoulder.

Draco said nothing as he walked cautiously into the kitchen.

"What is this?" Draco called.

"What is what?" Deans replied, turning and following Smith into the kitchen. Deans raised a brow when he saw what Smith was pointing at. "That's called a microwave, Mr. Smith."

Draco scrunched his brows together as he inspected the large, square device. "A what?"

"A microwave."
Draco frowned. "I don't think I've ever seen one before."

Deans grinned and shook his head as he watched Smith cross over into the living room.

"There isn't much in the fridge, but it should last you a few days," Deans said as he watched Smith inspect the small television set with wonderment. "I'll come by tomorrow and take you to the grocery store."

"Hmm?"

"The grocery store, Mr. Smith. That's where you buy food."

"I see."

Draco sat down in a folded chair and picked up the receiver of the phone on a nearby table. Draco put it to his ear and instantly dropped it like it had burnt him. Draco looked up at Deans and glared at him for an explanation.

"What?" Deans asked.

"It was making noises," Draco hissed. "There! Can't you hear it?"

Deans sighed, wondering if Smith wasn't really off his rocker, and picked up the receiver. When he placed it back on its base, the beeping immediately stopped. "It's not going to hurt you, Mr. Smith."

"This place is very peculiar," Draco said, looking around. "Where is my maid?"

"Excuse me?"

"My maid," Draco repeated, peering at the pair of antennas on the television set. "My Betty."

"You don't have one," Deans said.

"So it's just you."

"Yes, but I'm not a--"

"Well, get on with it. I'm quite hungry."

"Mr. Smith--"

Draco pressed the power button on the television and jumped back when images appeared on the screen. Draco stepped forward when he was certain the little people on the screen weren't going to jump out. "This thing offends reason, Deans."

"Mr. Smith!" Deans sputtered.

"What is it, Deans?" Draco answered, keeping his eyes on the screen and its images, entranced.

"You'll have to make your own dinner, Mr. Smith."

Draco stood and slowly turned towards Deans. "Really, Deans. Are you mad?"

***

a/n: While I realize Draco has probably seen a telephone before in Dr. Laeverton's office and I find it incredibly hard to believe that there wouldn't have been a television set in the Common Room of the
Ward, I couldn't suppress the urge to poke a little fun at Draco's complete naivety of Muggle creations. It was meant to make you giggle a little and I hope I did my job. :-)  

[1] That line is a direct quote from the film “Latter Days”
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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a/n: Quick little pre-note. I originally put a "Language" warning when I posted the prologue for this story because I know that my writing, especially when dealing with dark, intense stuff, usually tends to lean a little towards the profane. However, it's been tons of chapters and I've managed not to use profanity except maybe twice because I never really felt the need for it.

That being said, this chapter has quite a few naughty words in it.

Just a refresher warning, lol. And if you feel it's beginning to get excessive, feel free to let me know.

:-)

~*~

~Don't Lie to Me~

The next day...

***

Harry arrived at the Ministry early the next morning. It was raining outside, the wind blowing it sideways in sheets, and Harry was glad for the reprieve from the inclement weather even though his mood equally matched its gloom. Harry quietly wove in and out of the Ministry's halls, his steps taking him slowly towards his destination.

When he arrived, it took Harry a few minutes to figure out the spell that would unlock Hermione Granger's office in Muggle Affairs. Once inside, Harry shuffled through the papers on Hermione's neat desk, looking for the address of Draco Malfoy's new flat. Finding it, Harry carefully folded and pocketed the sheet of paper within his robes. Then Harry left the office, locking the door behind him, and slipped back down the hall.

He couldn't wait any longer.

***

Draco stared at the paper cup filled with dry, thin noodles and seasoning and bit his lip, trying with all his might to figure out this new puzzle. It said to add boiling water but damned if this place didn't have a teapot, or any other pot, for that matter. Draco turned and fixed his gaze on the thing that Deans had called a microwave. Deans had tried to explain how to use it but Draco had been too busy
discovering his new flat to really pay attention.

Draco opened the kitchen drawer beneath the microwave and pulled out a little paper book that had a picture of the same device on the front cover. He flipped through it, reading a few lines here and there, before turning once again to the little paper cup with noodles. Frowning in severe concentration, Draco added water to the cup and placed it into the square microwave. Pressing a button, Draco watched, fascinated, as a light came on inside it and illuminated the little cup as it turned around and around.

Draco nearly jumped out of his skin when the thing beeped shrilly and he opened the microwave and retrieved the cup. Cautiously, Draco dipped a finger into the cup. The noodles were far from soft but the water had become much warmer.

A slow smile spread across Draco's face and his gray eyes brightened. "Interesting." ***

Dr. Laeverton took a sip of his coffee and glanced once at the paperwork spread across his desk. There, among the scattered sheets, was John Smith's notebook with a small, yellow "post-it" note attached to it. Dr. Laeverton reached down and plucked up the note and read it.

'Doctor,

Mr. Smith accidentally left this in his room.

Regards,
Brooke'

Brooke was a Betty here and Dr. Laeverton grunted as he crumpled the note and tossed it into the wastebasket. Dr. Laeverton finished his coffee and fed his turtles before taking a seat behind his desk and retrieving the notebook.

Dr. Laeverton glanced at the first page and his salt and pepper brows drew together violently. The first passage was very different from the notebook Dr. Laeverton had read during their sessions together. This passage spoke of an Eagle Owl, severe and violent dreams, flashbacks that included fantasy visions of floating candles, bubbling cauldrons, and people wearing dark robes and strange, pointed hats. Dr. Laeverton kept turning the pages, a sour feeling sinking into the pit of his stomach, and he stopped abruptly as he read a passage about Bane.

It recalled, in detail, Smith becoming so angry at Bane that energy escaped from his body and nearly killed the other patient. Dr. Laeverton gnawed at his lower lip and shut the notebook thoughtfully. Usually, the Doc would brush this off as delusions and over active imaginations, except there had already been an account of this from Bane. It was the exact same story and Bane and Smith had not spoken once after the 'incident'.

Also, there were many passages about an Eagle Owl outside of Smith's window and a large owl had been reported to flying into the Ward with a snake and bringing it into Smith's room.

The icing on the cake, however, was that crazy people don't know they're crazy. Dr. Laeverton rose shakily to his feet. Smith's notebook had passages upon passages about whether or not Smith thought he was crazy and why he couldn’t tell the Doc or anyone else about these visions. If Smith was crazy, he certainly didn't want to be because he hid these thoughts from anyone who could condemn him so.

Dr. Laeverton snatched up the notebook and carried it with him out of the office, down the hall, and
directly into Bane's room. Bane looked from where he sat on his bed, eyes bright and cold.

"Bane," Dr. Laeverton said. "I want you to tell me again what exactly happened between you and Mr. Smith."

Slowly, Bane nodded.

***

Harry glanced at the sheet of paper in his hand and back up at the large, red brick building. Squinting, Harry could make out a blond young man walking back and forth in his kitchen. Harry swallowed, his heart beating faster in his chest, and sat down on a nearby bench.

Harry ran a hand through his jet-black hair and took a deep breath, trying to steady his rapid heartbeat. Harry hadn't slept at all the previous night. He had tossed and turned, every bone in his body screaming to go to America and immediately retrieve Draco Malfoy. Harry felt callous for treating the Malfoy Case so despairingly. And while sending Malfoy to America had been for his own good and wasn't even entirely Harry's own idea, Harry would be a liar if he said he hadn't thought it was funny or even felt a measure of satisfaction, knowing that whenever Draco would regain his memory, he would be embarrassed and angry.

Harry knew now that Draco Malfoy wouldn't care so much that he was stashed with Muggles, but that he would despise everyone involved in his relocation for lying to him and seemingly abandoning him. Harry also knew that part of his own stress of getting Draco to remember was that the Pensieve had shown Harry enough to convince him that Draco wasn't a complete asshole and that maybe his actions during the Eve Battle had been more pure, righteous, and unselfish than he had thought.

Harry had just never thought Draco had ever had it in him, or the desire, to be heroic…or, just to be a decent person.

And something parallel to Harry's own past had beginning to show itself in Malfoy's Pensieve. Malfoy understood loss and grief as well as Harry did. Now, after the war, most people do. Then, at Hogwarts, it was difficult to see past your own textbook on practical spells, let alone really take in war and death and the terrible sweetness of grief.

Malfoy knew what it was like to feel alone and to feel like he wasn’t up to par with what people expected of him. Malfoy knew what it felt like to be lied to his whole life and he definitely knew what it felt like to disappoint those who believed him to be something worth greatness.

Harry took in a shuddering breath and let it out slowly. In a million years, Harry never thought he would have so much in common with Draco Malfoy.

Harry rose to his feet when a tall young man with dark brown hair, olive skin, and hazel eyes pulled up in a black Honda and got out of the car. Harry watched carefully as the man walked towards Draco's building, paused, and turned to him.

The man squinted at Harry. “Hi,” the man said. “Are you new here?”

Harry raised his brows. “Somewhat. I’m…visiting a friend.”

“Yeah?” the man asked, walking towards him. “Who?”

“Um, John. He lives up there.” Harry pointed at the brick building.

The man broke out in a cheerful smile. “You mean Smith? What a coincidence, I’m here to see him
too. He never said he was having a visitor.”

“He doesn’t know,” Harry mumbled, perturbed by the young man’s cheerfulness.

“Oh?” Deans frowned. “What was your name?”

Harry thought for a moment, trying to recall the name Ron had given the doctor at St. Mary’s when he called. “Hale. Christian Hale. Pleasure.” Harry reached forward and shook the man’s hand, watching him slowly register and finally recognize the name.

“Mr. Hale! Dr. Laeverton did mention your name. How do you do?”

Harry faked a plastic smile and tried to pull his hand away.

“I’m Deans,” the man said.

Harry nodded. “Smith’s social worker.”

Deans beamed at him. “Sure am. I forget, what division are you from?”

Harry stared at him for a moment. “I’m here to see Smith,” Harry said finally. “And I’m sure you know the way.”

Deans’ smile disappeared and he pursed his lips. “Mr. Hale—”

Harry shook his head and walked passed him. Deans sputtered and had to jog to catch up. “Mr. Hale, Smith is somewhat…”

“Delicate? Vulnerable? Maybe I should come back another time?”

Deans had the grace to laugh. “Hardly delicate or vulnerable. He managed to convince me to make him dinner last night, the sneaky bastard.”

Harry smiled, in spite of himself, and opened the door to the building, holding it out—semi-politely—for Deans as he did so. Deans thanked him and Harry followed him up the stairs and down the hall. Deans stopped in front of John Smith’s apartment door and turned back to Harry, using his body as a barrier between Harry and the door.

Harry frowned and raised his gaze to Deans.

“Listen, I’ll let you see him, I mean, he can see anyone he wants, but just… don’t overwhelm him,” Deans said, his tone anything but confrontational. “I mean, yesterday, he didn’t even know what a microwave was.”

Harry snickered before he could stop himself and Deans grinned before he turned and unlocked the door. Inside, everything smelled like Ramen Noodles, and there were uneaten cups of them scattered everywhere. Deans cleared his throat, taking in the sight, and called for Smith.

“Deans!” Draco called from his bedroom, “I found the manual for that microwave thing in the kitchen.”

“I can see that,” Deans answered, going around the room, picking up the cups of noodles, and throwing them away. “You shouldn’t waste this food, Smith.”

Harry felt something stab in his chest as Draco and Deans conversed normally to one another. They couldn’t have known one another for very long and Harry wondered if he was jealous of their casual
“Why?” Draco answered from his room, his voice somewhat muffled. “The food is completely terrible. I don’t even think it should qualify as food.”

“Then why did you make so many?” Deans called back.

“I was experimenting with the density of the noodles. Apparently, it doesn’t matter how long you put the cup into the microwave if all you want is softer noodles. If you want them hot, of course, you’ll want to keep them in there for a certain amount of time. However, the water doesn’t even have to be heated for the noodles eventually get soft! Brilliant!”

Deans had stopped throwing away cups of noodles during Draco’s little conclusion about Ramen Noodles and was now staring incredulously towards Draco’s room. Deans glanced back at Harry, who shrugged and looked away.

“What are you doing now, Smith?” Deans said finally.

“Just left the loo, mate. Needed a shower.”

“Hurry up, you have a visitor.”

“Who is it?”

Deans glanced at Harry who stared back with an emotionless mask covering his features while his eyes spoke volumes of discomfort.

“Christian Hale,” Deans answered finally, becoming suspicious all over again.

“Who?” Draco asked, coming out of his bedroom, wearing nothing but a pair of sweatpants, his blond hair still damp from the shower. Draco winced as he turned into the hall, his hand coming up to rub at his scar. Then Draco’s head snapped up when he spotted Harry behind Deans and his gray eyes became so dark they were nearly black.

In three quick steps, Draco was in front of Harry, staring so hard at him Harry was compelled to take a step back.


“That’s not his name.”

Draco stared at the man with jet-black hair and green eyes that he’d seen so often in his dreams and knew, just KNEW, that Christian Hale was not, could not possibly be, his name. There were too many syllables in the first name and not enough in the last. Draco could hear the man’s real name in the back of his mind in echoes of a whisper but he couldn’t grasp onto it.

The man stared back at him, green eyes wide with anxiety...and a little of something else Draco couldn’t name, and he shifted his gaze momentarily to Draco’s lightning bolt scar.

"Deans, get out," Draco ordered in a breathless whisper as shadows of images began flickering through his mind, too much and not nearly enough.

Deans frowned, affronted and surprised in the same breath. "Excuse me, Mr. Smith, but I am charged with your well-being and I will not--"

Draco’s eyes left the green-eyed man’s as he whirled on Deans, a glare spitting from his eyes that
would give even the sturdiest man nightmares. "You insignificant piece of worthless wank," Draco growled in a low, dangerous voice, "I couldn't give half a shit what you were charged with. You are a waste of oxygen and this is my flat, you over-rated Betty-boy. I said get out. Now go. And don't, for fuck's sake, let the door injure that perfectly good ass of yours on the way out."

Deans opened his mouth to protest, startled by this new side to Mr. Smith, but Smith cut him short with a sharp flick of his wrist. Deans looked between Hale and Smith, both men trembling with the tension that suddenly surrounded them. Finally, Deans threw his hands up in exasperation and burnt dignity and trudged towards the door. "I hope you know what you're doing, Mr. Smith," Deans muttered before closing the door behind him.

Draco once again turned to the man with the green eyes. "I see you every night in my dreams," Draco bit out, his eyes blazing. "You're always there. I demand you tell me who you are and don't lie to me. I'm sick of all these bloody lies!"

Harry gazed back at him, his mind trying to make sense of what to do next. Harry had thought, for the few minutes of hearing a good-natured version of Draco Malfoy hold a conversation with Deans, that the Malfoy heir had become a different person during his stay at St. Mary's. But now, the Draco Malfoy that Harry knew was staring intensely back at him, except that his gray eyes were wild, bright, and half-crazed.

Harry, beginning to think that coming here without the Memory Draught and the proper supervision had been the worst impulse he had followed through in ages, reached into his sleeve and began to pull out his wand.

Draco watched him, the images shooting through his mind coming in mad and jarred sequences, trying to distract him with all their might. Suddenly, Draco knew that if this man retrieved that stick from his sleeve, he would almost definitely forget everything all over again. He couldn't let that happen.

Draco surged forward, his hand locking down on the other man's arm, and tried to suppress the sudden flood of images that began racing through his head at faster speeds and with more intensity. They circled around and around, spinning, crashing, blending into one another and Draco was dizzy with it. Draco shook violently as the visions battered against him, surging and receding with the awesome force of ocean waves under a storm. Lightning crashed in his mind and his feet turned to mush beneath him. His knees buckled and his mind froze when his thoughts could no longer keep up with the flashing and stumbling half-memories. Draco felt the floor disappear beneath him and his hand loosened its grip on the man's arm.

*His name is...*

*His name is...*

Harry caught Draco when he lost consciousness and silently carried him into his bedroom, laying him carefully on the bed. Shock and confusion ran through Harry's body in tremors as he sat next to the sleeping Draco Malfoy.

Allowing the sound of Draco's steady breathing to calm him, Harry took in an unsteady, deep breath and let it out slowly. This, officially, had been a very bad idea.

Harry shakily got to his feet and left the flat, his movements barely making a sound.

***
Scratching Through the Surface

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Scratching Through the Surface~

One hour later...

***

Ron hurried down the hall towards Muggle affairs. Ron held the note that had been owled to him moments before tightly in his enclosed fist. 'Ronald,' the note had read, 'get your ass in here now! ~Hermione.'

Ron cleared his throat outside of the Muggle Affairs Head Office and mentally braced himself. Reaching up, Ron knocked lightly on the door.

Ron nearly stumbled back when an arm suddenly thrust through the now opened door, grabbed his shirt collar, and roughly pulled him in. Inside, while Ron righted himself, Hermione paced her office like a caged lioness.

"Ron," Hermione said angrily. "Where is Harry?"

Ron shrugged. "I haven't seen him all morning."

"Someone broke into my office this morning," Hermione continued. "I think it was Harry."

"Why would Harry break into your office, 'Mione?"

Hermione continued to pace. "The address of Draco Malfoy's new flat is missing."

Ron stiffened and then he groaned loudly, throwing his hands into the air. "He's gone mental, that one!"

***

Draco’s eyes flew open and he instantly sat up. He shook his head, trying to get a handle on where he was. Suddenly, remembering everything from an hour ago, Draco jumped to his feet and ran out into the hall, his stormy irises searching for the man with the green, green eyes.

Realizing the man had left; Draco grabbed a chair angrily and threw it across the room with a shout. Clutching at his hair, Draco tried to think of where this man would go, where he could find him.
This man knew him; Draco could see it in his eyes. He had to find him. He had to know who he was and why he was always in his dreams.

Draco wouldn’t let the only person who knew who he really was slip away from him. He couldn’t let that happen.

Draco shut his eyes tightly and tried to pull up the images that had always centered on that man, times where he saw the two of them corresponding. Draco bit his lip as one image came into his mind and remained there, becoming sharper and more vivid. Through the haze of his amnesia, Draco could make out a shiny, mahogany colored steam engine, the sound of its horn blasting through his head. Gold letters on the stern solidified and Draco concentrated on them, trying to make them out with all his might.

Hogwarts Express.

Draco took in a deep breath and held it, trying to keep that image solidly in his mind while attempting to move around it. Families hurried around one another on the platform and, out of the corner of his eye, Draco spotted a lone boy with messy black hair and rounded spectacles. The boy turned slightly, causing a thick black tendril of hair to shift slightly on the boy’s forehead. Draco gasped and the image suddenly vanished.

The boy had an identical scar on his forehead, a lightning bolt one. And while Draco couldn’t remember if the man that had appeared in his flat had a similar scar or not, behind those rounded spectacles, that boy had the greenest eyes Draco had ever seen.

Except once.

Draco hurried into his room and pulled on some clothes. After throwing on a heavy black coat, Draco left the apartment, his long strides taking him down the stairs and out of the building.

Draco stopped a small, hunched over, old woman and asked her where the nearest train station was.

“Train station?” the old woman repeated. “That would be on Willow and Seventh. Five blocks that way.”

***

Seated on a swing in the park two blocks from Draco’s flat, Harry frowned as he felt the familiar tingling in his mind. Squinting, he pushed it away and stood up, knowing that must mean Draco was awake.

Harry couldn’t bring himself to Obliviate the Malfoy heir again but he also couldn’t handle staying in the apartment while the blond slept. Draco’s reaction had surprised and overwhelmed him. Harry had not realized their connection had become so strong so quickly. It had taken Harry years to figure out he was connected to Voldemort.

All the same, it wasn’t so much Draco’s reaction that had frightened Harry, it was the strength and power of his magic rolling off of him in insuppressible waves when he had grasped Harry’s arm. It was electric and raw, cackling around Draco and snapping angrily at Harry until he was dizzy with it.

Harry swallowed and shoved his hands in his pockets as he began to move back towards the apartment. Harry couldn’t explain why he’d left like that. He had an overwhelming urge to get out, to get away, to get some air and clear his head.
He needed a new plan. The old one, if he had even had one, certainly didn’t work.

Harry took a deep breath as he turned a corner and saw Draco’s building come into view. Here goes nothing.

***

Deans greeted Harry with a death glare when he entered the apartment. “Where is he?” Deans grated.

Harry’s jet-black brows went sky high as a sick, sour feeling settled in the pit of his stomach. “What do you mean? He’s not here?”

“Are you serious?” Deans shrieked, panic shaking his voice. “I left him with you!”

Harry spread his hands. “He was sleeping when I left. Calm down!”

Deans ran a hand roughly through his dark curls. “He was my first case. They’re going to fire me for sure.”

Harry snorted, somewhat sympathizing with the young Social Worker. “No kidding. Do you have any idea where he would have gone?”

Deans bit his lip. “I don’t know.”

“You still have that car?”

Deans nodded.

“Let’s go then. He couldn’t have gotten far.”

***

Draco scowled when the metal bar wouldn’t move. He reached out and tried to unlock the mechanism it was connected to using the trick he learned to use on Dr. Laeverton’s door at the Ward. It still wouldn’t budge. Draco could see a train ahead of him, on the other side of the small, annoying devices that barred his way.

Draco glanced over when an older man slipped some coins into the device and the bar gave way for him. He frowned, knowing he had no coins.

“Fuck it,” Draco muttered as he jumped over the bar and made his way towards the train.

It was an outdoor train station and the sky moved above him, slow and watchful. A security guard straightened when he saw Draco jump over and moved forward. “Excuse me, sir!” the guard barked.

Draco raised a brow and turned to him. “Yes?”

“It’s thirty-five cents,” the guard said.

Draco shrugged and turned away.

The guard frowned and stepped in Draco’s path. “Sir, did you hear me?”

“Yes. Please move.”
“Sir, you need to pay the machine or leave.”

Draco scowled. “Really, mate. Today is not the day. Get away from me.”

“Thirty-five cents, sir,” the guard repeated, unperturbed. “Or I am going to ask you to leave.”

Agitation welled up in him and Draco curled his hands into fists as he stared at the train. Not only was it not the Hogwarts Express, it wasn’t even a steam engine. Draco pressed back into that memory, trying to recall how it was that he had gotten there in the first place. “Platform… platform…”

“Sir,” the guard said, reaching for his walkie-talkie. “I’m going to ask you one more time—”

Draco snapped his fingers. “Platform Nine and Three Quarters! Where is it?”

“Excuse me?”

“Where is Platform Nine and Three Quarters?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” the guard said shaking his head. “But I must ask you to leave.”

“Leave?”

“You need thirty-five cents, sir, or you must leave.”

Draco shook his head incredulously. “No, no, no. I’m looking for someone. You haven’t seen him, have you? Black hair, green eyes, about my age, maybe an inch taller than me, Platform Nine and Three Quarters…?”

“Sir—”

Draco rolled his eyes and sidestepped the guard, approaching a small child with rosy cheeks and long golden curls. “You wouldn’t, by any chance, have thirty-five cents?”

The little girl giggled and bent down, picking up a quarter and a dime from the pavement and handing them to Draco. Draco frowned slightly at the dirty coins but thanked the child anyway. He walked back to the guard, who was now accompanied by two more just like him, and handed him the coins.

“Now,” Draco said, as if speaking to an idiot. “Platform Nine and Three Quarters.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about sir,” the guard said, stepping closer to Draco, his hand hovering over a short black weapon his belt. “There is no such thing. What is your name?”

Draco trembled as agitation hit him again like a bucket of cold water. “You realize you are most unhelpful,” Draco snapped.

The guard behind him who had been speaking quietly into his walkie-talkie stepped forward. “Sir, Sgt. Tailer has asked you to leave. Please do so quickly and without any fuss.”

Draco began to shake as the agitation churned in his blood and the visions began attacking his mind again, unwelcome and uninvited. “I’m looking for—”

“Sir,” another guard said. “We can do this the easy way or the hard way. We will walk you out.”

The guard moved forward and grabbed Draco on his upper arm.
Draco’s eyes blazed. “Don’t touch me,” Draco shrieked, jerking away. “I need to find—“

Suddenly, all three guards surged forward and attempted to grab Draco and restrain him.

“Get off of me!” Draco roared and energy spiked and crackled around him. With a shout, Draco’s magic exploded from his body and the guards flew off of him screaming.

Magic swirled around Draco in violent, uncontrollable spasm and Draco’s eyes glazed over as his mind shut down, completely succumbing to the power that had been locked inside his body for far too long.

***

Dr. Laeverton hung up the phone and began walking briskly towards the Staff’s Office. Deans had just called him, informing him that Smith was missing and a certain Christian Hale was with him and helping him look for Mr. Smith.

Deans didn’t trust Hale, that much was evident from the tone of his voice, but he agreed with the doctor on allowing him to help search for John Smith. Find Smith first, ask questions later.

The Doc entered the Nurse’s Office and looked up when silence greeted his entrance. Every staff member present was staring at a small television and Dr. Laeverton’s mouth fell open when he saw what they were watching.

“Doctor,” a Betty said breathlessly. “Isn’t that Mr. Smith?”

There, amidst wreckage and fire, was John Smith, his head thrown back and exploding energy emanating from his body, causing catastrophe wherever it reached.

Dr. Laeverton pulled out his cell phone and dialed Deans’ number.

“Hello?” Deans said on the other line.

“Deans,” Dr. Laeverton said in a hollow voice. “Get your ass over to Willow and Seventh. I’ll meet you there.”

“Is that where Smith is?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?”

“I’m watching him on Channel Nine.”

***

Hermione waited for Ron outside of Draco’s flat, impatient and trying to push back a persistent migraine. It had taken longer to get here than Hermione would have like because they had to first go to Hogwarts and retrieve a Memory Draught from Snape’s storage unit as Hermione’s had not been completed yet. Snape, of course, had been infinitely clear that he was furious at their incompetence concerning is godson. Then, they had to owl four other Aurors to aid their search.

Now, nearly two hours later, Ron had left Hermione outside with three of the four chosen Aurors, Mackle, Boyle, and Nadger, to go search Draco’s flat for Harry. Anin had went with Ron and Hermione frowned when they came back out of the building the same as they had entered it—without Harry Potter.
“Where is he?” Hermione demanded for the seeming billionth time that day.

Ron ran a hand through his hair as he approached his glaring fiancée. “I don’t know, ‘Mione. He hasn’t been gone long though. Anin and I found traces of his and Draco’s magic all over the flat.”

Hermione’s brown eyes widened a fraction. “Malfoy was using his magic? Do you think they had a battle?”

Anin, a pleasant fellow with blond hair and light brown eyes, shook his head solemnly. “No, ma’am. There was no sign of a struggle. And we believe that Potter left after Malfoy. His magic is the freshest even though it seems only residual. Malfoy’s traces are much more distinct if a bit scrambled.”

Ron nodded his agreement and watched Hermione’s frown deepen.

“We should have brought Hedwig, Ron,” Hermione said finally. “She would be able to locate him fairly quickly.”

“Should we go get her?” Mackle inquired from where he stood on Hermione’s left.

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t think we have that kind of time. Especially if Malfoy’s magic is exuding that kind of unrestrained power. Wherever Malfoy is, Harry is. We need to locate Malfoy.”

Suddenly, two American Aurors dressed in navy blue robes Apparated a few feet from them. “Mr. Weasley?” the taller one called out.

Ron immediately turned and walked towards them. “Yes, that’s me.”

“A moment please,” the shorter one said and bent his head to speak to Ron in low tones.

Hermione watched as the blood drained from Ron’s freckled face and when he walked back to Hermione, he wouldn’t quite meet her eyes.

“Ron, what is it?”

“The Yankees say they just came from a train station five blocks from here,” Ron murmured. “Malfoy’s there surrounded by Muggles and…he’s losing his mind.”

“Losing his mind?” Hermione asked shrilly.

“They say he’s causing quite the fuss and that the Muggles will kill him if he doesn’t stop blowing shit up.”

***
"Temporary" Equilibrium

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~“Temporary” Equilibrium ~

“When all stellar energy sources are exhausted, the interior of a star will undergo a gravitational collapse. In this sense a star is a “temporary” equilibrium state between a gravitational collapse at stellar birth and a gravitational collapse at stellar death.” ~Astronomical Physics

Minutes later…

***

Harry’s mouth dropped open when he and Deans pulled into the train station’s parking lot in Deans’ black Honda. Before the car was fully parked, Harry had opened the passenger door and jumped out, running towards the scene unfolding before him.

Helicopters circled above as squad and S.W.A.T. cars and vans swerved in and were parked near the tracks, acting as a barrier for the law enforcement officials trying to get a handle on the situation, screaming into walkie-talkies and gesturing wildly to one another. Near the train, Draco hovered inches above the ground in an upright position, the tips of his toes slightly brushing the concrete from time to time. His head was thrown back and his mouth slightly open, his hands were lax by his sides and the whites of his eyes could be seen from where Harry stood, yards away, and they seemed to be glowing.

A sphere of red and gold crackling energy surrounded the Malfoy heir and the inner core of the sphere seemed to be filled with blue and green string-like energies, swirling around and moving through Draco’s body. The lower third of the spheres disappeared within the concrete below Draco and the pavement was cracked and uneven, standing up at odd, jagged angles until the outer sphere ended near the train and where the police and S.W.A.T vehicles strategically lay.

Harry stared as his running slowed to a walk, wondering in amazement at why Draco looked so peaceful and he was reminded of when Draco was taken up into the air after killing Voldemort and granted a second life by ancient magic that few understood.

Harry found his steps drawn towards the outer sphere and he was shocked out of the semi-trance when a gruff-looking Muggle police officer roughly shoved him back. “Sir, this area is not safe,” The man said to Harry pulling him away before turning to another officer speaking into a headset. “Lieutenant! I thought we vacated the station!”
“We did Sergeant Bowler,” the lieutenant snapped. “Get him out of here!”

Harry opened his mouth to protest but Deans, who had finally caught up, pulled on his arm. Harry turned to him and saw an older man behind him with a salt and pepper beard step up quickly and addresses the man with the headset. “Lieutenant Fitz, I am Dr. Laeverton from St. Mary’s Hospital. This is Michael Deans and Christian Hale. We know this man.”

“You know him?!” the lieutenant barked, violently jerking off his headset and stomping forward. “Then tell me, doctor, what the hell is he and how the hell are we going to stop him?!”

“He’s not dangerous--” Harry began before a sonic wave of invisible energy shot from the sphere’s core--Draco Malfoy--and pushed outwards, throwing every person back who wasn’t anchored to something and shattering the glass of the nearby train’s windows and the glass of the surrounding vehicles.

Harry, whose wandless magic had automatically activated a shield around his body, enabling him to remain standing, gaped at Draco, trying to make sense of what was happening to him.

“Not dangerous, huh?” the lieutenant muttered as he came to his feet and picked up his headset. “Those waves have been getting increasingly bigger.”

The headset crackled in the man’s hand. “I--a--shot--’Nant--” a voice said over the communication. The lieutenant raised the headset to his ear. “Say again?”

“I have a shot, Lieutenant!”

“NO!” Harry shouted. “You cannot--”

The man turned to Dr. Laeverton as he waved dismissively at Harry. “If your input isn’t going to be productive, I must ask you to vacate the area.” Then he pulled out a walkie-talkie, adjusted the channel, and put it near his mouth. "Captain, target is in range. Alpha Dove has a shot. Permission to take down target?"

The walkie-talkie crackled. "Granted," the captain answered from wherever he was.

"No!" Harry said again.

“Lieutenant, I’m sure there is a way to diffuse the situation without shooting my patient,” the Doc said calmly.

The man shrugged. “We’re using rubber bullets. It won’t kill him.” The man raise his fist to an unseen party, flattened his fingers and teetered his hand in short movements. A rifle went off and Harry watched helplessly as the large blue rubber bullet shot through the sphere and slammed into Draco’s left shoulder. His body snapped forward and he wavered at an odd angle before his eyes snapped shut, his mouth formed a frown of severe consternation, and his hands closed into tight fists. Slowly, Draco moved upright again and suddenly another sonic wave shot forth; only this time, the train and the vehicles were surrounded by the invisible energy and began levitating at the height Draco hovered above the ground.

The red and gold outer sphere glowed brighter and began to pulse as Muggle officers ran to and fro, the mood around them becoming less professional and more frantic. Harry continued to stare in bewilderment as the lieutenant slowly came to his feet and, eyes wide in disbelief, came to stand next to him.

Harry turned and met the man’s gaze.
"Alright," Lieutenant Fitz murmured. "I'm listening."

Harry's mind raced, trying to formulate an excuse that would convince this man not to order his precinct to unleash hell on Draco Malfoy.

"Who is he, Hale?" Deans demanded as he came to his feet as well. "I know you know."

Harry's green eyes flickered over to Deans' hazel ones, and then over to Dr. Laeverton's as he came to stand with them too. All three of them stared at Harry, their eyes hard and expectant.

Harry swallowed past his fear and turned to gaze at Draco Malfoy as he hung, suspended at the center of the spheres of energy, the residual pressure waves pushing outward causing the train and the vehicles to bob in the air. "He saved my life once," Harry said softly. "Whatever is happening to him, we need to concentrate on getting him out alive. He's a good man...And it would be my fault if he died today."

***

Ron Weasley paused when Hermione stopped in her tracks, staring open-mouthed at Malfoy as something clicked in her brain. They were just about to approach the local precinct's Captain, posing as UK Secret Service and the FBI with the American Aurors who claimed they did it all the time, to get his officers to stand down and get the helicopters away from the area. Mackle and Anin had been sent off in search of Harry and Boyle and Nadger were on their brooms, circling above the helicopters and using their magic to keep the flying Muggles away from the dangerous reach of Malfoy's exploding energy.

Ron turned towards his fiancée. "What is it, 'Mione?"

Hermione took in a deep breath, her eyes flickering to Ron's. "Ron, I need you to handle the Captain on your own. Can you do that?"

Ron laughed in her face.

"Really, Ron. I need to find Harry."

"Mackle and Anin are after him," Ron said. "I--"

"Ron, you need to convince the Captain to get everyone away from here, including his men."

"Why?"

Hermione looked back at Malfoy suspended in his sphere of energy, apprehension churning in her stomach. "Because it's his magic that's outside of him. And...that's exceptionally problematic."

***

"I don't understand, Mr. Hale," Dr. Laeverton said. "How do you--"

Suddenly, Mackle and Anin were at Harry's elbow and insistently pulling him away. Frowning, the Doc stepped forward. "Mr. Hale--"

"Listen, Doc," Mackle said, interrupting him. "First of all, it's 'Agent Hale' with the United Kingdom Secret Service. Second, back the fuck up."

Harry blinked at him and then grinned. Mackle was a Muggle-born who had become an Auror two years before Harry and had plenty of experience dealing with Muggles on their own terms and
without having to use magic. Anin, Mackle's partner, smiled pleasantly at the three men who stared after them as they pulled Harry away and his smile turned to acid when he regarded the young Auror.

"Nicely done, Potter," Anin bit out. "This is quite the catastrophe."

Harry's grin instantly vanished. Anin was usually pleasant but, as an Auror, the older man was all business. Having no argument, Harry remained silent.

"Alright, here's the deal," Mackle said, standing between the two. "We've got Boyle and Nadger up high. Granger and your partner Weasley are with two American Aurors trying to handle the situation with the Muggles. Do you understand what's happening with that Malfoy bloke?"

Harry shook his head silently.

"I recognize the Doc," Anin said, squinting back at the three Muggles they had left behind. "Granger showed me a picture. Who are the other two?"

"Michael Deans, the younger one, is Malfoy's Muggle Social Worker--"

"A what?" Mackle asked and Anin shook his head at him.

"And Lieutenant Fitz, the bloke on the left," Harry continued, "is with the local precinct."

"I see," Anin said. Anin frowned and looked back at Malfoy. The three wizards braced themselves as another wave of invisible energy radiated from the large sphere. Mackle gestured to the Muggles who slowly returned to their feet, talking animatedly to one another.

"We need to get them out of here," Mackle said.

"Hermione!" Harry shouted as he saw her running towards them. Breathlessly, Hermione skidded to a halt in front of them and waved her hands.

"Harry! Malfoy is going to implode!"

Harry drew his brows violently together. "What?!"

"That sphere is his magic, Harry," Hermione tried to explain. "Collectively, a trained wizard has the magic of a thousand Killing Curses. If that energy escapes the sphere, this whole place is going to all hell!"

"I thought you said he would learn to control it," Harry shouted.

"A Wizard's magic is tuned the Wizard's emotions, Harry," Hermione said in a rushed voice and stamping her foot. "The only way for a Wizard to push all of his magic outside of his body is to completely lose control of his emotions. His overwhelming memories must have triggered that, Harry! Look at him!"

Harry bit his lip and stared over at Malfoy. "What is the inner sphere?"

"I don't know, but whatever it is, it's what is connecting Malfoy to his magic. It's the only reason he hasn't lost it yet."

Harry turned back to Hermione. "Could he regain his magic?"

Hermione looked away. "In theory..."
"In WHAT theory?"

Hermione spread her hands helplessly. "Harry...if he snapped out of it...um, maybe..."

"Maybe what?" Harry said, exasperated. "Maybe if I calmed him down?"

"You wouldn't be able to reach him, Harry!"

Harry turned once again to Malfoy's outer sphere and clenched his teeth. "Watch me."

"Harry, NO!"

Hermione surged forward to grab Harry but Anin and Mackle restrained her, watching carefully as one of the Ministry's youngest Aurors approached the red and gold wall of crackling energy.

Harry murmured the Shield Charm and tried to push into the outer sphere. Instantly, Harry was thrown back and he landed heavily on his back. Harry listened as the roaring noise of the Muggles running to and fro, the sirens blaring, the shouting, the helicopters, and everything else faded away as he approached the outer sphere again. It wasn't that the outer sphere made any noise; it was that the energy was so intense, it muted out everything else. Harry took a deep breath and concentrated. He conjured the Shield Charm again and turned slightly to Accio Hermione's wand. Taking both his and Hermione's wands and pointing the tip of them at separate areas, he slowly eased them in. Automatically, energy spiked and crackled around the tips of the wands, and Harry bit his lip so hard he tasted blood as he pulled the two wands together.

Once the two wands connected, a brilliant white hot line of energy shot up the edge of the outer sphere in front of Harry's Shield. Immediately, Harry pushed forward into the weakened spot. Heat enveloped Harry as he slowly made his way through Malfoy's exploding magic and the Shield fought to wrap Harry in a safe cocoon of energy. Harry's lungs felt compressed and the pressure on his ribs was nearly unbearable. His eyes watered and his vision blurred. Soon, he was walking blind and the sound in his ears was a screaming silence. Dizziness attacked him and Harry closed his eyes against it. His stomach churned and he clenched his teeth. The pressure was so painful and the heat so unbearable and he couldn't see or hear and then, suddenly, someone was speaking.

"You must stay hidden, Draco." Snape's voice. Harry would recognize it anywhere.

"I know." Malfoy?

Harry turned toward the sound as it faded away and tried to blink the blinding tears out of his eyes. His skin began to cool and the pressure lifted from his heart and, abruptly, Harry heard a new voice.

"It is what you do that defines you, Draco. I wouldn't delude myself otherwise if I were you." Dumbledore!

"You're not me," Draco snapped back.

"Very true."

Harry fought to open his eyes but they wouldn't cooperate.

"Does this mean you don't care, Draco?" Pansy Parkinson.

"It must."

"I don't believe you."
A pause. "One day, you will. And then you'll second guess yourself; again and again."

"I hate you."

Another pause. "Good. It will hurt less."

Suddenly, Harry's body came flush up against another's and the voices shifted and wavered. Then Harry's eyelids began to work again. As Harry opened his eyes, the voices merged together, sounding like a room full of people was all talking at once.

In front of him, Draco hovered with his eyes shut tightly and his fists clenched at his sides. And he was listening.

Harry looked around, realizing that the blue and green of the inner sphere came from his memories. His memories were what was connecting him to his magic! Or, maybe, Malfoy had subconsciously used his magic to pull his memories from his mind so he could shift through them. Maybe it was the other way around and this was simply the end result.

Harry took a deep breath and reached up, curling his fingers around the back of Draco's neck and into his light blond hair. Connecting with Draco's magic, Harry dispersed his Shield Charm and allowed himself to levitate with Draco, inches above the ground.

Harry pressed his forehead against Draco's, feeling the tingling of his old scar touching his skin. "Malfoy."

Draco's eyes shot open, his pupils wide and unfocused. "My name," Draco whispered in a hollow voice.

"Yes," Harry murmured. "Your name is Draco Malfoy."

"I know," Draco whispered and a smile stretched his lips. "Yes, I know."

They bobbed there for a moment before Draco spoke again. "I've been looking for you."

"In your memories?" Harry whispered back.

"Yes."

"I am not a memory."

"No?"

"I am right here, Malfoy, and so are you. Look at me."

Slowly, Draco's eyes focused on Harry's face and he stared into Harry's eyes. "Harry Potter."

"That's right," Harry whispered, nodding against Draco's forehead. "You have to calm down, Malfoy. You could kill a lot of people if you don't calm down."

Draco twitched and closed his eyes.

"No, no, no," Harry said, shaking Draco slightly. "Look at me, Malfoy. You have to."

Draco opened his eyes and the silver irises flashed with familiarity. His hands came down and grasped Harry's wrists. Squeezing, Draco bit his lip and stared into Harry's eyes, emerald orbs shimmering reflections of the energy around them. "I need your help," Draco whispered.
"I'm right here," Harry murmured and cried out when an imploding pulse of energy shot inward and through them. Draco gritted his teeth and concentrated.

***

Everyone had gasped when they saw the outer sphere flash white and shimmer inward. Hermione struggled against Mackle and Anin, screaming about getting Harry out of there. The two Aurors watched stoically as the sphere shimmered again and became smaller.

Suddenly, the sphere turned silver and then a blinding white, obscuring Harry and Draco from view, and everyone threw their arms up to shield their eyes. When they moved their arms, the spheres were gone and Harry Potter stood among the wreckage, holding a sobbing, delirious Draco Malfoy in a tight embrace.

Finally, Mackle and Anin released Hermione and she ran forward. Reaching Harry, she slipped the Memory Draught into Harry back pocket and retrieved her wand before stepping to the side to meet Harry pained gaze.

"Get him out of here, Harry," Hermione murmured, her expression dazed and full of unrepentant awe. "We'll clean this mess up."

Harry nodded and Apparated himself and Draco back to London.

***

Arriving in front of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, Harry pulls out a piece of paper and has Draco read it. Being invited, Number Twelve Grimmauld Place appeared to the Malfoy heir and Harry led him inside.

Draco's sobs had calmed by the time Harry had gotten him to the stairs leading up to the guest rooms, and his blond head was passively resting on Harry's shoulder. Once Harry settled him into a bed, Harry sat on the edge of it and handed him the Memory Draught.

"What is this?" Draco whispered, taking the vial and inspecting.

"Drink it, and you'll remember everything."

"Do I want to?"

Harry frowned. "Do you want to what?"

"Remember?"

Harry looked away and stood up. "That's not for me to decide." Harry walked into the bathroom and returned with another vial. "This will help you sleep without dreams," Harry said, handing it over. "It's a suggestion."

Draco raised his eyes to Harry's. "Will it be that bad?"

Harry's eyes softened a bit. "It might," Harry said honestly.

Moments passed before Draco said anything. "Thank you," Draco murmured finally.

Harry blinked, caught off guard. He didn't respond until he left the room--and Draco--and went downstairs and into the kitchen. Harry opened the fridge, looked inside, and closed it. Then he sat down at the kitchen table and buried his face in his hands.
"You're welcome."

***
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: This chapter marks the beginning of Arch Two. Enjoy!

~Not Quite Paradise~

“…down the dank
moldering paths and past the Ocean’s streams they went
and past the White Rock and the Sun’s Western Gates and past
the Land of Dreams, and soon they reached the fields of asphodel
where the dead, the burnt-out wraiths of mortals make their home…” (Odyssey 24.5-9, translation by Robert Fagles).

The next morning…

~*~

Draco slowly opened his eyes and automatically murmured a charm to dispel his headache. As the throbbing pain behind his eyes eased, a half-smile curved his pale lips.

Draco Malfoy remembered the Mind Calm Charm.

Then, as quickly as his smile appeared, it vanished. Draco sat up on the large bed and looked around him. His cultivated mind immediately caused a platinum blond brow to rise as he took in the once-lavish décor of the room he was in. The drapery and furniture were expensive and well thought out but it was covered in inches of dust and moth-eaten holes covered the fabric. It was as if someone had put a great deal of effort into designing the large bedroom and then had completely forgotten about it after the project was over.

The colors were dark and rich, the light from the warm fire of the fireplace glancing off of the picture frames on the walls and washing over the thick carpet before it, like a glass of red wine by candlelight. Draco threw back the covers and placed his feet on the floor. He glanced over at the nightstand by the large, gilded bed and gazed at the two empty vials set there.

Idly, the fingers of his right hand went to the sleeve of his left arm. Pushing up the fabric and keeping his blank gaze in the general direction of the two vials, Draco traced the scratched out image of Voldemort’s Dark Mark with his fingertips.

Abruptly feeling sick, Draco doubled over and put his head between his knees. Draco clutched his hair, no struggle this time in discerning his memories and he wondered what was worse as his mind
Draco forced his heart beat to slow and his thoughts to quit roaring of their own accord.

Draco sat back up and looked at the vials once more before coming to his feet. Wherever he was, it was Harry Potter who brought him here. Draco wouldn’t allow himself to be a sobbing mess the next time they spoke.

Draco turned in a circle and spotted a pair of his black slacks, neatly folded, black robes with the silver hem Malfoy’s were trademark for wearing, and a black silk, open-collar shirt lying across the couch in front of the fireplace. Draco nodded to himself, appreciating, despite himself, that throughout this entire ordeal, at least he was provided his own damn clothes.

After washing up in the adjoining bathroom and dressing, Draco walked over to the window and pulled back one heavy, velvet curtain, squinting against the burst of bright eastern sunlight. The dawn was cold and gray, the way Draco Malfoy knew—and remembered—he liked them and, more delightfully, it was an English dawn. He could tell by the ever-present residual smell of rain and the lifting fog that never quite went away.

Not quite the Paradise he was expecting after he died, but it would do.

~*~

Draco wandered into the kitchen minutes later and spotted Harry Potter dozing at a small table, his cheek propped against his hand. Draco wondered where the rounded spectacles Harry usually wore were and allowed himself a small grin, realizing that The-Boy-Who-Lived looked quite harmless when he slept.

Draco leaned against the wall and cleared his throat. “I suppose we’re even then.”

Immediately, Harry’s eyes shot open and his head jerked up. Harry blinked a few times before his green eyes focused on the figure before him and Draco smirked, making sure to keep the lines around his curling lip hard and minutely bemused.

“What?” Harry managed finally.

“I saved your life, you saved mine; we’re square,” Draco answered calmly.

Harry didn’t answer but he reached into his sleeve and produced Draco’s wand.

Draco’s gray eyes brightened covetously and he whispered Accio, thoughtlessly, in his mind, summoning his wand to himself. Catching it, his magic calmed from the swirling torrent within him to a slow push and pull every wizard felt when they concentrated on their magic flowing through them.

Pocketing his wand, Draco glanced back at Harry, watching him run a hand over his face and look like the world was, once again, resting on his shoulders.

“Are you an Auror now?” Draco asked, resuming his perch against the wall.

Harry nodded blearily, not quite meeting Draco’s eyes.

Draco’s trademark smirk was back in full force. “So was all this your doing?”

“Mostly,” Harry answered honestly in a hoarse voice.
Draco pursed his lips, trying to hold back his laughter as it boiled up inside of him. “There’s this weapon the Muggles use…I believe it’s called a Magnum 44.”

Harry raised his eyes, lifting a black brow questioningly.

“The bullet’s on me,” Draco said, pressing a fist to his lips, his eyes gleaming with vicious laughter.

“Oh, go fuck yourself, Malfoy,” Harry growled, the familiarity of their childhood rivalry almost comfortable.

Draco released his laughter and it rang off of the walls of the kitchen. “Harry Potter, Auror of the Ministry of Magic…responsible for the most incredible fuck up in the Wizarding World ever…”

“Shut your face, Malfoy,” Harry said scowling. “Not ‘ever’. I mean, that would have to belong to the day you were born…”

“Less than original, Potter,” Draco remarked with another sarcastic curl of his lip. “I expected more from you.”

Harry’s scowl lost its fire and he looked away. “Yeah, so did everybody else.”

Draco drew his brows together. “I was talking about your comeback, you ponce. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You’re even less Gryffindor than I am.”

Harry was immediately on his feet. “What the hell is that supposed to mean? And what the hell makes you think you know anything about me?”

Draco slowly, deliberately raised his hand to his forehead and tapped the lightning bolt scar with his forefinger. Harry’s eyes followed the movement and he unconsciously chewed on his lower lip as he gazed at the scar that used to belong on his skin.

“It bloody hurts when you feel like shite, Potter,” Draco murmured. “Do us a favor and suck it up, you pansy.” Draco paused. Then, “Was it like this with you and Voldemort?”

Harry shook his head slowly. “Not really. I hated him; the pain was more violent.”

Draco snorted. “And what makes you think I don’t hate you?”

Harry gave him a long-suffering look.

“Oh, right,” Draco said sarcastically while still managing to sound charming. “I saved you from mutually assured destruction.” Draco turned to walk out of the kitchen, but paused near the hall. “Don’t kid yourself, Potter. I will always be a Muggle-hating Malfoy and if you don’t hate me now, you will eventually. Isn’t that the game we play?”

“No,” Harry said softly, placing his hands flat against the wood of the table. “What have we given, Malfoy?”

Draco went very still.

“My friend, blood shaking my heart,” Harry continued as Draco slowly turned and stared at him. “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender…which an age of prudence can never retract—“

“No, this, and this only, we have existed,” Draco finished for him, his voice as icy as his eyes. “You
sneaky bastard, you found my Pensieve.”

It wasn’t a question and they both knew it.

“You can’t pretend to be an asshole anymore, Malfoy.”

A slow, cruel smile curved Draco’s mouth and the sight of it sent shivers down Harry’s spine. Draco moved back into the kitchen, his presence in the small room suddenly feeling black and oppressive to Harry. Draco walked until he was directly in front Harry before pausing and leaning forward so that his breath brushed along Harry’s cheek and the sound of his soft voice echoed loudly in his ear.

“Oh, yes I can, Potter.”

Harry swallowed and stubbornly set his jaw. He had dealt with Draco Malfoy at Hogwarts; he was more than equipped to do so again now no matter what he playing at. “Yeah? How do you explain quoting Muggle poetry when being remarked by Voldemort?”

Draco chuckled softly. “T.S. Eliot was a Squib, you idiot.”

Harry closed his eyes as Draco’s soft, mocking laughter spread across his cheek, leaving a trail of goose bumps in its wake. Harry almost sighed in relief when Draco pulled back for a moment, a quizzical look plastered across his face that almost looked comical.

“Which might actually be worse, you know,” Draco said after a moment. “I sort of lived as a Squib these past few months. Less than appealing, I can assure you; though I’m sure you and your friends had good, hard laugh at my expense.”

“It was Snape’s idea,” Harry muttered defensively.

Draco snorted. “You really should have been in Slytherin, you know that?” Draco murmured as he leaned in again. “Merlin forbid you should take responsibility for your own actions.”

“And what about you?” Harry asked, refusing to step back. “At least I don’t pretend to be something I’m not.”

That cruel smile was back. “Don’t you?”

“What are you talking about, Malfoy?”

“You know. Confusion is a coward’s way out and you are no coward.”

“You’re contradicting yourself, Malfoy.”

“Am I?” Draco’s breath in Harry’s ear was nearly driving him mad.

“Step away from me, Malfoy. You’re too close.”

Draco smirked and Harry turned his face to glare directly at him.

“You’ve gone soft, Potter. You must have missed me.”

Harry scowled. ‘Is that why you did it? Because you knew no one would miss you?’

Draco’s eyes flashed with something Harry couldn’t name and Draco’s smile almost became soft. “That’s more like it, Potter.”
Guilt wrapped around Harry’s heart and squeezed and Harry opened his mouth to apologize. Draco saw the look and cut him off with a wave of his hand, stepping away suddenly and leaving Harry feeling cold and miserable all over again.

“I wish to see my Godfather,” Draco said before disappearing down the hall. “Bring him here.”

Harry allowed the trembling that quivered inside of him to well up and shake his limbs before he forcefully dispelled it and willed his heartbeat to slow. Harry took in a deep breath and tried not to be frustrated that he had just spent nearly twenty minutes with Draco Malfoy and hadn’t managed to get a single question answered.

~*~

Severus Snape found his godson in the Library of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place and knocked softly on the doorframe. Draco, being a professional at making people wait for him, did not look up until he was finished reading the page he was on of the book he was sitting in a chair with, the fireplace blazing beside him.

Snape had received the owl from Harry Potter little over an hour before and rushed from Hogwarts to see his godson, the apprehension and curiosity nearly strangling his senses. Potter was no where to be found when he arrived and Snape had wandered the Black residence, following the warmth of the fire that Draco must have made for himself.

Marking his place in his book, Draco carefully set it down and glanced up at his godfather with a decidedly bland expression on his sharp features.

“Hello, Godfather.”

“Draco,” Snape answered with a curt nod of his head, his apprehension only a whisper of a shadow behind his black eyes. “I trust you are well?”

“As well as can be expected, I suppose,” Draco said. “I’m not even supposed to be alive.”

Snape’s mouth curved in his version of a smile. “You’re an idiot, by the way.”

“Your consoling nature is always so overwhelming,” Draco shot back softly.

“Why did you do it?”

Draco sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “I expected that question from Potter, not you, Godfather.”

“Regardless,” Snape said with a flick of his of his wrist. “Why?”

“Do I really need a reason outside my mother, Godfather?” Draco said quietly, staring into the fireplace and its frolicking flames.

“Yes,” Snape said.

Draco looked up at his godfather and raised a blond brow. “Oh?”

“You said yourself, Draco, you’re not supposed to be alive,” Snape answered softly. “Revenge for Narcissa would still not qualify as pure selflessness. The ancient magic of Sacrifice would not have been invoked through just revenge.”

Draco pursed his lips and looked back into the fire, finding no warmth there but enjoying the view
much more than Snape’s demanding gaze. “What do you want me to say, Godfather? That I embarked on a soul-changing journey and my heart was pure light and love by the time I confronted Voldemort?”

Snape snorted but did not answer; such was their secret humor.

Draco sighed and rubbed his at his temples. “I don’t think I should say, Godfather. I think I may be in enough trouble as it is.”

“Could it possibly be that bad, that you couldn’t even tell me?”

Draco continued to stare at the fire.

“It wouldn’t have anything to do with Potter, would it?”

Draco’s eyelids twitched but he still did not respond. However, Snape knew his godson too well.

“You must be joking.”

Draco’s mouth tightened into a thin line before he answered. “Would it be fair, after all these years, for Potter to die because of some genius mistake made by one maniac of a dark wizard?”

“Since when do we give a Muggle’s ass what is fair and what is not, Draco?”

Draco laughed softly. “You have no idea, Godfather. I just…I knew it would be hard for our world to pick itself up after the Eve Battle, but even more so if their hero died. I made it so he wouldn’t and now he’s an Auror. Isn’t that sweet?”

“How do you expect me to believe a word you just said, Draco?”

Draco smiled thinly. “Where is he, by the way?”

“The Ministry, no doubt. Potter has quite the mess to clean up.”

“A mess that was you originally your idea?” Draco inquired with a sarcastic smirk.

“I had no idea Potter and Weasley would be so incompetent—“

“You taught them for six years, Godfather,” Draco said with a roll of his eyes. “Really, what were you thinking?”

Snape spread his hands. “Potter has been committed to your case for three years, Draco. I didn’t think—“

“Three years?” Draco asked suddenly. “What do you mean?”

“Potter didn’t tell you?” Snape asked. “You were in some kind of coma for three years after the Eve Battle.”

“What was the exact number of days?”

“Pardon?”

“The exact number of days, Godfather.”

Snape thought for a moment. “I believe…One thousand, two hundred, and…seventy six days.”

“What is?”

“That is how long I was gone making the VCE Elixir.”

Snape shook his head. “No, it takes four years and nine months to make the—“

“You really think I would sit there by a cauldron for the entirety of nearly five years, Godfather?”

“I see.”

Draco rested his chin in his hand. “One, two, seven, six…I wonder if that has any merit.”

“I specialize in Potions, Draco, not Numerology.”

“I am aware, Godfather. Thank you for your enlightening input.”

Snape frowned at him before his face went tight with worry as Draco gasped in pain and clutched at his scar. Snape rushed forward and knelt before his godson. “Draco, what’s wrong?”

“Potter,” Draco bit out through clenched teeth, “is not having a good day.”

~*_~
A Gentleman's Agreement

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~A Gentlemen’s Agreement~

At the Ministry…

~*~

“Blinding sun, Potter!” Rufus Scrimgeour, the Minister of Magic, shouted, his round face flushed in aggravation. “What am I going to do with you?”

Assuming the question was rhetorical, Harry Potter remained silent. The Minister had been shouting at him for nearly twenty minutes already and Harry figured it would be best to let the man spend his energy before speaking at all.

Ron, who refused to even look at Harry after seeing Hermione Granger run from the Minister’s Office on the verge of tears before being called in themselves, was an ever present silent shadow behind Harry. Harry could feel the irritation rolling off of his partner in his direction and had to fight the urge to turn around and look at him.

Scrimgeour continued to pace the office and Harry and Ron stared straight ahead, their faces blank and expressionless; except Harry’s, whose green eyes were bright and simmering with a storm cloud of anger and frustration.

“This fiasco was completely avoidable!” Scrimgeour continued. “I don’t know what got in your sodding head, Potter! And involving Muggle Affairs was certainly not the best of your bright ideas!” On and on he went and Harry’s mind screamed for him to shout back that Malfoy was alive and that was actually his job and therefore—

“Are you listening to a word I’m saying, Potter?!”

Harry head snapped towards the Minister. “Yes, sir.”

“Do you have anything to say for yourself?”

Harry lifted his chin but delayed his response when Ron tugged on the hem of his robe as if to say, ‘don’t make it worse, you dolt.’

Harry took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I can handle the situation in America, sir.”
Scrimgeour laughed in his face. “Like you handled it yesterday?”

“No, sir.”

“What are you going to do, Obliviate everybody?” Scrimgeour sneered. “That seems to be your answer for everything!”

A muscle twitched in Harry’s jaw but he did not respond when he felt another tug on his robe.

“The American Ministry has it under control,” Scrimgeour said in a calmer tone. “Thank Merlin they’re not holding any resentment. Apparently, they deal with this sort of thing frequently. New Mexico had some interesting occurrences a couple decades ago that they managed to blame on aliens from outer space…and then there was that terrible little bit with a bridge in West Virginia a few years back. Now, they say they can blame everything on low-budget film making…whatever that is.”

Harry raised a brow but said nothing.

“But you, Potter!” Scrimgeour said, raising his voice again. “What am I going to do with you?!”

Harry remained silent, but, for once, this only seemed to make the Minister angrier. Scrimgeour finished his pacing and threw himself into a chair, glaring for all he was worth at one of his youngest Aurors.

“You are proving to be the worst investment I ever made,” Scrimgeour spat.

The rage that simmered behind Harry’s green eyes boiled and his fingers curled into fists. “That’s awfully rich, Minister, considering all we’ve done for the past three years! One accident does not negate—“

“WE?!” Scrimgeour exploded. “Not we, Potter! You! You are completely incompetent and I have half a mind to take you off the Malfoy Case altogether and send you on an unpaid suspension! Now what do you think of that?”

“I am not incompetent.”

Ron tugged roughly on Harry’s robe and this time Harry whirled on him. “Would you cut it out?!”


Harry turned back to the Minister, his anger blotting out any clear thought his mind might have been trying to formulate. Suddenly, Harry heard Draco’s voice in his head.

’Suck it up, you pansy.’

Harry took in a deep breath and let it out slowly before approaching the desk. Harry placed both hands on the Minister’s desk and leaned forward, staring directly at Scrimgeour.

“If you really think there is a soul in this place that would be able to handle Malfoy better than I, then have at it,” Harry said, watching as Scrimgeour’s angry demeanor began to calm. This is the Auror everyone expected from Harry Potter; not the brash young man who causes catastrophes in Wisconsin.

“Why do you think you are so much better equipped?” Scrimgeour asked.

Harry smiled thinly as he raised his hand and tapped his forehead—where his scar used to be—just like Draco had done to him earlier that morning.
Scrimgeour pursed his lips, thinking. Finally, his eyes softened and he sighed, running his chubby fingers over his face. “Potter,” Scrimgeour said, abruptly sounding spent and tired. “It’s not that we haven’t had to deal with accidents like these before—especially when You-Know-Who was around—and Merlin knows what you’ve done for our world; but you must understand that so much more is expected of you.”

Harry frowned and straightened.

“You have no idea what it’s like trying to rebuild after the Eve War, to try to convince the Wizarding World that we can get back on our feet and move on,” Scrimgeour went on saying. “And I cannot afford for this case to fail. Draco Malfoy is as much a legend now as you are; which is exactly why I originally put you two in charge of this case.” Scrimgeour leaned forward in his chair. “Do you realize that mothers tell their children stories of you and Malfoy before sending them to bed?”

“I was unaware,” Harry said dryly and he heard Draco’s voice whisper in his mind again, this time accompanied with soft, mocking laughter. ‘Suck it up, you pansy.’

“This all very iconic, Potter, and Malfoy being so exposed and unprotected yesterday is certainly not the goal we are shooting for. We WANT Malfoy to be able to roam freely about because it would be an assurance of this new safety we’re providing as the Ministry of Magic; however, many want him dead. So until you can figure out who and why, Malfoy must remain hidden. Do you understand?”

“I do, sir.”

“Good.” The Minister leaned back in his chair and rubbed at his temples. “I still need to take disciplinary action, Potter. You realize I cannot just let this go.”

“I understand.”

“Where is Malfoy?”

Harry hesitated before answering. “Headquarters.”

Scrimgeour stared at him for a moment before nodding, understanding finally that Harry meant for the Order of the Phoenix. “Brilliant. Will he stay put?”

Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek. “I believe so.”

“How can you be sure?”

Harry didn’t answer immediately. “If I have to tie him down, Malfoy will stay put.”

Scrimgeour smiled. “That isn’t exactly the best way to treat a Wizarding hero.”

Harry’s eyes turned a flat sort of green. “It is the way you treat me, sir.”

To Harry’s surprise, the Minister laughed. “I suppose so. Well, then, a two week suspension for you, Potter, wherein you will not let Malfoy out of your sight. Weasley—“

Ron’s head snapped up.

“You will report in everyday of Potter’s absence, nine to five, and restrict yourself to your cubicle.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You will leave Muggle Affairs and Ms. Granger to their business.”
Ron made a choked sound but nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“And both of you will report to me the second some mad scheme pops into your head so I can Obliviate the bloody hell out of it,” Scrimgeour said, smiling pleasantly. “Now get out of my sight.”

Outside the office, Harry tried to stop Ron as he made to push past him. “Ron—“

“You think it’s fun, don’t you?” Ron hissed, whirling on him. “Creating fiascos so that you can play the hero all over again?!”

“Ron, that’s not—“

“We’re PARTNERS, Harry!” Ron bit out. “We do things together! I look like an idiot because you run off to do your one man show and now I can’t even visit my bloody fiancée when it was YOU who fucked up! Blinding sun, Harry! When are you going to get it through your thick head that what you do effects everyone around you and when you’re being terminally selfish like you were yesterday it’s your closest friends who suffer for it?!” Ron took a deep breath and let it out in a sigh. “But I guess it doesn’t matter as long as you get what you want, right?”

Ron turned on his heel and stomped away, muttering to himself about being ‘Harry Potter’s stupid friend’.

Harry watched helplessly as his best mate disappeared down the hall, a heaviness in his stomach that was not-quite-grief, not-quite-anger, and not-quite-guilt.

Harry ran a hand through his messy black hair. ‘Get out of my head, Malfoy,” Harry whispered to himself.

His only response was that tingling sensation where his scar used to be.

~*~

“So, Sirius Black gave this place to Potter?” Draco asked his godfather as they went down the creaking stairs.

“Yes,” Snape answered. “It was used as the Headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix.”

A sunny smile—an expression Snape had no idea his godson was capable of—broke out on Draco’s face and he turned in a circle once they had reached the bottom of the stairs. “Really?” Draco said, the quietness in his belying the expression on his face. “I had wondered…”

“Does your scar still hurt?”

Draco shook his head and bent to inspect a small, dusty painting on the wall of the main hall. “Not really. A bit of throbbing, no more.”

“What does it mean when it only throbs?” Snape inquired from where he remained at the base of the stairs.

Draco shrugged nonchalantly and rubbed at his scar, careful not to mess up his diligently kept hair style. “Potter’s the expert, remember? He’s had seventeen years of experience with this damn thing.”

Snape rolled his eyes and continued to watch his godson. While Draco Malfoy had always been more comfortable around his godfather, Snape had never seen him act this…ambiguous.

Snape had taken care to explain—in great detail—everything he knew about the danger Draco was
in after the pain in his godson’s scar had subsided. Draco had listened carefully, his face a placid mask of courtly patience, and when Snape had finished describing the importance of Draco remaining hidden, his godson had laughed softly and walked away from him.

They bantered, of course, like they usually did, which Snape would admit was comforting in its own way, but Snape could not dig any answers out of his infuriatingly silver-tongued godson, who would deftly sidestep any direct questions and dance around all other inquiries.

Eventually, Snape gave up and took to showing Draco the house, assuming Potter had not the courtesy to already have done so and knowing that Draco may very well be here for a while. That was Snape’s vote, in either case, and he had made it more than vocal during the past hour.

Snap was jerked from his thoughts when the front door opened and a blast of cold, spring wind swept through the house. Almost immediately, Harry stepped into the house and closed the door. Harry paused when he looked up and saw both Snape and Draco staring expectantly at him.

“Snape,” Harry said with an informal jerk of his chin.

“Potter,” Snape answered.

Harry turned to Draco, his automatic glare sliding into place. “I’ll be in the study when you’re through.”

Draco nodded and both he and his godfather watched silently as Harry made his way up the stairs, the creaking of the floorboards louder in their ears then perhaps it should have been.

~*~

Draco found Harry in the study standing by the fireplace and staring into the roaring fire within it. The light from the flames flickered across his handsome features and his jet-black hair fell artfully into his eyes, which he raised to meet Draco’s when he heard him come into the room.

“So,” Draco began, his gray eyes bright with cynicism. “Am I your prisoner?”

Less than amused Harry looked back at the fire. “Do you want the long or the short of it?”

Draco put on his best charismatic smile. “The short, please. We all know your stories have a flair for the dramatic.”

Harry briefly rolled his eyes skyward and silently prayed for patience to whoever might have the empathy to listen. “There is an underground warrant for your death, Malfoy,” Harry said when he looked back at the fire.

“My godfather said as much.”

Harry looked over at the Malfoy heir. “So you know it is in your best interest to stay hidden.”

“Apparently.”

“It is also in your best interest to inform me of anything that may be useful to your case.”

Draco smirked. “I’ll be sure to let you know if anything comes to mind.”

“Are you taking this seriously, Malfoy?” Harry demanded, scowling for all he was worth.

Draco shrugged. “I’m not entirely certain what makes you think I care about what is or is not in my
best interest, Potter.”

Harry snorted. “You are Slytherin, Malfoy. It’s your nature.”

Draco’s eyes darkened with mystery. “If you say so.”

“Malfoy, quit trying to confuse me with your riddles. I’m in no mood for it. Do I have your word that you will stay here?”

Draco offered a sarcastic smile. “In the Order of the Phoenix’s Headquarters, no less! Such an honor.”

“Malfoy,” Harry growled, a warning in his voice.

Draco sighed dramatically. “Very well; if I must.”

Harry nodded and looked back at the fire.

Draco stood there watching Harry watch the fire for a few moments before he crossed his arms and leaned against the doorframe. “It’s all very touching, really.”

“What is?” Harry asked, not bothering to look up.

“Your utterly noble concern for my welfare.”

It was Harry’s turn to smirk as he turned towards Draco. “You are nothing but a job to me, Malfoy; never forget that.”

They stared at one another for many minutes, a tension gathering between them Harry didn’t want to name, before Draco spoke again.

“She’ll come around, you know.”

Harry blinked. “Who will?”

“The Weasel.”

Harry came towards Malfoy and stopped directly in front of him, his green eyes bright with the scowl he wanted to show. “Stay out of my head, Malfoy.”

Draco’s smile was quiet and his eyes glittered with amusement. “I’m only in there by invitation, Potter.”

Harry glared into Draco’s laughing eyes for half a moment before walking past him and disappearing down the hall.

Slowly, Draco’s smile faded and his eyes lost their shine. Draco walked quietly over to a chair in front of the fireplace and sat down. He covered his mouth with one hand and thought about the dangerous game he was playing as he stared at the dancing flames.

And Draco Malfoy knew he was in way over his head.

Yet, when wasn’t he?

~*~
Bad Faith

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Bad Faith~

"'Bad faith' (from French, mauvaise foi) is a philosophical concept first coined by existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sarte to describe the phenomenon wherein one denies one’s total freedom, instead choosing to behave as an inert object. It is closely related to the concept of self-deception and Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment."

The next day…

~*~

Draco Malfoy found himself wandering the house aimlessly, finding that the old Black residence was a lot larger than it seemed. Harry, of course, knew this and made it his first priority to hide himself within the bowels of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Draco wasn’t even sure where Harry slept. Yesterday, Draco had found a crumpled blanket on a couch in one of the sitting rooms. Today, no trace was forthcoming of Harry’s whereabouts the night before and it was almost as if he had disappeared completely.

Draco was almost certain he was still in the house, however, because Hedwig, Harry’s owl, was perched outside on the front porch every time Draco glanced through the window.

Draco paused to observe an antique mirror. The two different shapes of the reflective glass were spotted with age and wear and the gilded frame was detailed and rotting. Draco frowned, knowing that, with a little restorative care, this mirror would be quite the expensive piece. Draco fully doubted that Harry knew how much wealth this house held underneath the layers of dust and moth beds.

Draco leaned forward and blew gently against the dust covering the reflective glass and stared at his own image as the dust cloud dissipated around him. The despair he had been trying to stuff behind his courtly smiles seemed to instantly resurface the second he looked into his own eyes…His father eyes.

Draco often avoided his reflection for this very reason. He had always known, from the second he had decided to rebel against his family creed and become as unlike his father as possible, he would inevitably see Lucius Malfoy every time he passed a reflective window or a dusty, gilded mirror. That the ghost of his father would hover disapprovingly behind his own gray eyes and the sad lines of his mother’s mouth would always be etched behind his smiles.
Briefly, Draco closed his eyes and thought of that rainy day his mother was buried in hollowed ground. His father had not even bothered to come and yet Voldemort made a point of making an appearance to remind Draco that the he, The Dark Lord, would always have the upper hand. That he could take anything he wanted from those who followed him and everything else from those who didn’t.

And what did Draco Malfoy have?

Nothing.

Growing up with riches only made it less glamorous, growing accustomed to the finest circles of society only made it less charming, and heaps of gold only proved to burn his eyes with its brightness and cause him to turn away.

His friends were loathsome, backstabbing followers of an image he fought to uphold, his relatives expected a creation from him, not a person, and after all of this, Draco Malfoy had become the very thing he’d run from since he turned thirteen, secretly withdrawing from it in his mind until there was nothing left of him but an empty shell.

The worst possible kind of faith. A Malfoy through and through.

And then Voldemort, the vilest hypocrite to walk this earth, took the only person who saw behind Draco’s mask from him. Of course, Narcissa, his mother, was not exactly the sweetest kind of mother. She was as cruel as they came and supported his father in every endeavor. Narcissa had been silver-tongued and manipulative, using her pale, secret beauty to charm the guileless and cause the strongest men and women to resort to eating out of her hand by the time she was finished with them.

Draco smiled and saw his mother’s smile in his reflection.

Narcissa Malfoy had been no sugar cookie. Yet, she had loved her son, in her own way. It was betimes cruel and sometimes downright malicious, the way their relationship panned out, but Draco never doubted his mother’s love. Never had a reason to second guess her intentions when it came to him. And Narcissa was never fooled by Draco’s attempts to imitate his father or the downright petty attempts to torment Harry Potter and his friends.

Draco watched as the tight lines around his mouth and eyes softened when he thought about Harry-infuriatingly-noble-Potter. Ever since their first year, Draco lied to everyone except himself about the reasons he tormented Harry so. Draco knew that, at the very core, Harry Potter was everything he wanted to—and could never—be. It wasn’t, even in the slightest, that Draco wanted to be the honest, chivalrous, messy-haired hero Harry was naturally born as; it was the freedom Harry had. When Harry Potter was angry, he could be, and he rested safely in the self-righteous knowledge that Harry Potter was Harry Potter and whatever he felt or did or said was whatever Harry Potter felt or did or said. That was freedom as Draco saw it. To be able to live as your own person, outside of the image others set for him, and have friends who knew and understood and was infinitely patient with the true person underneath the hero, behind the mask of The-Boy-Who-Lived.

That luxury was never Draco’s to have, and he had always been green with jealousy because of it. So, at every opportunity, Draco would make a point of crawling under Harry’s skin, just to see that fiery, proud, and shaken boy that hid beneath Harry Potter’s noble reputation. It pleased Draco to see the true Harry, even if he had to force it out of him with cruel words and a sarcastic smile.

And truly, Harry Potter drove him mad.

Harry irritated and angered Draco to no end when he tried to deny the Slytherin in him and very
vocally dismiss the Slytherin House as evil, nothing more than a breeding nest for Death Eaters and Dark Wizards. So, when Harry had always lashed back at him at Hogwarts, this anger had boiled up in him and made him a tad crueler than he had originally intended. After all, it was what everyone—Harry Potter included—expected of him, right? To be a relentless, sneaky, evil tormentor of everything pure and righteous, right?

Draco snorted and straightened, turning away from the mirror.

Severus Snape, his own godfather, didn’t even understand him. Most of the time, Draco Malføy didn’t even understand himself. He knew, however, that this limbo he found himself in had to be worse than the inner circles of hell. What Harry-oh-so-concerned-Potter didn’t understand was that this warrant, this rally call for Draco’s assassination was not made by a single wizard.

Draco had been banished at Narcissa Malfoy’s funeral and while he resided in Britain, whether among Muggles, in a hidden house, or otherwise, his life was forfeit. This was more than a Death Eater’s revenge for Draco’s actions against Voldemort; this was a Pureblood Society’s way of flushing out a Blood Traitor who made his sins more severe by killing Lord Voldemort and actively saving a Half-blood—Harry Potter.

Draco’s wandering steps took him back towards the front of the house and he found himself standing in the kitchen. Listening to his empty stomach churn, Draco sighed and went about making lunch with whatever he could find in the sparse kitchen. Three years alone in a hut in the middle-of-nowhere China had taught him a few lessons about fixing decent meals out of nothing for himself.

Draco Malføy frowned, cursing silently, for the thousandth time since yesterday, whatever the hell that had saved him from his own suicidal Killing Curse that night of the Eve Battle. Because he was still alive, and because of whatever stroke of sadistic genius landed Harry Potter the job of protecting him, Draco Malføy had once again managed to put those he cared about in grave danger.

Maybe if he played his hand well, Draco could manage not to cause the death of those dear to him this time. Draco was never all that profound at playing with fire, but maybe being connected Harry Potter through the Horcrux Scar was making him brave.

Or maybe it was making him reckless.

Time would tell, Draco supposed.

~*~

Harry, who was found in the study, had his head buried in a mountain of paperwork, scribbling notes madly on to a blank sheet of parchment, his quill bent and as tired as Harry looked.

Draco quietly set the plate of food on top of his paperwork, forcing Harry to straighten and look up. Harry had not even heard Draco come in.

“What’s this?” Harry asked, eyeing the plate of butter pasta, chicken, and peas.

Draco raised a bemused brow. “Most cultures call it food.”

Harry stared incredulously at Draco, tossing his head to the side to dispel a stray lock of jet-black hair from his eyes. “I didn’t know you could cook.”

Draco frowned and bent to take the plate away.

“No!” Harry said immediately, grabbing the plate covetously. “I didn’t mean…well…What’s in it?”
“Arsenic,” Draco replied, stone-faced.

Harry looked back at his food, his face saying he had half a mind to believe him.

Draco sighed and, with a roll of his eyes, grabbed the plate; but Harry still had a firm hold on it and they locked eyes.

“I was joking, you dolt,” Draco hissed. “Tell me, why would I kill you know?”

Harry looked back at the plate and laughed out loud when his stomach grumbled noisily, the tension between them dissipating in a flash. “Alright, I’ll eat it.”

Draco strolled over to a bookshelf and selected a book. Opening it to the first page, Draco found a chair near the fireplace, sat down, and began to read. When he was sure Harry wasn’t looking, Draco lifted his gray eyes over the rim of the book and watched Harry eat, a secret smile curving his lips.

Harry was reading a document lifted up with one hand and shoveling food into his mouth with the other, tossing his head every now and again to get a stray tendril of hair out of his green eyes. His mouth glistened with butter from the pasta and Draco found himself mesmerized by it, watching carefully as Harry deftly used his tongue to pull in stray strands of noodle into his mouth.

Harry glanced over at Draco when he was finished, wiping his mouth with the back of his sleeve, and their eyes met. Harry seemed frozen as he tried to read the hungry look in Draco’s cold, gray glare.

“Why are you staring at me?”

Draco shrugged and looked back at his book. “A cook is always pleased to see his creation his appreciated.”

Harry gaped at him, trying to fathom what Draco could possibly mean by that. “Have you gone completely mental, Malfoy?”

“Pardon?”

“One minute, you’re the Slytherin prick you always were and, the next, I don’t recognize you at all. I mean, what’s with making me lunch?”

“Which do you prefer?” Draco asked, turning the page. “And you were hungry.”

“Damn it, Malfoy, look at me,” Harry said heatedly, annoyed that Draco was pretending to read.

“I thought you didn’t want me to,” Draco said, lifting his eyes once again. For an instant, Draco thought he saw a shadow of his mother’s cruelty looking back at him through Harry brilliant green eyes and Draco shut his eyes against it. When he re-opened them, it was gone as quickly as it came and there was nothing but Potter’s own cruelty staring back at him.

Slowly, the intensity faded from Harry’s emerald orbs. “I don’t know what I want from you,” Harry said finally.

“But you want something,” Draco said, lowering the book and closing it. “Answers, perhaps?”

Something shifted in Harry’s demeanor and Draco knew he was holding back.

“I suppose I could rightfully assume you have quite the torrent of questions swimming around in that
head of yours,” Draco continued, the intensity in his gray eyes flaring.

Harry nodded. “You’ll tell me what I need to know when you’re ready.”

“That’s awfully compassionate of you.”

“Doesn’t happen often in your world, does it?”

“I don’t have a world, Potter,” Draco answered softly. “That’s what is wrong with me.”

Harry did not know what to say to that so he continued to look back at Draco and tried to understand the young man in his study compared to the boy from Hogwarts.

“Did you enjoy your pasta?” Draco asked finally with a secret smile.

“I did.”

“Good,” Draco said, standing to his feet, “because that’s the last of it. We need a House Elf, Potter. I’m not going to cook for you every day and this place is filthy.”

Harry mock-glared at Draco and was surprised when Draco flashed a brilliant smile in return before leaving the study, his book in hand.

Harry stared at the door Draco just vacated and thought that, perhaps, these next few weeks might just be bearable.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~ A Blood Truth ~

verum ipsum factum—“truth itself is constructed”

The next day…
~*~

Slightly, the House Elf that Harry Potter had managed to retrieve from the Malfoy Manor the night before with a letter of confirmation handwritten by Draco, popped into Draco’s bedroom with a resounding crack.

Draco, who was lying in his bed, reading a book of poems, as he did more often than anything else here at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, looked over the rim of his book with an eyebrow raised.

“Master,” Slightly squeaked nervously, wringing her thin hands, “Slightly is here to tell you that a visitor is downstairs, sir. Does Master wish Slightly to send him off?”

“Him?”

“Yes, Master; him.”

His interest piqued, Draco set his book down and stood up. “No, Slightly. I’ll be down straight away.”

“Very good, sir,” Slightly answered and disappeared with another crack.

Knowing that Harry would probably have another row with him for greeting the man without his permission, Draco figured since the man knew how to come into the old house—as it was hidden from anyone who wasn’t, at some point, invited—the threat was minimal at best. Besides, instigating an argument with Harry Potter was fast becoming the highlight of his days while he was cooped up in this old, rickety house.

Slightly was insistently stubborn about only answering to Draco, as she knew him as her master since he was an infant; and no one, house elves included, who lived in Malfoy Manor trusted Harry Potter. Unless, of course, they were forced to, as Draco found he was. Thus, Draco knew Harry was oblivious to the presence of the newcomer and as he quietly went down the stairs and turned the corner, he was surprised to find that he was faintly disappointed to see Ron Weasley standing in the
Draco couldn’t put a reason behind his disappointment. Maybe it was because it would have been a tad more exhilarating to Draco’s otherwise most obvious masochistic personality if it had been someone he didn’t recognize and immediately know there would be no misadventure today. Or maybe it was because Weasley was Harry’s best mate, and Draco knew he would have to stand by at watch that true Harry interact with his most trusted friend from afar—as he had always done—and know that it would never be that easy for him to get Harry that open.

Of course, Draco didn’t want to think about that, or where that line of thought might lead. Four years ago, Draco Malfoy had given up any thought of Harry to overtly incredulous fascination with the enigma that was The Boy Who Lived. Yet, it was so much more effortless to dispel thoughts and daydreams of Harry Potter when he was locked up in a hut in the middle of Asia with a brick bag of other things to fill up his mind with. Now, Draco couldn’t get that man out of his head. Draco was realizing that he could feel his feelings, dream his dreams, and would be thrown into the most sour of moods anytime Harry was, no matter where the noble prick was.

And, of course, there was the ever present tension between them. Draco knew he felt it too and knew that was what caused each other to remain on opposite sides of the house whenever possible, afraid of what that tension could possibly mean.

Ron turned when Draco cleared his throat and the red-haired Auror managed a strangled smile.

“Oi, Malfoy,” Ron said, regaining a little composure. “Harry here?”

Draco chewed on the inside of his cheek, wanted to say something civil, but the words wouldn’t formulate in his head. “He’s upstairs,” Draco murmured finally. “I’ll get him for you.”

“Thank you,” Ron said, looking strangely at the Malfoy heir. “Malfoy?” Ron called out before Draco disappeared down the hall.

Draco turned back to the young Auror. “Yes?”

“Do you think he’s vexed at me?”

A smile hovered around Draco’s lips for the barest of moments before he caught himself and pressed his lips into a straight line, denying the smile to take shape. “I would never call myself an expert on all things Potter and his emotions,” Draco said dully before allowing his voice to lighten a little. “But if I had to guess, I’d say no.”

A relieved smile broke across Ron’s face like sunlight through a storm and Draco nearly gagged. Draco turned back into the hall and made his way up the stairs. Slipping into the study unnoticed, Draco spotted Harry coming down the ladder that lay against a tall bookshelf, his face screwed up in concentration as he read a vellum scroll older than the two of them combined.

Draco sneaked up behind him and plucked the scroll from Harry’s hands.

“Hey—Malfoy, have you gone mad?” Harry asked, lunging for the parchment. “Careful with that!”

Lifting it above his head and steadily backing out of Harry’s reach, Draco tried to read the small scrawl across the old paper. “Genealogies?” Draco said with a laugh. “What on Earth are you doing in here, Potter?”

Harry scowled and lunged again. “Give it here, Malfoy!”
Draco suddenly backed into Harry’s desk exactly when Harry made another lung for the scroll and ended up pinned between the desk and Harry’s body. They froze; Draco’s arm still holding the parchment above his head and Harry practically hanging off of Draco like a suit jacket.

Draco looked up at Harry, surprised to note that Harry was actually taller than him, and became mesmerized by the shaken, deer in headlights look Harry was favoring him with. Harry blinked and tried to will his limbs to get the hell off of Draco, but they wouldn’t listen. Harry could feel the heave and fall of Draco’s chest and the heat emanating from his body. Harry hadn’t even realized he was cold.

Draco tried to shift but only managed to press his leg between Harry’s, earning an eloquent, “Fuck”, from his Hogwarts rival, and he froze again, suddenly sick with the fact that he had no plan of action for this particular scenario. The blood quickened in Draco’s veins and his heart beat faster and when he was quite certain he was going to act rashly and completely regret it later, he spoke.

“The Weasel’s in the drawing room.”

Harry sucked in a breath, the spell surrounding them suddenly shattered. “Wha-what?”

“Ron Weasley,” Draco said, trying, but failing, to keep the tremor out of his voice, “is downstairs waiting for you.”

Harry immediately pushed off of Draco and backed away. They stared at one another for almost a minute, no words forthcoming, until Harry ran a hand through his hair and all but bolted from the room.

When he could breathe again, Draco looked down at the tent in his pants and scowled. “Of all the fucking people on this godforsaken planet…”

~*~

A somewhat flustered and distracted Harry, with his robes wrapped strangely around him, met Ron in the drawing room.

“Ron, what are you doing here?”

Ron’s cheerful greeting died on his lips. “Well,” Ron said, nervous again. “’Mione’s working late so I figured I’d stop by and see how things are going at the old HQ, mate.”

Harry frowned. “You could have owled first.”

Ron drew his brows together. “Malfoy’s a right git, you know that?” Ron muttered. “Telling me you weren’t still vexed and all.”

Harry’s eyes darkened murderously. “He came down to see you without telling me first?”

Ron laughed nervously. “I suppose so. Are you cold?”


Ron pointed at Harry, raising a brow at how he was huddled in his robes.

Harry shook his head. “Trust me on this one, Ron. You don’t want to know.”

Bewildered, Ron shrugged. “Right, then. How unbearable is he?”
“Malfoy?”

“Who else?”

Harry let loose a short, awkward bark of laughter.

“That bad, huh?”

“Worse.”

Ron fiddled with the hem of his robe. “Well, do you need anything?”

Harry regarded him strangely. “No. I got Malfoy one of his house elves yesterday. She’s no Kreacher, but she’s still pretty stubborn. It’s brilliant, though; we won’t have to worry about food or sneezing up dust for a while.”

“Hermione would have a fit,” Ron said with a smile.

Harry grinned, suddenly feeling better. “You tell her, mate, and I’ll skin you alive.”

~*~

Draco finished skimming the parchment he’d stolen from Harry minutes before and set it down for a small journal Harry was writing notes in. He pursed his lips and held a lit candle closer to make out Harry’s small writing.

‘Found further evidence on breaks in the pureblood lines; facts overlooked probably because of societal status. The Parkinson’s had mentioned certain gravity towards Blood Traitors. Note to research usual punishments for such “crimes”.’

More notes told of Harry’s endless attempts at retracing Draco’s own footsteps regarding bloodlines and Draco briefly read them through before turning to the paragraph concerning the Parkinson’s.

Draco knew Harry was no idiot, even if he had struggled with a few subjects at Hogwarts, and was not surprised that Harry would devote so much energy to this particular line of research to unravel the key to Draco’s death warrant. If Harry only knew how close he was, he would have probably voided Draco’s case by know. Really, all this was futile in the end.

However, what made Draco’s blood boil was his suspicion that Harry may be endangering the Parkinson’s with his research on Draco’s behalf.

Faintly, Draco registered the sound of the front door opening and closing and Draco hurried to find more notes about the Parkinson family. Soon, he stumbled on a passage in the journal depicting a certain visit he had made to the Parkinson Manor, with specific questions about Narcissa Malfoy’s funeral and Draco’s actions there within.

Draco snapped the journal shut and raised stormy gray eyes to meet Harry’s agitated green ones when the young Auror walked back into the study.

“I know you’re not stupid, Malfoy,” Harry bit out immediately. “Why do you insist on proving me wrong by meeting a stranger at the door? Do you want to die?”

“Stay away from the Parkinson’s,” Draco said in a low, dangerous voice.

“Excuse me?”
“Stay away from the Parkinson’s,” Draco repeated. “You’ll only make it worse for them if you drag them into this.”

“I didn’t drag them into anything,” Harry snapped irritably. “They’re repaying a debt.”

“I said no, Potter,” Draco growled.

“Don’t you fucking start, you goddamn prick,” Harry said heatedly. “You were shacked up in Wisconsin, sucking on your thumb and trying to remember your name when I was out here trying to figure out some truth about purebloods and how you could possibly rub them the wrong way. It’s not as fucking easy as it looks—”

“You want to know some truth about purebloods, Potter?” Draco asked quietly, suddenly stalking towards Harry with quick strides. Harry barely had time to blink before Draco reeled back his arm and slammed his fist into Harry’s jaw.

Harry’s head snapped back and immediately his magic charged up around him. Harry automatically reacted by burying his fist into Draco’s gut. Draco grunted and jabbed his elbow into Harry’s face. With a shout, Harry swung hard; trying to land a punch to the side of Draco’s face, but Draco grabbed the flying wrist and stepped inside the swing, pressing his lips against Harry’s.

Harry’s eyes grew wide as saucers as Draco moved his mouth over his bleeding lips and when Harry began to relax against the kiss, Draco bit down on Harry’s lower lip and forced his tongue into Harry’s warm mouth.

Harry immediately pushed his tongue against Draco’s, no stranger to the old song and dance, as their tongues duelled for the upper hand. Finally, a low groan escaping from Draco’s throat, and he tipped his head back as Harry grabbed his shirt and held on as he began to dominate the kiss.

Suddenly, Draco’s tongue stepped outside the dance, sought, and found the cut his fist had caused on Harry’s lower lip. Caressing it lovingly with his tongue, Draco tasted the sweet tang of Harry’s blood before roughly sinking his teeth into it. Harry gasped and Draco pulled back, pressing his lips to the small cut once more before moving away.

Draco stared into Harry’s eyes as he slowly released his wrist. In answer, Harry released his death grip on Draco’s shirt. A little off balance, Draco stumbled back, his eyes never leaving Harry’s.

Harry watched, breathing heavily, as Draco raised his fingers to his lips and wiped off the blood that remained there. Draco gazed at his red tinted fingertips for a moment before raising his stormy eyes back up to meet Harry’s.

“Our blood tastes exactly the same,” Draco whispered. “It looks the same, runs just as thickly, colors dirt the very same way, and even smells the same.”

Draco paused, watching Harry digest this information. “That is the truth about purebloods.”

Minutes passed before either of them said anything.

“You could have told me that without kissing me,” Harry said finally.

Draco offered the cruelest smile he could muster. “But then you would have never known how much you enjoyed kissing me back.”

Draco moved past him towards the door. “And that may be a Harry Potter truth,” Draco said before leaving the study.
Harry stood in the middle of the room, stunned out of his mind, and raised his fingers to his mouth, gathering a few droplets of blood. Harry rubbed the blood between his fingers thoughtfully before he had an overwhelming urge to laugh.

Instead, he managed a quiet, maniacal chuckle.

“Fuck me,” Harry whispered. Draco Malfoy was right.

He did enjoy kissing him back.

A blood truth, indeed.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~How You Remind Me~
Part I

"Never made it as a wise man...
...Couldn't cut it as a poor man stealin'...
...Tired of living like a blind man...
...Sick of silence without a sense of feeling...
...And this is how you remind me...
...This is how you remind me..." ~Nickleback

The next morning...
~*~

"Has he eaten?" Draco asked Slightly, sipping thoughtfully on a cup of tea.

Slightly shifted nervously and Draco shifted his overbearing gaze to rest directly on her. "Well?"

"Slightly wanted to make sure Master had some breakfast," Slightly squeaked, wringing her hands.

"You have yet to offer him breakfast?"

"Master, Slightly thought--"

Draco cut her off with a flick of his wrist. "I should flog you, Slightly," Draco said quietly, his heart not really in the words he was choosing. "Potter is the Master of this house and we are but guests. Do you understand?"

"Slightly understands, sir," Slightly murmured, hanging her head, her large pointed ears drooping.

"You will offer him meals first, is that clear?"

"But sir--"

"Slightly!"

"Slightly understands, sir," Slightly said, her large luminous eyes filling with tears. "Slightly will do what Master commands. Slightly is sorry for vexing Master."
Draco looked back at his tea. "That'll do, Slightly."

"Slightly thanks Master," Slightly whispered before disappearing with a pop and leaving behind a trail of dusty magic.

Minutes later, Slightly returned, once again looking like she was on the verge of tears.

Draco, who had not moved, finished his tea before turning to the worried house elf. "What is it, Slightly?"

"Slightly asks Harry Potter if he would like breakfast like Master said," Slightly squeaked shrilly. "But Harry Potter does not want breakfast from Slightly! Harry Potter tells Slightly he is not hungry, sir!"

Draco heaved a sigh. "Slightly, bring a fruit bowl and some biscuits to wherever he is--"

"The study, sir."

"Thank you; and a pot of tea," Draco finished, throwing on his robes. "I'll be in there shortly."

"Yes, sir." With a pop, Slightly disappeared, eager to do her Master's bidding.

Tiredly, Draco made his way down the hall towards the study. He had not slept more than few hours combined and when he did sleep; his dreams were filled with strange images he did not recognize. So troubled by his sleep and agitated by his wakeful thoughts, rest seemed a foreign thing to the Malfoy heir.

He suspected that the little incident the night before had been a bit brash on his part and alienated Harry even more. This, of course, was what he had been trying to avoid. He wanted...well, Draco wasn't sure he knew what he wanted but he did know he didn't want this; the ever present, oppressive and heavy tension. It was sticky and unnatural, but the strangeness of it all was, regardless of how angry or upset Draco made Harry, if they were in the same room, his scar did not hurt at all. The tension he felt in his lungs, making it hard to breathe, while his scar seemed to be satisfied with it.

Draco had no clue why he kissed Harry bloody Potter. Harry was right; Draco could have explained his point perfectly well without kissing him.

But he wanted to. And so he did.

A part, Draco thought, was that homosexuality was fiercely frowned upon in pureblood Wizarding circles, specifically because there was still no magic that would allow same sex partners to reproduce solely of themselves and adding a third party put the baby at too much risk to be a half-blood. Of course, it was not uncommon for married aristocrats to take lovers, no matter their gender, and a blind eye was turned to it as happened often when purebloods decided to indulge their senses. However, as a primary relationship, homosexuality was considered as disgraceful as being a Muggle-loving Blood-Traitor.

This was exactly why Draco leaned towards it.

If there was anything that pleased Draco more than having a row with Harry Potter, it was finding a new way to piss off the pureblood circles who had tried to mold him into a hateful little copy of his father, Lucius Malfoy.

Technically, since Pansy Parkinson, Draco had not been romantically involved with anyone...ever.
And, perhaps, Pansy didn't even count because while Draco held a large amount of affection for her, their relationship and engagement had been arranged at their infancy. Pansy had never had a problem with accepting things as they were and threw her whole heart into their engagement, but Draco, being what he was, managed to shred her heart into pieces before he even left Hogwarts by being increasingly shallow and cold towards her.

Draco wasn't sure what it felt like to be emotionally attached to someone, unclear if he had felt that way about anyone in his life, the way Pansy had felt for him. And while Draco was an adventurous flirt, he never made emotions and sex a priority in his life, contrary to outside suspicion.

Harry, on the other hand, was the embodiment of everything forbidden to him. It was a lovely little cherry on top that Harry was assigned to protect him and had to remain in the house with him for another week and a half or so. And, really, there was nothing else to do but torment The Boy Who Always Fucking Lives.

What shook Draco, however, was that Harry Potter actually kissed him back. He hadn't expected that. Draco had fully expected to be thrown off and hexed until his insides turned blue. But Harry had not only kissed him back, but he had taken over the kiss completely until Draco bit him.

What that meant almost frightened him. Not because it would throw Draco flirting with The Boy Who Lived into a completely different ball park, but because Draco knew that no one scares Harry Potter like Harry Potter scares himself.

And what could Harry possibly be telling himself for kissing Draco Malfoy, of all people on this planet, when just the mere sight of one another had been enough to turn each other's stomach, once upon a time?

Draco paused outside the study and took a deep breath.

~*~

"No, really, I'm not hungry," Harry tried to tell Slightly as she stood atop his paperwork, trying to hand him a large bowl of fruit.

"But Master insisted Slightly bring you breakfast!" Slightly squeaked as frustrated tears ran down her face.

"Yes, that's very...kind of him," Harry said, stumbling over the word in reference to Malfoy. "And, really, thank you, but...no."

"But Master insisted!" Slightly squeaked, stomping her foot and shoving the bowl back into Harry's face.

"Slightly, that's quite enough," Draco said, leaning on the door frame with a bemused expression on his face. "Just leave it on the table."

Slightly immediately scrambled to comply and Harry turned to look at Draco. Something awful passed behind Harry's beryl eyes but it vanished before Draco could name it.

"Good morning," Harry said, his voice flat and emotionless.

"Is it?" Draco said with a sarcastic smile.

Harry shrugged and looked back at his paperwork, resting the tips of his fingers flat against one particular scroll. "I'm filing a transfer today."
"What?" Draco snapped, his eyes suddenly going wide and his casual demeanor slipping. "Why?"

Harry swallowed and refused to look up. "Last night, I acted unprofessionally. There are well-equipped Aurors who can handle your case better than I."

"You must be joking," Draco said, incredulous. "You're going to run away? I thought heroes never ran away."

"I'm no hero," Harry answered, his voice quiet. "I can survive against incredible odds, but that doesn't make me a hero. You need someone who will handle your case responsibly."

"I'm not interested in having my case transferred, you coward," Draco hissed, suddenly angry. "It shouldn't matter what goes on here, Potter. It's only you and I."

"What do you want from me?"

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"I want you to stop holding me in the past."

Harry finally looked up at Draco, the vulnerability in his green eyes almost too much for Draco to bear.

"When you stop holding me in the past," Draco continued, "things like last night won't seem so terrible. You and I both know this has nothing to do with me being your 'case'."

"I can't--"

"You can't, what?" Draco interrupted, clenching his fists. "Snog your old school rival? Get too close? Have a little goddamn fun? Let yourself believe I may not be as terrible as you once thought? What, Potter? I really want to understand this one, mate, because, frankly, I'm not the only enigma here!"

Harry pressed his lips into a thin line and did not answer. He watched Draco fume silently; his gray eyes blazing, his casual grace rigid and uninhibited, and he wanted to shout. Shout what, Harry didn't know. It's been days since he brought Draco here but not that many. Under a week, and he had managed to create yet another mess with Draco.

Briefly, Harry thought of Cruent and a vortex of buried emotion began to spin beneath the surface. With Cruent, Harry knew he wasn't understood. In all honesty, Cruent was just a regular fuck; it was just unfortunate that Cruent brought his feelings into the mix.

People looked at Harry and they saw this...this icon. Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived, even without the lightening bolt scar, Harry had to hide beneath piles of paperwork and odd jobs as an Auror to be able to keep his life relatively quiet. Harry had become resigned to the fact that when people looked at him, they would always stare, they would always assume, and they would never, ever see him as the person behind the celebrity.

The mad thing was, Draco Malfoy NEVER did that. Not once in the entire time he'd known Draco had he ever treated him like glass or stared at him in awe. In fact, Draco had made it a priority to remind him—and everyone within earshot—that Harry Potter was just a scared, lonely boy underneath the fame of a lightening bolt scar. Once, Harry had hated him for this; now, he was second guessing himself.
It was too much to take in and the night before certainly didn’t help.

Trick was, Harry couldn’t stop thinking about it. And that definitely made doing his job less than simple.

But, really, when was anything simple when it concerned Draco Malfoy? The more Harry tried to figure him out, the more confused he became.

Suddenly, Draco surged forward and violently shoved the bowl of fruit off the table. Immediately, Harry was on his feet, hands clenched at his sides, determined not to be sucker punched into another snog session with the Malfoy heir. Slightly stumbled around their feet, trying to get the mess cleaned up as quickly as possible so she could make a hasty retreat.

“Slightly,” Draco growled. “Leave it.”

Slightly immediately dropped the bits of pineapple she had gathered and disappeared with a loud pop.

“What’s the matter, Malfoy?” Harry murmured. “Don’t like being ignored?”

“Of course not,” Draco bit out. “That’s not so unnatural, is it? Though, I must say, it’s not nearly as bad as being abandoned. You must know all about that, wouldn’t you, Potter?”

“Shut up, Malfoy.”

“First your parents—“

“Malfoy, you have no right—“

“And then Cho and Sirius—“

“I’m warning you—“

“And of course, Dumbledore, who knew the exact hour of his death but never bothered to let you in on the little secret.”

“Stop—“

“And whatever happened to Ginevra Wea—“

Harry’s fist plowed into Draco’s face so hard, he was knocked to the ground. Staring up at Harry from the floor, Draco wiped the blood from his mouth and smiled. “Yes, you know all about being abandoned, don’t you?”

“This is why I can’t do your case anymore, Malfoy!” Harry all but shouted. “Look at us! It’s like Hogwarts all over again!”

Draco slowly got his feet, tenderly probing the gash on the inner side of his lip with his tongue. “Yes, it is. Your problem is that you’re liking it too much.”

Harry clutched at his hair. “Malfoy—“

“Admit it, Potter,” Draco sneered. “For some reason or another, you wanted to be here because you knew it would spice up the otherwise dull life you’ve created for yourself. That you knew I wouldn’t treat you like you were made of glass.”
“Malfoy—“

“And you are STILL denying the Slytherin in you!” Draco clasped his hands in front of him and batted his lashes. “Oh, please, Sorting Hat,” Draco mocked, “not Slytherin. Oh, please not Slytherin!”

“Well, it did wonders for you, didn’t it?” Harry shot back.

Draco snorted. “Right.”

“Really,” Harry said, the cruelty at his core bubbling up. “You got yourself landed in a House that celebrated a false purity, you surrounded yourself with people who claimed to be your friends but weren’t, you managed to get the Dark Mark slapped on your arm—“

“Potter,” Draco warned.

“AND you managed to get your mother killed, cause the murder of Albus Dumbledore, get exiled, and get YOURSELF cursed into the next life on some fool’s mission to try to be like me!” Harry finished with a shout, his voice suddenly raw.

Draco’s eyes went emotionless and he reached for his wand. Before he could have out with it, Harry had the tip of his pressed against Draco’s throat.

“Go ahead,” Harry said quietly. “Give me a reason to hex you. I really could do without the aggravation.”

Draco hung his hands limply by his sides. “I guess that’s it then,” Draco murmured. “Harry Potter, mad with envy because Draco Malfoy got to kill Voldemort. I wonder how that would look in the Daily Prophet?”

Harry drew his brows together in a severe frown. “I didn’t mean—“

“But it’s the truth, isn’t it?” Malfoy whispered. “Just like, for the briefest of moments, when the Dark Lord marked me, I felt powerful. I, Draco Malfoy, was the youngest Death Eater of my age. I was almost proud to have been so trusted with the assassination of the mighty Albus Dumbledore. It means we’re human, you and I.”

“Voldemort’s death was owed me,” Harry suddenly hissed.

A manic glint suddenly exploded behind Draco’s gray eyes. “And he’s dead!” Draco shrieked. “ Isn’t he! And instead of being grateful to me for saving your arse, you want to send me off to some other Auror like a pair of used trainers! You owe me a life debt, Potter! A life debt!”

Harry nodded and looked away. Slowly, Harry lowered his wand and set it aside. “I’m sorry, Malfoy; but I can’t let this continue.”

Draco tiredly ran a hand through his hair, suddenly looking spent and vulnerable. “Fine; I’ll just… you know…” Draco turned and left the study.

Harry bit his lip, his heart screaming to go after him and say…something, and his mind sternly telling him to leave it be. After all, it was just Malfoy. Right?

Harry clenched and unclenched his fingers before suddenly springing into action. Walking quickly, Harry stepped out into the hall and stopped short when he saw Draco leaning heavily against one wall, his shoulders quivering and his back facing Harry.
Harry reached out a hand. “Malfoy?”

“Don’t,” Draco bit out, his voice cracking.

Harry touched Draco’s sleeve and Draco shoved him off. “Potter, really, don’t you think we’ve said enough?” Draco whispered and when he looked up, Harry saw the most unnatural thing in this world.

Silent tears streamed down Draco’s pale face and he looked so wretched Harry’s heart felt like it was going to shatter.

“I’m sorry,” Draco continued and his voice sounded like it was holding back a torrent of emotion. “For Dumbledore. Really, I am.”

“For fixing the closet in the Room of Requirement?”

Draco laughed through his quiet tears and the despair that reflected in them. “No…that he had to die at all.”

Harry tried to step forward, hand stretching forward, but Draco pushed himself off the wall and backed away. “I managed to destroy the one man who would have been powerful enough to save my mother.”

Harry had not actually thought of it like that, and the revelation that this was how Draco felt came crashing down around him.

“I could have used the Time-Turner,” Draco continued softly, the tears falling faster and his voice becoming strained. “But Dumbledore said there was a price to be paid. There’s always a price for a lesson learned. I never asked him to save my mother; and he may have, if I had. But I didn’t.”

Draco smiled his cruel smile. “I understood. A price had to be paid. Narcissa Malfoy, a martyr to my soul. And me,” Draco raised his dull eyes to Harry’s. “To yours.”

Harry shook his head slightly. “I don’t understand.”

“Dumbledore explained the Horcruxes to me and I unraveled the riddle concerning you. I knew a price had to be paid for the demise of Voldemort. I couldn’t let it be you.”

“Why?” Harry breathed. “Merlin save me, why?”

“Because you’re right,” Draco said with a little half-smile. “No one would have missed me.”

“I didn’t mean…”

“Don’t lie to me,” Draco admonished softly. “Yes, you did. And everyone would have missed you. You were brave and true and victimized…it was better this way.” Draco suddenly buried his face in his hands. “I’m not supposed to be alive, Potter. Do you understand? I’m not supposed to be here! What the hell am I supposed to do or think? You tell me, Potter, what I am supposed to feel!”

Harry felt lost. “I don’t know, Malfoy; I just—“

“Don’t,” Draco said again. “Just…don’t. Do us a favor, will you, Potter?” Draco murmured, backing further down the hall.

Harry raised his chin, his eyes trying to see him through the shadows.
“Disappear,” Draco said as he vanished among the darkness of the hall.

You are a right prick, Harry told himself, wondering if it was possible to feel any more wretched.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~How You Remind Me~
Part II

“…You beg Him not to go…
…Old Volumes shake their Vellum Heads…
…And Tantalize—just so…” ~Emily Dickinson

An hour later…

Harry stared at the Case Transfer scroll, the document only needing his signature to become official, his eyes not really seeing the letters written across the page. Instead, his mind’s eye was focused on the memory of a weeping Draco Malfoy.

Harry had only seen him that way once before; at Hogwarts with Moaning Myrtle, the night he tried to cut out the Dark Mark from his arm. Harry briefly thought about the memory he had discovered in Draco’s Pensive that showed the night Draco had been locked up in a stone room, awaiting his father and Voldemort to remark him in a place he could not reach.

Harry closed his eyes and realized that after all this time; Draco Malfoy had been just as scared, lonely, and lost as he had been during their years at Hogwarts.

The Gryffindor in him raged at the injustice of it all and took pity on the Malfoy heir.

Pity was a strange thing and Harry wanted to discard it for a new feeling. Harry knew Draco would not look kindly at being pitied. Of the two of them, Draco had attempted to make the very best of their time here at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, in his own way, and Harry acknowledged that now.

Draco had left him be, except the few times Draco had insisted on forcing Harry to eat or to inform him that Ron was at the door. And when they were in the same room, Draco had been everything Harry knew him to be, snobby, sarcastic, and betimes downright cruel…and Harry wondered if it was all forced for Harry’s sake.

The Draco he saw an hour ago was not the boy he had known at Hogwarts. This was the Draco Harry had caught glimpses of in his Pensieve, in hidden memories and secret conversations with their deceased Headmaster. And, of course, there was the vulnerable, confused man Harry had taken to
St. Mary’s—the Draco before the conditioning.

It was strange that Draco rarely mentioned St. Mary’s and, if at all, it centered around Harry’s grand fuck up to celebrate the cruel Malfoy Harry expected of him. This, of course, only reinforced Harry’s belief that Draco was trying to be his old self for Harry so he didn’t….didn’t what?

Harry shook his head. Maybe it was smart of him because Harry was unsure of what he would do or say if Draco became completely uninhibited around him and allowed Harry to see the vulnerable, altogether different Draco underneath.

Or maybe he wasn’t all that different. Maybe Draco was just a little more humane that Harry had always thought. Maybe he is always going to be the Draco Malfoy Harry had always known him as, but his opinion of the Malfoy heir became skewed because, lo, Draco Malfoy isn’t the evil prick that his preceding reputation dictated him as.

And what would that mean?

It would definitely make him tolerable.

Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek and sat back in the chair, resting his hands behind his head.

No, not pity. Malfoy made his choices and so did Harry Potter. Harry had made his fair share of stupid decisions in his time and Draco didn’t pity him for the repercussions.

Harry thought of the way Draco’s blond hair would fall into his laughing gray eyes and how his soft, cruel lips would curve into this all-knowing smile every time he looked Harry’s way and Harry suddenly found it hard to breathe.

Harry hid himself away from the Malfoy heir because no one could make his blood feel like fire like Draco could. Harry had forgotten how that felt, to feel alive. And it was impossible to not want to start a row with Draco Malfoy, not because he could be a downright insufferable prick, but because of the challenge.

Pride was a common denominator between the two of them, and Harry knew it. However, Harry had very little to be proud for in a very long time. A single word from Draco, and Harry was fired up, defensive, and ready to protect whatever Draco had a mind to take a stab at.

And Harry would be a liar if he claimed it didn’t feel perfect and right and good when he let go and kissed Draco Malfoy back. It felt like a release of something, an understanding passing between the two of them, and it scared Harry senseless.

Harry couldn’t treat Draco like Cruent; he couldn’t get involved in another shallow relationship for three very good reasons. One, it had taken Harry way too long to deal with the guilt of hurting Cruent like he had. There is no payoff for Harry in breaking someone’s heart; he just didn’t want the broken heart to be his. After Ginny, Harry just couldn’t take it anymore. Those who didn’t leave him by dying left him because they didn’t want him anymore. And that hurt Harry more than anything else he could think of. The people who saw past the celebrity usually didn’t like what they saw.

Two, Harry wasn’t all that certain Malfoy was sane. Both his parents were dead, but Draco only ever mentions his mother, acting as if Lucius never existed. Draco wouldn’t encourage conversation about what happened inside St. Mary’s. The Malfoy heir rarely commented about his own past except during the few arguments they shared and the only time he became angry was when his mother, Voldemort, or Pansy Parkinson was mentioned.

Third, really, it was Draco Malfoy. Harry wasn’t even certain he was gay, let alone the fact that
Harry was still coming to terms that Draco Malfoy wasn’t actually hate-worthy. Sure, he was gorgeous and suave and everything that made Harry’s blood quicken, but…in another time and place…

A small voice nudged its way into Harry’s train of thought and whispered that this might just be that ‘other time and place’. Harry shook his head, dispelling the idea. Harry wouldn’t be able to live with himself if he added himself to the list of troubles Draco had to deal with right now. Or, could he? Harry shook his head again.

And while Cruent and he had been a casual thing, Cruent had been nothing like Harry. The more Harry thought about it, the more he realized he had in common with the Malfoy heir. And, of course, there was that bloody scar and its unclear magical connection to tend with.

Harry squeezed his eyes shut as his thoughts began to lose clarity and became more obscure and scrambled, bartering with one another for the upper hand. When he opened them, Harry gazed down and focused on the Transfer Case scroll, picking up an ink quill and setting it to the scroll. Harry bit his lip and second guessed himself for the thousandth time in an hour. Would it really be better if they weren’t so near one another? Would it really better if Malfoy’s case was handled by another team of Aurors?

Was Harry really just being a coward?

Harry scowled and began to ink his name into the magical document. With a sigh, Harry threw down the quill halfway through his first name and ripped the document into pieces. It may be a very bad idea to continue this living agreement, but Harry Potter was no coward.

And Draco was right; Harry owed him a life debt. He would not be Gryffindor if he backed out now.

Suddenly feeling relieved, Harry smiled a little to himself, a smile that didn’t quite reach his tired, green eyes, and rested his chin in his hands, staring across the study and into the fire.

Harry’s arm suddenly began to burn and his forehead began to tingle. Harry gasped and clutched at his arm, trying to rub the irritation away. Abruptly, Harry felt nauseous and weak, the energy draining from him inexplicably. And then, as he somehow lost the ability to move his wrist, Slightly popped into the room, her eyes wide and shining with her tears.

“Mr. Harry Potter, sir!” Slightly sobbed and hiccupped. “Harry Potter must come quickly! Master needs you!”

Harry instantly jumped to his feet, swaying slightly with his dizziness. “What’s wrong?”

“Master needs Harry Potter!” Slightly shrieked. “Master told Slightly not to come but Slightly disobeyed! Master is hurt!”

“What?!” Harry said, running out into the hall and rushing towards Draco’s room. Slightly followed closely behind, wailing her grief.

Harry skidded to a halt in front of Draco’s room and barged in. Seeing no one, Harry stepped in, trying to blink away his dizziness and shake off the sudden heavy feeling in his limbs. Harry turned towards the bathroom and his heart stopped when he saw thick red blood oozing in from under the bathroom door.

“Fuck,” Harry muttered as he stumbled forward and threw open the door.
Draco lay across the bathroom floor, staring glassy eyed at a tiled wall, his left arm a bloody wreck and his wand on the other side of the bathroom. There was blood everywhere and the bathroom smelled thickly of it.

Immediately, Harry tried to pull out his wand, but the fingers of his left hand wouldn’t work properly. Using his right hand, Harry pulled out his wand and uttered a string of spells Madame Pomfrey had once taught him that would immediately close all the wounds on Malfoy arm.

As they healed and Harry slipped across the blood-slicked floor to grasp a hold of Malfoy and pull him from the room, Draco raised his hazy, gray eyes. “Don’t…not supposed…to be…here…”

“Why would you do this?!!” Harry shouted as he lifted Draco and carried him to the bed.

“No…supposed to be here…mistake,” Draco mumbled. “Fixing…mistake.”

Harry laid Draco down on the bed and hovered over him, checking vitals and making sure all the cuts on his arm had closed up. “You are not a mistake, Malfoy.” Draco’s heartbeat was way too slow.

“No one…would miss me…” Draco heaved a sigh and closed his eyes.

Harry crawled under the sheets with Draco, concentrating that magic between them, trying to charge it with his own energy and wandless magic. “I would,” Harry whispered, pulling Draco’s body close and pressing his forehead against the lightning bolt scar. Suddenly, yellow crackling energy began spiking around them. “Look at me, Malfoy.”

“No…you wouldn’t,” Draco murmured dreamily. “You would just…feel bad…”

“Look at me.”

Draco opened his eyes and gazed back into Harry’s intensely worried green eyes.

“I would miss you,” Harry whispered fiercely. “I didn’t send out the transfer.”

Draco blinked slowly until his eyes lost their pigment and his pupils became as wide as his irises.

“Malfoy?” Harry called out, terrified. “Malfoy?!”

Harry shook him and the energy spiking and swirling around them became denser. “You are not allowed to die here! Malfoy! Look at me!”

Harry’s voice became frantic and he squeezed his eyes, trying to pour his magic into the energy that connected them. Harry’s heart beat wildly as the energy surged through his body and into Draco’s. Draco’s body jumped as the energy charged his heart, again and again, trying to restart it.

“Breathe!” Harry screamed. “Goddamit, Draco! Breathe!”

And then, when Harry’s heart felt like it was going to explode, one last charge jolted against Draco’s heart and he arched in Harry’s embrace, sucking in a breath; and then everything went white.

Through the brilliance of their peaked magic, Harry shivered against Draco’s body, the nerves in his limbs jarred by the experience of his own energy being used to revive another human being. Draco brought a hand up and ran it down the length of Harry’s cheek.

“Shh,” Draco whispered, still in a dream-like state, and gathering Harry into his arms. “I’ve got you.”
Harry buried his face into Draco’s chest, feeling his heart beating steadily, and continued to shiver and twitch.

“Thank you,” Harry heard Draco whisper, anguish in his voice making it thick and heavy; and Harry began weep with relief.

~*~
When Harry first opened his eyes some fifteen hours later and did not immediately see Draco lying next to him, Harry panicked and sat straight up, blinking the sleep from his eyes and flicking his eyes around madly.

"Potter," Draco murmured to his left. "I am here."

Harry twisted in the sheets and saw Draco reclined in a chair, looking over the rim of a scroll he had retrieved from the library, no doubt, and watching Harry carefully, his face unreadable.

Draco offered half a smile. "You've been sleeping since yesterday. How are you feeling?"

"Why the fuck did you do that?" Harry snapped, his eyes suddenly going bright and almost fevered, and Harry freed himself from the sheets and went to stand over Draco and his chair. "You scared me to death, Malfoy!"

"I was trying to prove a point."

"What point?!"

"Did you feel it?"

Harry blinked at him, wanting to scream and shout about his incredible stupidity but rendered speechless because the question caught him off guard.

"When I was dying," Draco said quietly, lowering the scroll and setting it aside. "Did you feel it?"

Harry looked to the side, remembering the weakness in his limbs and the inexplicable dizziness.

"Yes," Harry said.

"I needed you to understand," Draco said so softly, Harry could barely here him, though his gray eyes spoke in loud volumes. "We're in this together, you and I; whether we like it or not."
Harry's mouth fell slack for a moment before his anger exploded. "COULDN'T YOU HAVE JUST--"

"Told you?" Draco interrupted calmly. "I did try, if you recall. But, alas, people don't fucking listen."

Harry snapped his jaw closed and pressed his lips into a thin line, staring back at Draco incredulously. "You must figure out less extreme ways of getting things accomplished, Malfoy," Harry said finally. "You cannot slit your wrist every time we have an argument."

Draco stood, Harry already so close that the action caused their bodies to be mere inches apart. Harry breathed in and tried to classify Draco's scent. It was a sharp, clean smell...accompanied by something else sweet and exotic. Draco smelled like forbidden things, and Harry's heart beat faster for it.

Draco reached up and placed a finger beneath Harry's chin, forcing Harry to meet his gaze. Frustration and the residual murmur of worry swam beneath the surface of Harry's emerald green orbs and Draco was amazed, mesmerized by the meaning behind Harry's gaze. "Such concern for my welfare," Draco whispered.

"I really shouldn't," Harry muttered to himself before craning his neck and pressing his lips against Draco's, lacing his fingers into the hair at the base of Draco's neck.

Draco answered almost immediately, clutching at Harry's shirt collar and moaning as Harry's tongue swept into his mouth. Harry's lips moved over his in an almost professional manner, and his limbs quivered with restraint until Draco pulled back slightly to run his teeth along Harry's lower lip. Then, with an animalistic growl, Harry dug his fingers deeper into Draco's hair and yanked violently, using the leverage to plunder Draco's mouth savagely. Overwhelmed by Harry's sudden spike of passion, Draco succumbed to a shivering thing in the young Auror's arms, moaning as Harry's tongue seemed to be everywhere in his mouth at once.

Suddenly, Harry clutched Draco's shoulders, turned him, and pushed him gently onto the bed. Eager fingers reached up and pulled Harry down atop him, and Harry allowed himself a guttural moan as his hardening prick pressed against Draco's. Watching Harry's lids flutter closed over his passion-streaked eyes, Draco marveled at how free and beautiful Harry looked when he let himself surrender to his desires, wondering how many people were able to see him this way.

Draco gasped when Harry shifted and then pressed back against him, the friction of their two lengths rubbing against one another sending shivers up and down Draco's spine and he arched into it, throwing his head back. Draco wrapped the sheets around him in his fingers, waiting for the next surge of Harry's hips against his, but it never came. Draco looked up at his tormentor through the haze of his desire, seeing Harry gazing down at him with the same questioning restraint that had begun the kiss.

"We can't--"

"Oh, no," Draco mocked softly, grabbing Harry's shirt and pulling him down, flush against his body, and grazing his teeth along Harry's jaw-line and nipping at the lobe of his ear. "We can't, we shouldn't, we mustn't," Draco whispered against Harry's ear before running his tongue along the lobe and pulling it gently into his mouth with his teeth.

Harry groaned, the muscles of his arms on either side of Draco quivering as he fought to keep himself from completely collapsing on top of the Malfoy heir.

"But we are," Draco whispered, spreading his ministries down the side of Harry's throat. Harry's
neck arched into the touch and he moved his head to the side as Draco placed warm kisses down the length of his throat and the jut of his collarbone, undoing Harry's shirt-buttons as he went. "And doesn't it feel wonderful?"

Harry thrust his hips against Draco's in answer, beginning a slow steady rhythm, and Draco buried his face into Harry's now bare chest, lost in the sensation of friction building between them and the heat pooling in their stomachs. Harry dipped his head, spreading small, quiet kisses over Draco's face, and Draco nearly wept at the savage tenderness of it all.

Draco lifted his face; arching his body as close to Harry's as possible and allowed Harry to move his mouth over his once again. Harry's searching fingers sought and found the lower hem of Draco's shirt, lifting it slightly and slipping his hand underneath. Draco shivered against Harry's touch as his hand moved up and over Draco's stomach and chest, gasping against Harry's mouth when his fingers found and gently twisted a nipple before moving on, finding a new place to torment.

Harry's thrusting hips steadily began to gather speed, the friction between their groins making their erections nearly unbearable, and Draco began to lose focus on meeting Harry's kiss, lost in the sensations shooting up his spine and the stars bursting behind his closed lids.

Harry ran his tongue down the flesh of Draco's throat, allowing him to lose himself in the storm of his impending orgasm, and kept lowering his kisses, keeping the pace of his thrusts against Draco as steady as possible, it suddenly very important to Harry that Draco come, and when he reached the collar of Draco's black silk shirt, Harry all but ripped it open and Draco smiled hazily. Harry dipped his head once again and latched on to one small pink nipple, lapping at it with his tongue in tantalizing circle-like motions before biting down and then smoothing over the sting with a swipe of his tongue, earning small mewling noises from the back of Draco's throat as Harry sped up his thrusting pace to an almost frantic speed.

Suddenly, Draco clutched violently at Harry's arms, digging his fingers painfully into the skin, as the storm of his impending orgasm began to take shape within the churning heat in his stomach. Draco's eyes went dark with surprise and passion as he stared up at Harry. Harry watched, his intense gaze doing more for Draco than his hips were, as the body beneath him tightened like a bowstring and Draco's eyes lost their focus. Then, meeting Harry's thrusts in four jerky, final movements, Draco groaned loudly, his orgasm overwhelming him, and finally collapsed against the sheets beneath Harry's fascinated, intense gaze.

Without a word, Harry moved to the side and laid next to Draco, waiting patiently for him to catch his breath and re-gather his wits. When Draco finally looked back at him, his eyes were almost dreamy and a slow smile curved his lips.

Harry took in a deep breath, his eyes sharp and knowing. "That was your first orgasm, wasn't it?" Harry asked softly.

Draco chuckled. "No," Draco answered. "It was my first with another person, granted, but not my first altogether. My own hand does wonders, I'll have you know."

Harry groaned and flung his arm over his hands.

Draco raised a brow, not entirely in the mood for Harry's dramatics. "What?"

"You're seriously a virgin, mate?" Harry clarified under his arm.

Draco frowned. "I was making a potion to save your arse in the Chinese wilderness when you and everyone else was a having their first shag, Potter," Draco said heatedly.
Harry moved his arm and looked back at Draco. "Have I ever thanked you for that?"

"What?" Draco asked, confused. "Your first shag?"

"No," Harry whispered, the intensity of his sudden vulnerability nearly blinding Draco. "For saving my life."

Draco looked away, that nameless thing behind Harry's eyes too much to bear directly. "No...but I don't want you to."

Harry tenderly touched Draco's face, urging him to look back at him. "You need to hear it, Draco."

At hearing his first name fall from Harry's lips, Draco's surprised gray eyes lifted back to Harry's green gaze.

"Thank you," Harry murmured.

Anything Draco would have said died on his lips and he moved forward abruptly and kissed Harry passionately, trying to push away the fright of his own vulnerability that suddenly bubbled up inside of him.

A pop sounded by the door and they both jumped. Draco sat up and sent a withering glare Slightly's direction and the house elf shrank back, wringing her hands.

"Slightly is here to ask Harry Potter if he would like breakfast like Master told her," Slightly squeaked. "Master did say so."

"That's all right, Slightly," Harry responded kindly, putting a restraining hand on Draco's elbow. "I'm not--"

Draco suddenly whirled on him. "If you say you're not hungry, Merlin save me, I'm going to hex you into the next world! You need to eat; especially after last night. Why don't you ever eat?"

Taken aback, Harry's eyes widened and flickered to the nervous house elf by the door. "I'll...have some eggs, Slightly. Hard boiled, if you please. Thank you."

Slightly nodded vigorously before popping back out of the room.

Harry stood and walked into the bathroom, and even though it was cleaned of any traces of blood, Harry still had traces of Draco's dried blood on his skin. Harry turned on the faucet of the sink and watched as the steam from the hot water fogged up the mirror. Slipping out of his shirt, Harry discarded it on the floor and began scrubbing the flaky, dried blood from his hands and arms. Draco moved into the bathroom and leaned against the doorframe.

"What about you?" Draco asked, his eyes laughing again in that insufferable way.

Harry looked over a muscled shoulder. "What?"

Draco gestured casually with a flick of his wrist and Harry glanced down at his still unbelievably hard erection pressing against the front of his pants. Harry shrugged. "When it concerns you, Malfoy, I am quite certain I've withstood worse."

Draco smirked and moved forward, turning off the faucet and placing himself between Harry and the sink. "Come now, Potter," Draco murmured, deliberately unzipping Harry's trousers and sliding his hand inside. "I find I like it better when you call me Draco. What must I do to have you call me"
Draco?

Harry twitched when Draco closed his fingers around his aching shaft and began to move his hand torturously up and down the silky, hard length. "That," Harry gasped, pressing his face into the crook between Draco's neck and shoulder, the muscles in his neck suddenly turned to liquid.

"Oh?" Draco teased, running his thumb over the head's slit and using the oozing pre-cum as a bit of lubricant as he continued to work Harry's straining phallus. "So say it."

"Draco," Harry murmured against Draco's shoulder.

"Hmm?" Draco murmured against a cruel smile, a smile that was only Draco, as he moved to the base of Harry's cock and squeezed, kissing the exposed side of Harry's neck.

"Draco!" Harry gasped, clutching Draco's shoulders.

Draco tugged harder and reached up with his free hand to lift Harry's face to meet his in an animalistic kiss. Draco pulled Harry's lower lip onto his mouth with his teeth and sucked on it before releasing it and pushing his tongue past the young Auror's swollen lips. "Again," Draco whispered.

"Draco," Harry breathed against Draco's mouth and Draco twisted his wrist around Harry's cock, now quivering against Draco's skilled hand. Draco reached lower and cupped Harry's balls, fondling them slightly before pressing two fingers against that sensitive spot behind them. Harry cried out against Draco mouth and Draco bit down on Harry's lip when Harry arched against him and began moving his hips to meet the movements of Draco’s hand.

"Draco..."

Draco pulled even faster, working the length, twisting and adding pressure, until Harry was moving against his hand so erratically; it was stirring his own groin back to life.

"Come for me, Harry. That's it..."

Harry came with a shout, wrapping his arms around Draco's neck and shivering as the residual spasms of his orgasm shook his body. Draco held him close, rocking him slowly. "Shh, I've got you. I've got you."

When Harry finally calmed and raised his eyes to Draco's, he brought up a finger and traced the line of Draco's jaw before pressing a small kiss to Draco's lips. Draco smirked when Harry pulled away. "Now let's get you cleaned up. You really are filthy."

Harry rolled his eyes and reached passed him to turn the faucet back on. "Real cute, Malfoy. You sure know how to ruin a moment."

"No worse than you, I must say."

"You were right; your hand does work wonders."

Draco laughed. "Um, by the way, where the hell are you sleeping?"

"The study."

"Well, now, that just won't do."

~*~
Draco blinked, his eyes focusing suddenly, and looked around him. He found himself standing before the window of his bedroom, still in his bed wear, his sock-less feet chilled and pressed into the carpet, and staring at Pan, his Eagle Owl, who was perched on a branch outside the window, gazing shrewdly back at the Malfoy heir.

Draco stepped back, trying to remember how he had gotten there and nearly panicked, thinking, for a split second, that he had forgotten everything all over again.

However, no, Draco recognized his owl and his surroundings, knowing that the infinitely stubborn Harry Potter was sleeping chastely down the hall in his study, and Draco must have sleep walked over the window.

Draco shivered, abruptly registering the tingling sensation between his shoulder blades and tried to shake it off. Strangely, Draco knew he had dreamed as the heaviness of it hung around him still; and yet, he could not re-formulize the dream in his mind.

Draco took in a deep breath, scowled cynically at Pan, who bemusedly tilted his regal head to one side, and turned to gather his robe. Tying the sash around his narrow waist and slipping on some
slippers, Draco made his way down the hall and into the study.

Draco felt the corners of his mouth lift into a decidedly affectionate half-smile as he found Harry sleeping behind his desk, curled in a chair, and his head to one side, causing his thick, messy black hair to fall into his sleeping eyes and brush lovingly against his proud cheeks. Draco caught himself and let the smile dissipate before unraveling the sash of his robe so he could slip out of it and use it as a makeshift blanket to cover the sleeping Boy Who Lived.

Taking a seat across the desk, Draco stared out the far window and watched the sun rise as he waited for Harry to wake. Draco frowned as the dawn erupted over the horizon in fiery reds and golds, preferring a quiet, pale dawn to a riot of color any day. As Draco stubbornly squinted at the rays of fire brightening the eastern sky he thought of the day before and how, despite the day’s events, Harry had ended up sleeping once again his study.

While Draco wouldn’t call it discomfort, the feeling permeating the space between them by the time they had their morning meal, it was definitely distant…and not entirely Harry’s doing either.

Their infrequent conversations had been forcefully light and Draco found himself wanting to roam the house instead of pestering Harry as he had done when they first arrived at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Harry continued to research in his study, his attack of conscience throwing him back into his work full force, probably to keep his mind off of what they had done.

And while Draco was almost certain Harry had had his fair share of meaningless relationships, they both knew it would never be so between them. If they tried, they would fail.

The two of them were connected by ancient magic, and the sexual tension swimming densely in the air between them constantly did not help.

After yesterday, they both knew they could—and probably would—fight the growing attraction, physical and certainly emotional as well, between them, and for each of them, very different reasons would spur their rebellion.

Draco assumed it was Harry’s aggravatingly golden honor that would stay his hand when it came to him. For Draco’s part, as much as touching Harry made him feel alive like nothing else, Draco could not stomach the immediate vulnerability he felt bared as Harry’s intense green eyes stripped him of every barrier he had spent years building around himself.

Whatever frightened thing quivered beneath the stifling layers Draco had wrapped around his soul, it would take more than even the best intentions from the noble Harry Potter for him to trust anyone with the defenseless side of Draco Malfoy.

Because Draco Malfoy has never trusted anyone; ever.

When Harry stirred and slowly opened his eyes, Draco glanced over at him with a perfect, pureblood smirk.

“I cannot possibly be expected to believe that that chair is more comfortable than my bed,” Draco drawled.

Harry looked down at Draco’s robe that covered him and a small smile graced his lips. “How incredibly sweet of you, Malfoy,” Harry remarked, almost cynically…but not quite.

“Oxymoronic,” Draco said with a shake of his head. “Malfoy’s are never sweet.”

Harry stretched languidly before placing his elbows on his desk and rubbing the palms of his hands
into his groggy eyes. “You’re up awfully early.”

Draco shrugged even though Harry wasn’t looking. “ Couldn’t sleep.”

Harry glanced up. “Why?”

Draco eyes seemed to frost before they returned to their normal shade of slate grey. “No idea, Potter. Perhaps it had something to do with the incessantly cold sheets.”

Harry rolled his eyes and sat back in his chair. Harry was almost grateful that Draco’s attempt to treat what was evolving between them with humor, knowing that it could be ever-so-serious if they weren’t careful.

“Really, Potter,” Draco continued. “Even if your insufferable honor dictates that you maintain a measure of professionalism with me, I know for a fact that my room isn’t the only one with a bed. Why do you insist on sleeping in the study?”

“So talkative this morning, Malfoy,” Harry muttered, shutting his eyes briefly and trying to ignore the question. Sirius Black, his deceased godfather and dead for trying to protect him once upon a time, used to sit at this very desk.

Harry shivered, as the recurring thought he constantly battled whispered through his mind. Those who attempted to protect Harry Potter, usually died while doing so.

Even Draco. Once.

“Don’t try to change the subject,” Draco said with a frown. “Why?”

When Harry re-opened his eyes, the pained expression behind them caught Draco off guard.

“I have my own flat in London, near the Ministry,” Harry murmured. “I rarely come here. There are too many ghosts… and I don’t like the way some of the wings make me feel.”

“How do they make you feel?” Draco inquired softly after a loaded pause.

Harry looked to the left and stared off into something Draco couldn’t see. “It’s like an echo of everything I hate…everything I fought once and everything I could become if I chose it.”

Draco was quiet for nearly a minute, mulling this over in his mind. That Draco could understand as well. Malfoy Manor had lineages of ghosts that kept watchful eyes on their descendants, making certain that their sons and daughters did not fail in continuing their line. Draco had despised going home on holiday during his time at Hogwarts, knowing for certain that the eyes of his ancestors saw right through his wretched, deceiving soul and were cursing him to infinity and back.

Draco was also aware of the effect sharing a Horcrux with Voldemort must have tormented Harry Potter. Draco had watched from afar at Hogwarts as their connection had driven Harry to darker moods and extreme fits of temper in their sixth year. It must have terrified the Gryffindor Golden Boy to know that it would be so easy, too easy, in fact, to just surrender to the scar and become another Dark Lord; one infinitely more powerful and extreme than the one they already had to contend with.

“I thought I would have taken that from you when I took your scar,” Draco said finally, knowing all too well what it was to fight the faceless darkness within. “The Horcrux was the only thing connecting you to Voldemort.”
Harry looked back at Draco then, his dense green eyes haunted. “Voldemort’s aren’t born, Malfoy. They’re made. He was Tom Riddle once.”

Draco didn’t respond right away, trying to swallow the thought that the monster that had murdered his mother had been human once. “You’re nothing like him, Potter,” Draco grated, abruptly leaning forward in his chair, his eyes bright and intense, flashing silver like lightning. “If nothing else, remember that you CHOSE Gryffindor. You chose. These ghosts have nothing on the power of choice.”

Harry peered back at Draco, trying to read the message those gray eyes were trying to send him. Harry saw the shift, the nameless urgency behind those piercing gray eyes, as if there was a message there for the both of them…a message even Draco couldn’t decipher. A secret hidden inside the Malfoy heir. Maybe it was the scar that whispered behind Draco’s eyes.

Suddenly, the silver faded back to gray and Draco sat back. “You did choose,” Draco repeated in a softer tone. “As I did…I…, never mind.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Malfoy, tell me.”

“It’s nothing. When are you going to sleep with me?”

Harry let out a startled laugh before his eyes went dark with a scowl. “This is not your harem, Malfoy.”

“No,” Draco said solemnly, his snark back in full swing. “But it’ll do.”

“You’re such a fucking prick, Malfoy,” Harry sighed, running his hand through his hair. “I cannot believe I almost shagged your snobby arse.”

Draco produced the most seductive smile Harry had ever seen. “’Almost’ is something to be remedied, isn’t it?”

“No, Malfoy.”

“I wouldn’t be so terrible, would I?”

“You’re a virgin.”

“Something else to be remedied,” Draco replied with a grin. “And sweeter the victory for you.”

“No, Malfoy.”

Draco chuckled. “I wonder if masochism is a common Gryffindor trait.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Harry snapped.

“Your problem,” Draco murmured as he stood to his feet and gathered his robe, “is that you know you’ll enjoy it too much.”

Harry stared hard at Malfoy, glad that the desk was between them…though, all things considered, it may not be enough if Draco kept looking at him that way.
“I will not be another tool for you to defy your lineage, Malfoy,” Harry said in a low voice. “Your rebellion is your own.”

That cruel smile that set Harry’s blood on fire curved Draco’s regal mouth. “Regardless of my game, Potter, the fact remains. You want it too.”

Harry closed his eyes against that smile that made the ghosts of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place shriek like banshees through his mind, and when he opened them, Draco Malfoy was gone.

“So, seduce me,” Harry whispered to the cold, empty space Draco Malfoy left behind.

However…Harry was quite certain he already did.

~*~

In Wisconsin…

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“Hello, Mister Deans,” a Betty called out from the Receptionist’s desk in front of Dr. Laeverton’s Office. Deans paused in his steady stroll towards the Doc’s office to smile pleasantly at the plump woman and her bleached and teased out hair.

“Mary,” Deans greeted. “How are you?”

“Could be better, of course, if I wasn’t here,” Mary responded with a flirtation grin that Deans had to fight to not grimace at. Her bright red lipstick was smeared all over the front of her teeth.

“Oh?” Deans inquired, leaning against her desk. “When do you get off?”

The Betty giggled shrilly and tried to cross her legs gracefully; and failing, of course. “In ten minutes or so.”

“Fantastic,” Deans said with a charming smile. “Go doll yourself up while I drop off something for the Doc and I’ll take you to coffee; how does that sound?”

Mary’s eyes widened a fraction and nearly fell over herself trying to find her bag and standing up. “That sounds wonderful! I’ll be right back!”

Deans’s smile instantly disappeared when the Betty turned the corner and he felt his lip curl. When a woman, Muggle or otherwise, said she was going to be right back, it instantly gave the man a window of about thirty minutes.

Deans turned back to the office. He had plenty of time.

Inside the Doc’s office, whose usual retainer had been home sick for the past few days on a mysterious bout of influenza he had contracted—from the American Aurors, no doubt, Deans thought, to give a reasonable amount of time to clean up the mess the British had left behind—Deans turned in a circle, his eyes searching for the document.

Frowning slightly, Deans retrieved the wand he always kept hidden within his sleeve. It wasn’t his, of course. His wand had been broken by Headmistress Deliverence Dane of Sequoia School of American Wizardry and Witchcraft when he had inadvertently caused the death of another student from Salamen House. The wand he held was the deceased boy’s wand, kept with him to remind him of his greatest sin and to, of course, enable him to use magic in secret as a he lived as a Muggle.
“Accio journal,” Deans muttered and immediately John Smith’s notebook—the accurate one—floated up from beneath a pile of papers. Deans tucked the wand safely back into his sleeve and walked briskly from the office, the notebook clutched securely in his hand.

Outside St. Mary’s, the mysterious man who had contracted Deans’…skills…some four to five months ago waited patiently under the shadows of a large oak tree. Deans handed him the notebook and watched as the man’s bright blue eyes gleamed covetously at the sight of it.

Then the man handed him a briefcase and Deans checked it for the owed money. Satisfied, Deans closed the briefcase and straightened to watch the man slowly walk away from him.

“When are you going to tell me your name?” Deans called after him.

“Never,” the man said over his shoulder, his voice low and indistinct.

“I’ll need to have something to call you,” Deans pressed, leaning against the tree. “What if I am questioned?”

The man paused and turned back to Deans, a slow, malicious smile stretching the glamour that distorted his actual features. “Then call me The Gatherer.”

~*_~

Back at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…
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Harry shifted in the chair, trying and failing to find a comfortable spot so he could fall back to sleep. The remainder of the day had been uneventful and Draco had left him alone. The desired effect, however, was not what Harry had wanted. Harry had found himself bothered and distracted, glancing up every half a minute, expecting Draco to come sauntering back into his study but he never came.

Eventually, Harry became tired and settled in for the night. He had slept a few hours but had woken abruptly in the witching hours of the night and unable to fall back asleep.

Of course, his mind was fixated on Draco and Harry was too tired to try and think of something else. Annoyed, Harry shifted again before throwing off the blanket he had wrapped around himself and stood up.

Harry supposed it wouldn’t hurt to go check on the Malfoy heir and made his way down the hall. Harry paused before Draco’s bedroom door, a battle raging in his mind, before grasping the handle and opening the door.

Harry frowned when he saw Draco’s rigid form standing directly in front of the window, the front of his body and his tilted face pale with the moonlight that streamed through the window.

“Malfoy?” Harry called out but Draco didn’t move.

Harry went and stood in front of him, his blood suddenly cold as he gazed down into Draco’s wide open eyes. His gray irises had all but disappeared and his pupils were black and empty. Harry felt his skin prickle with goose bumps as he stared down into the abyss of Draco’s eyes, knowing that the void led somewhere Harry wasn’t sure he wanted to go.

Harry grasped Draco’s shoulders and shook him. “Malfoy, snap out of it!”
Draco still did not respond and Harry began to worry. “Draco!”

Draco blinked and his pupils shrank to a normal size. Suddenly, Draco shook himself and peered at Harry, confused.

“What?”

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. “Do you always sleepwalk?”

Draco, beginning to shiver, laughed softly. “Not that I can remember; at least, not before I came here.”

“Huh.” Harry placed a hand on the small of Draco’s back and led him to the bed. “Are you cold?”

Draco slid beneath the covers and pressed his cheek into a pillow. “I don’t think so.”

“Then why are you shaking?” Harry asked, standing by the bed still.

“I don’t know.”

Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek for a moment before turning towards the door.

“Potter?”

Harry turned back and Draco gazed up at him, the quivering in his limbs belying the confidence and strength in his gray eyes.

“Stay,” Draco murmured and held the sheets back in invitation.

Harry considered for a moment before moving forward and lying next to the Malfoy heir. Harry stared at the ceiling as Draco shivered beside him for half a moment before turning his face to Draco’s. Draco stared back at him, a simple question behind that perfect grey.

Harry slid his arm beneath Draco’s waist and pulled the shivering Malfoy towards him, wrapping him in a protective, warm embrace and running his fingers soothingly through Draco’s white hair. Slowly, Draco’s shivering subsided and he was lulled to sleep by the comforting touch in his hair.

Soon, as Harry became accustomed to Draco’s forehead pressed into his cheek and a third leg resting comfortably between his, Harry felt his eyes droop; his last thought remembering how much better it felt to fall asleep in someone’s embrace...and in a bed.

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The Risking Whispers

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Risking Whispers~

“It’s a crime…
…You let it happen to me…
…Never mind…
…I let it happen to you…
…I don’t mind…
…There’s nothing left to lose…
…Except my mind…and all the things I wanted…
…How can I believe…?
…When this cloud hangs over me…
…You’re the part of me that I don’t want to see…
…Forget it, forget it, forget it, forget it…
…Just fade away…
…Please let me stay…
…Caught in your way…
…I can live forever here…” ~Forget It, Breaking Benjamin.

The next morning…

As dawn light crept through the branches of the old oak tree outside the bedroom window, Harry fought to stay asleep, a defensive instinct telling him that it would be better to keep his eyes closed and not open them to the image of Draco Malfoy sleeping serenely beside him. However, because perhaps masochism was indeed a common Gryffindor trait, Harry opened his eyes and automatically focused on Draco’s peaceful face.

Harry swallowed against the swell of frustration that tightened in his throat, the more common battle in his mind about how he should feel about his old school nemesis and what he thought he was actually beginning to feel raging with a vengeance. While Harry was almost certain Draco Malfoy would always be the annoying, snobby prick he always took him for at Hogwarts, Harry was beginning to grow accustomed and actually almost endear those traits of the Malfoy heir’s that used to make his blood boil and want to punch Draco in his delicate, sneering face until his knuckles were raw. The things that had made Draco seem utterly despicable and justified Harry and his friends’ loathing of the Slytherin Prince seemed more and more untrue. Well, perhaps not untrue, but simply left to skewed perception. Simply put: Draco Malfoy wasn’t as horrid as Harry had once thought.
And now Harry was sleeping next to him, protecting the Malfoy heir in every way Harry had ever protected a person, and was left wondering why it didn’t feel as wrong as it should.

Draco was on his side, curled towards Harry, his hand resting in the space between them and, while they weren’t touching, it seemed intimate to Harry, as if it were the most comfortable and natural thing to wake up in bed with this man, facing him, and watching the heave and fall of his chest as Draco slept.

Harry gazed on as Draco shifted slightly and a lock of shining white hair fell across his proud yet delicate cheek; and Harry considered, for the thousandth time, actually taking Draco as a lover.

Of course, ethically, it was a terrible option to consider, and morally, worse; however, again, it felt too natural for Harry to ignore. Objectively, Harry understood that the ever-present challenge between them was a part of why he knew taking Draco as a lover would, in the very least, be interesting by default. Also, Harry was beginning to realize that Draco’s unforgiving faith in Harry being a human and not some god of a wizard was something Harry craved, as well as the cruel honesty and their snarky exchanges. And, of course, there was the simple fact that Draco Malfoy encompassed a sexiness that was deep and dangerous and proud. Harry rarely termed men as beautiful, but if he had to, Draco Malfoy would be on the list, as near to the top as expected. It was impossible to fight his automatic reaction to those sharp, laughing gray eyes and those thin, cruel, knowing smiles.

And, then, there was the magic between them. It was a raw energy that seemed to have an intention of its own, drawing them together and connecting them without permission. Magic was something that had always awed Harry; however, he had learned to control it at Hogwarts and use it at his will. This crackling, spiking, ancient magic between them seemed to ebb and flow with its own volition and controlling it only seemed to happen when Harry was completely out of control and working on pure instinct, as he did the night Draco slit his wrist.

Not understanding this thing between them frightened Harry to no end, more so, perhaps, than the growing attraction to the pale, snobby Slytherin Prince he had practiced loathing for years.

Yet, the more Harry fought it, the more surrendering to it seemed opportune; even if Harry knew Draco Malfoy was playing his own game.

The game…Harry wasn’t exactly sure what it detailed, but he did recognize the excitement in Draco’s eyes when they blazed with rebellion against his heritage. Harry was certain that Draco Malfoy lived and breathed with the sole purpose to aggravate *someone*, and, at the time being, Draco’s vendetta still seemed to be centered around the lies he had to swallow and become for his heritage and the people and circumstances that led up to his mother’s death. Harry knew that Draco liked the idea of taking the Boy-Who-Lived as a lover because what better way to piss off purebloods and Death Eaters alike in one go? Whatever else Draco had in his head, Harry couldn’t fathom. There was still so much of Draco Malfoy that was still a mystery to Harry.

Harry reached and pushed the lock that whispered against Draco’s check gently to the side and froze when a pair of clear, gray eyes fluttered open and stared back at him, his fingers still hovering above Draco’s cheek.

Draco’s eyes were alert and unwavering as they stared at one another and Harry finally withdrew his hand. Draco’s eyes moved with the motion of Harry’s hand but he remained still, assessing and Harry became nervous.

“Malfoy?” Harry whispered, wondering if this was like the night before when he found Draco staring out the window.
Draco raised a brow. “Yes?”

Feeling foolish, Harry shook his head and made to stand up, unnerved by the intensity of those sharp, gray eyes. Draco reached out and pulled him back down, his mouth curling into a bemused smile.

“It’s early yet,” Draco murmured, the boldness in his eyes becoming more pronounced. “I was just thinking about how you were awake and still here. That’s all.”

Harry didn’t respond, peering across the space between them cautiously as he pulled the pillow under his head again.

Draco’s smile became wider and a flash of perfectly white teeth added to the insufferable charm of his curving mouth, and Harry, watching, knew those teeth were just as sharp as they looked.

“Good morning, Harry,” Draco said and held back a laugh when Harry blinked at the use of his first name.

“Not ‘Potter’ today, is it?”

Draco’s smile became even wider and Harry’s blood began to burn in his veins. “Well, I should think it would be a bit strange now that we’re sleeping together.”

Harry glanced away, that knowing smile sending thoughts echoing madly through his brain.

“Oh, come now, Harry,” Draco murmured facetiously. “Shyness really doesn’t become you.”

Harry looked back at Draco, his green eyes burning holes into the Malfoy heir and his smile faltered and nearly slipped. “You really think we’re so close, Malfoy? Some things are simply physical.” The cruelty in Harry’s voice made Draco flinch but his smile gathered strength.

“True,” Draco whispered. “Some things do have to be earned, I suppose.”

Draco reached and grabbed a handful of Harry’s shirt, pulling him closer. Draco bent his head and pressed a long, feather-light kiss to Harry’s lips before pulling away. Harry leaned in automatically when Draco pulled away and this time Draco did laugh, knowing all too well the effect he was beginning to have on Harry Potter. Scowling, Harry rolled on top of Draco, pressing his leg in between Draco’s, and placing his hands on either side of Draco’s head. Glaring down at Draco and seeing his triumphant expression, Harry realized that he had very much waltzed right into Draco’s trap.

“For Merlin’s sake,” Harry growled. “You have to stop teasing me, Malfoy.”

“Then give me what I want,” Draco replied, his tone not entirely unkind.

“You’re insatiable,” Harry muttered, relaxing his stance and pressing his forehead into Draco’s shoulder. “And I don’t know what you want.”

Whether it was from pity or compassion, the energy around Draco shifted and he wrapped his arms around Harry, who fell against him instantly, and held him, running a hand soothingly in circles on Harry’s back. Finally, Harry surrendered to the comfort and reprieve from their constant mind game Draco had offered Harry and nearly swooned at the relief he felt when he realized he didn’t have to fight in this moment. Inexplicably, Harry’s mind quieted and he relaxed into Draco’s embrace.

“Potter?”
Harry looked up, his eyes tired and defenseless.

Draco dipped his head and pressed his lips against Harry’s, this kiss entirely different. It was…almost sweet; but, then, Malfoy’s are never sweet. Harry kissed back, allowing Draco’s tongue into his mouth and his fingers in his hair. The kiss was slow and searching, their fingers touching every part of one another they could find with their eyes closed, until finally, their fingers locked and they set to memorize the others’ hands. Harry didn’t realize the kiss had ended, so mesmerized was he by the simple, feather-light touches, until Draco hands moved away and cupped Harry’s face.

Harry opened his eyes and looked deep into Draco’s, finding a vulnerable uncertainty there that was like a rare, precious gem.

“I’m ready to answer your questions,” Draco whispers, his voice wavering slightly. “But I cannot promise you that you will like them all or if they will even really help.”

A thousand sarcastic replies flickered through Harry’s mind but every one of them died on Harry’s lips as he realized Draco was quite serious and, more importantly, afraid of Harry’s judgment. Harry nodded and tried to think of all the unanswered questions Harry had had since before he took Draco’s case, none of them forthcoming.

“My mind just went blank,” Harry whispered with an apologetic smile.

Draco traced the line of Harry’s jaw and the curve of his neck with an index finger. “Take your time,” he answered.

Harry closed his eyes, trying not to focus too much on Draco’s touch and how it left a trail of fire burning on his skin, but not have the desire to ask him to stop. When Harry finally opened his eyes, he had his first question.

“How did you know about the Horcruxes and that my scar was the final one?”

Draco brought his hand up and gently pushed the messy jet-black locks away from Harry’s forehead before thoughtfully running the tips of his fingers over the skin that used to bare the lightening bolt scar.

“You, actually,” Draco began. “I overheard you speaking with Granger and Weasley about Horcruxes in sixth year. I did not begin my research on them until after the Dark Lord remarked me and did not realize your scar was the last until I found Regulus Black’s journal in the Malfoy Library and read it through some time after my exile.”

Harry frowned. “Regulus Black’s journal?”

Draco nodded, taking special care to trace the lobe of Harry’s ear before leaning down and pressing a kiss to the sensitive spot behind it. “Black spoke of a pendant Horcrux that shattered the night Voldemort killed your parents. He remade the necklace and stored it in the prepared spot—some cave somewhere…I can’t remember—and he etched his initials into it so that the finder would know it wasn’t real. Then he put the shattered necklace back together and hid it among the Black Fortune, sealing it so it could be opened from the outside. I believe you found it here, yes?”

“Molly did,” Harry answered. “Ron’s mother. So you knew the necklace’s Horcrux was transferred some where the night my parents died because of the journal and that the scar was the new one because…?”

“Because you were alive,” Draco said simply, tracing the lower curve of Harry’s mouth while he waited for Harry’s next question.
“The Time-Turner,” Harry said.

“What about it?”

“How did you find it?” Harry met Draco’s kiss instinctually before settling back to hear Draco’s answer.

“The Room of Requirement,” Draco said before placing another kiss against the hollow of Harry’s throat. “When I discovered the VCE Elixir, I knew I couldn’t complete it in time. I snuck into Hogwarts and the Room showed me what I would need to make the potion. I stole McGonagall’s Time-Turner, went to Asia, and the rest is history.” Draco began to spread his kisses lower, unbuttoning Harry’s shirt as he went.

Harry closed his eyes, trying to concentrate as his blood began to quicken with Draco’s ministries.

“And your will? Why would you give Hermione the library?”

Draco glanced up, incredulous. “I had thought that would be obvious. To anger my relatives and, frankly, because Granger would put those dusty books to good use.”

“And giving Molly Weasley the Malfoy Manor?”

Draco paused and glanced away. “While it would be poetic justice to give the Manor to Blood Traitors simply for the pleasure of knowing how it would affect the Wizarding World to do so, it was mainly because the Weasley’s were the only Pureblood Family that managed to stay a true line without becoming...like me.”

Harry’s eyes softened. “What do you mean, like you?”

“Horrid, wretched, pompous…” Draco shrugged. “And don’t say I’m not. I can be whatever I choose; it is just easier for me to be those things. I am more used to being a Malfoy than otherwise.”

Harry did not answer but ran his fingers softly through Draco’s hair as he continued his small, teasing kisses along Harry’s chest, his mouth seeming to be everywhere at once. Harry thought hard about his next question, wanting to make sure it was worth causing Draco to stop to answer it.

“Why didn’t you tell Snape what you were doing or where you were going?” Harry nearly moaned when Draco lifted his head, the warmth that had spread along Harry skin growing cold with the absence of Draco’s mouth.

Draco chewed on the inside of his cheek, choosing his words carefully. “Because, after my mother died, Severus’ grief seemed heavier than mine. I couldn’t bare it. I had let everyone down and, Merlin save me, I was going to make it right again. And I had to do it on my own.”

When Draco finally met Harry’s gaze, an understanding seemed to leap into the energy between them. That, Harry could relate to. He understood, he really did. And, in that moment, Draco knew he did too.

Harry sat up and initiated a kiss that rivaled any they had shared to date. It wasn’t violent, but it was passionate; it wasn’t sweet, but it was tender, and when Harry pulled back slightly to understand the wetness he felt on Draco’s cheek, he saw the tears streaming silently down Draco’s proud face and tried to catch them as they fell, kissing them away. Then, their kisses were slower, saltier, and more deliberate as they tried to seal the new understanding between them.

A half an hour later, Slightly appeared and took their breakfast order, leaving her master and Harry Potter with a happy smile stretching her face. She, too, noticed the calmer energy between them and
the frictionless silence. Today was going to be a good day.

~*~
~A New Scent~

The following day…

~*~

U.S. Magical Law Enforcement Division, Madison, Wisconsin. Muggle Affairs.

***

Drew Williams met with his partner, Joe Byrne, early that morning—earlier than usual, at least. Williams and Byrne were in the last throes of cleaning up what they had come to affectionately call the ‘British Blunder’ and were hoping that today would mark the last day of IFO—In Field Obliviation—before paperwork and completely wrapping up the case. It was somewhat humorous at first, giving them plenty of material for inane jokes and smirking comments about the British Ministry and how they must train their Aurors to afford such…interesting outcomes. After a week, however, the humor lost its flavor and now they were just tired and very much ready to move on to the next case.

Drew Williams was a young father of two girls and husband to Martha Lane, his sweetheart from Sequoia School for American Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he had graduated a year before her from Faraday House, and had been an Auror for MLED, Ontario, California before transferring to Madison when his first girl was born. At Madison, he had been partnered with Byrne and had worked with him for a full five years now.

Joe Byrne was an older, and much shorter, Auror with an ailing wife, Madame Kate Galeoanne, and no children. Despite a somewhat somber life at home, Byrne maintained a sense of dry humor and steady grounding to their partnership. Williams often wondered if he hadn’t specifically asked for a younger partner to help him keep his mind off of what awaited him when he went home. The younger energy helped Byrne forget the mortality of them all; at least until he clocked out at five to be reminded all over again.

Williams handed Byrne a cup of coffee—black, the way he always drank it—and to a sip of his own—cream, but no sugar—as they peered over their regimen for the day.

After Williams finished reading, he glanced balefully at his watch and then over at his partner. “All we have to do is go over footage, Byrne? Why the hell did we have to be here at 6:30 in the godforsaken morning?”
Byrne sipped at his coffee and peered at Williams over the rim of the Styrofoam cup. “Cause Madame Molta’s happy hour starts at three today, Williams. We finish early; we have more time to celebrate.”

Madame Molta’s was the bar Madison’s MLED’s Aurors always went to after finishing a case. It was bad luck to begin another case without sealing the last one with a schooner of ice cold lager.

Williams paused. “Fair enough,” he said finally with a shrug.

Minutes later, they approached Phil Lackey’s office, one of the very few Aurors in Wisconsin who understood Muggle technology. Entering, Williams and Byrne never failed to be surprised by the piles of *stuff* that littered the office. Muggle machines and contraptions seemed to seep from every corner and crevice of the tiny room. Carefully edging their way into the room, they searched with their eyes for Lackey, afraid to touch anything with their hands.

After nearly a full five minutes of searching for him without avail, Byrne frowned and took a deep breath. “Lackey!” he shouted.

A pile of metal rubble in the corner jumped sharply and a middle-aged man with a shirt that really… didn’t…fit him and pants that were too large emerged. Lackey always looked as if he tried to shave his stubble in the dark because patches of longer facial hair grew in no particular order along his wide jaw. His laughing beady eyes were framed by thick, black framed glasses that had three or four extra spectacles attached to the frame, ready to enhance or detract his vision on a moment’s notice. His head was bald and his skin tanned and smudged with dirt and grease.

All in all, Phil Lackey was a likable fellow. Albeit strange, but that’s what happened when Wizards became obsessed with Muggle artifacts. They sort of…fall off their rocker a bit.

“Phil!” Williams greeted cheerily. “How’s it hangin’?”

Phil smiled solemnly. “A little to the left, actually.”

Byrne coughed as Williams’ face went slack before he blinked and shook himself from a most unwelcome image. “Phil, we need to review the footage taken a week ago at Willow Station.”

“The B and B?”

“No,” Byrne said, shaking his head. “The British Blunder.”

Phil nodded to himself. “The B and B.”

Williams exchanged an exasperated look with Byrne, whose face was the very mask of tolerance, while Lackey dug through a pile of contraptions and pulled out a sort of projector. Then he plugged some wires into some other things and pushed a small, black, rectangular object into a larger, black, rectangular object. Abruptly, Lackey snapped his fingers and the lights went out. Then, pushing a switch, a moving projection began playing on the far screen.

Byrne and Williams watched dispassionately as the crane shot focused in on the young British Wizard wrap himself in a cocoon of magic and worry the Muggles around him into a panic. Soon, Muggle Law Enforcement surrounded the station and the scene unfolded a bit more dramatically. The power surges from the young Wizard caused some static in the footage, disrupting the cleaner images.

Suddenly, Lackey squealed and pointed. “By me! Is that Harry Potter? It is, isn’t it?”
Williams and Byrne exchanged another glance. They had spoken of that at great length. While they had only communicated directly with British Auror Ronald Weasley and the woman from the Ministry of Magic’s Muggle Affairs division, Hermione Granger, they had realized some time later that the man who had walked through the imploding magic around the blond Wizard had, in fact, been the infamous Harry Potter.

They had seen him, of course, but had not recognized him at all. The lightening bolt scar and his trademark round spectacles had been missing and, to top it off, he hadn’t looked at all like a Wizard nor an Auror. It wasn’t until they began filing paperwork with the British did his become noticed and the connection made that the black-haired young man who had saved the blond Wizard and Apparated them away had been The-Boy-Who-Lived.

Even more interestingly, the blond Wizard had been Draco Malfoy, the man who had killed the Dark Lord who had terrorized Europe some few years back and had been in a coma ever since. To be truthful, the whole story seemed a bit fairytale-ish and Byrne didn’t even believe the Malfoy boy to exist until he had seen him with his own eyes at Willow Station.

They had decided that whatever was going on in England with Harry Potter, Draco Malfoy, and the Ministry of Magic must be a-whole-’nother-pickle. Of course, they had wondered why Draco Malfoy would have taken residence in a mental institution in the middle of nowhere Wisconsin in the first place. Even the events that had led up to the spectacle at Willow station had been kept very quiet and left to speculation with the Aurors at MLED, Madison.

“Isn’t it?” Lackey pressed.

Williams nodded before holding out his hand and ordering Lackey to pause the recording. Instantly, the image froze and Byrne stared over at his young partner as Williams squinted at the screen.

“Phil,” Williams said. “Can you zoom in?”

Lackey pressed a few buttons and the image shot forward. When it became focused and clear again, Williams stepped closer, peering at the men that surrounded Harry Potter as the two British Aurors, Anin and Mackle, approached.

“Phil, keep that picture and move it back a few minutes.”

Byrne watched closely as Williams squinted at the screen, the whirring noise of Phil rewinding the recording slowly humming in the background.

“Stop,” Williams said bending forward and pointed at a curly haired, olive-skinned man that had driven Harry Potter to the sight and remained near him all the way until Harry Potter decided to brave the storm of magic that surrounded Draco Malfoy.

“I recognize this man,” Williams whispered.

Byrne studied the man on the screen. The man’s eyes seemed to be everywhere at once whenever no one was looking at him. Byrne didn’t like the way his face changed so often. Byrne had a sinking feeling this case wasn’t quite finished yet. “Who is he, Drew?”

Williams bit his lip. “I can’t remember. I swear, I know him though. And I’m certain he is no Muggle. Did you see his expression when they first arrived? You can tell he’s seen magic before. And look at the way he watches Potter.”

Byrne nodded and took a deep breathe. “Alright. Contact Weimster and Drasin. I want to know his name, what he does, where he lives, and the exact number of freckles he has on his right hand by
lunch time.”
“Yes, sir.”
~*~

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.
***

Harry looked up from a scroll he was studying from behind his desk and smiled as he saw Draco reading quietly in the corner of the study. The past two days had been good.

Good. Harry used to hate the way that word sounded, thinking that nothing could be described so simply. Except now, thinking back at the few short hours between that private moment they shared in Draco’s room and his confession all the way to this moment, Harry knew the best word to use was ‘good’.

Good and quiet. Yet, it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence. They were beginning to feel more comfortable in one another’s presence and filling up the space with words didn’t feel necessary.

“Potter, I can feel your eyes on me. Cut it out.”

Scratch that. Never mind.

Harry grinned and looked back at his scroll. “What do you want for dinner?”

Draco looked up. “Why? Are you cooking?”

“Um,” Harry glanced over at Draco again, his smile light. “I really don’t think you’d want me to.”

Draco snickered and bent back over his book. “Slightly makes a wonderful soufflé.”

“Does she?”

“Mnhmm.”

“Sounds great.”

“You must be tired of reading.”

Harry sighed and rolled up his scroll. “You caught me. I am.”

Draco set his book down and sent one *those* looks towards Harry. “So what do you want to do?”

Harry felt a shiver run down the base of his spine but he matched Draco’s stare boldly and said nothing.

Draco stretched before standing and strolling over to Harry’s desk. Draco placed two hands on the desk and leaned forward. “Would you like me to guess, Potter?”

A slow smile stretched Harry’s lips and he stood as well, coming around the desk and standing behind Draco. Harry wrapped his arms around the Malfoy heir and pressed him full against his body. Draco’s eyes fluttered closed and Harry could actually see Draco’s pulse quicken in the vein of his throat. Harry bent his head and lightly kissed the vein before biting down, not hard enough to draw blood, but just enough to leave a mark. Draco groaned throatily and Harry felt himself harden at the sound.
Harry slid a hand down the flat of Draco’s stomach and grasped one slender hip, pulling Draco closer so he could feel exactly what kind of effect he was having on Harry. Draco rolled his head back onto Harry shoulder and arched his neck, his whole body practically pleading for a kiss. Harry obliged with less control than he had anticipated and a soft growl escaped passed Harry’s throat and disappeared somewhere inside Draco’s mouth as their tongues dueled and sparred.

So much and not enough, Harry abruptly pulled away and placed a small kiss on the back of Draco’s neck before stepping away. “After dinner,” Harry said before leaving the study.

Tantalized, Draco made some indiscernible noise as he whirled around and watched Harry walk from the room. When he heard Harry’s soft laughter echo down the hall and drift back into the study, Draco couldn’t help but smile.

“He’s learning,” Draco murmured wickedly to himself before righting his clothes and following Harry out the door.

Good, indeed.

~*~
Of Mice and Men

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Of Mice and Men~

“Don’t fret, precious; I’m here…
…Step away from the window…
…And go back to sleep…”

Minutes later…
***

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…
~*~

Dinner was quiet as they ate in the kitchen, stealing looks of barely-masked anticipation. Harry knew Draco must be nervous because his usual back-handed innuendos had all but disappeared and the blond Slytherin Prince was unusually silent.

Harry was surprised to find how calm he was despite the inner battle that had raged in him about even considering taking Draco as a lover. Yet, when he had decided the day before, Harry felt languid, the game suddenly turning in his favor. The history of his experience versus Draco’s virginity gave him a sense of control; the upper-hand perhaps. Although, as Harry finished his soufflé—which was delicious, by the way—he was grounded, knowing that he needed to take a care with what the night would bring. Harry would not shatter the fragile trust they had built between them.

After Harry placed his dish in the sink to be cleaned later by Slightly, he turned back to Draco, who was still seated at the kitchen table and pushing his unfinished dinner around on the plate. Walking around the table, Harry picked up Draco’s plate and put in the sink as well. When Draco put his fork down and raised his eyes to Harry’s, Harry couldn’t read the feeling that perfect grey was exuding.

Harry reached out and entwined his fingers with Draco’s and urged him to stand with his eyes. Then, still gently holding Draco’s hand, Harry led them both back upstairs.

***

“Safe from pain and truth and choice…”

U.S. MLED, Madison, Wisconsin. Muggle Affairs…
Byrne glanced up when Williams dropped a file on his desk.

“The man goes by the name Michael Deans,” Williams said and, though his voice was controlled, years of being his partner told Byrne that Williams was livid.

“And that’s bad?”

“Michael Deans is dead,” Williams said through his teeth. “Killed in his second year during a Potions accident at Sequoia’s School for American Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

“The school you went to,” Byrne said with a nod. “But I thought you recognized the guy? Did he go to the same school?”

“Not only did he go to the same school,” Williams said, “he was the student responsible for the accident. His actual name is Maximus Cure. He was expelled and his wand confiscated. I was in my seventh year at the time. That’s how I knew his face.”

Byrne scratched at the stubble on his chin. “Is he using magic?”

Williams dropped another file on his desk and Byrne picked it up, thumbing through it as he listened to his partner speak.

“Nothing on file,” Williams said with a shake of his head. “However, there is a potion called the Inversion Enchantratem that causes the drinker to lose control of his or her magic and it is forced outside the body, separating itself from form. This is what killed Deans. Cure had experimented with the forbidden potion at Sequoia.”

“Is that what happened to Malfoy at Willow Station?”

“So it seems.”

“So it seems’ isn’t the answer I’m looking for, Williams.”

“Yes, Joe, it was. We thought it was a psychological defect. But no, all the evidence points to that potion.”

“Does the potion always kill?”

“No.”

“Explain.”

“It renders the drinker harmless and the magic, transferable. It is extremely harmful to children and can kill as with Deans. It’s illegal not because it’s harmful but because it is a way for someone, even a Muggle, to steal magic.”

“Merlin’s Balls,” Byrne swore.

“My question is,” Williams continued, “how did Cure know that Draco Malfoy would be at St. Mary’s? Why him? Why now?”

Byrne gave Williams a shrewd look. “You think someone hired him.”

“I do.”
Byrne ran a hand through his sparse hair and sighed heavily. “If someone is interested in Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter, that someone is interested in Lord Voldemort’s surviving army. We can’t let that mess from England come onto our soil. Find Cure. I want answers.”

“You got it.”

***

“And all those poisoned devils…
...See? They don’t give a fuck about you…
...Like I do…”

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…

Harry and Draco faced one another in the darkening bedroom. A single candle on the nightstand sent shadows flickering across the room and their faces as they stared at one another.

Harry lifted a hand and ran a finger down the side of Draco’s face. Draco’s eyes fluttered closed and he leaned his cheek into the touch.

“Are you frightened, Malfoy?” Harry whispered, no trace of mockery in his voice whatsoever.

“Oxymoronic,” Draco murmured, turning his face in and placing a kiss on Harry's palm. “Malfoy’s are never frightened.”

“Are you frightened, Draco?” Harry uttered, the syllables slipping passed his lips in a breathy whisper.

Draco opened his eyes and let Harry see the fear in his eyes. “A little.”

Harry closed the space between them and slid his fingers beneath the folds of Draco’s robe, pushing it off and letting the robe pool at their feet. Tenderly, Harry ran his fingers up the length of Draco’s neck and curling them into the blond hair at the base of Draco’s neck. Harry pressed a kiss to Draco’s temple and felt Draco begin to relax against him.

“Don’t be,” Harry murmured.

***

“Count bodies like sheep…
...Count bodies like sheep…”

Fifty-Fourteen Waldemere Way, Madison, Wisconsin…

Maximus Cure, otherwise known as Michael Deans, felt the prickling on his skin of approaching magic before the two Aurors Apparated inside his studio apartment.

Smiling, Cure waved lazily at them and stood from his seat on the couch. “I had expected you sooner,” Cure said. “We have much to discuss, I expect.”

The older, shorter Auror, whose badge marked him as Byrne, stepped forward, his wand raised. “Maximus Cure, you are under arrest for the illegal use of magic, for the attack of Inversion Enchantratem on one John Smith, and suspicion of taking a deceased Wizard’s identity. You have
the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you…”

***

“Count bodies like sheep to the rhythm of the war drum…
…Count bodies like sheep…”

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…
~*~

Undressing one another was a deliberately slow process. Harry took care to kiss every bared part of Draco’s skin as he shed layer after layer of clothing and allowed Draco to dominate his mouth as nimble fingers quickly undid the fixtures of his own robes, shirt and trousers.

Despite their unrushed pace, they were breathless as they stood naked in front of one another, the flickering light of the sole lit candle causing shadows to dance upon their skin as they drank one another in with their eyes.

Harry tried to concentrate on his breathing to control himself as Draco’s eyes roamed over his naked skin, that piercing gray caressing his body with more effect than anyone’s fingers ever had. Hesitantly, Draco lifted his hands and placed them on Harry’s chest, gazing up into Harry’s forest green eyes with a question in his own. Harry placed his hands over Draco’s pressed his touch more firmly onto his skin.

His courage building, Draco ran his hands down the length of Harry’s bared chest and flat stomach and stepped in to kiss Harry full on the mouth as his hands wrapped around Harry’s waist.

Harry groaned when their erections pressed against one another, the feeling electric and sudden, no fabric to bar the sudden spike of arousal between them. Harry growled into the kiss and nearly crushed Draco to him when Draco rocked his hips slightly, pressing closer and tipping his head back to allow Harry more of his mouth. Harry moved away from his lips and began a trail of kisses down the side of Draco’s neck and shoulder and Draco’s hands found themselves tangled in the thick tresses of Harry’s black hair.

Harry bent lower and ran his teeth over a nipple, taking it into his mouth and sucking slightly, eliciting a sharp gasp from the Malfoy heir, a sound the made Harry's blood feel like fire.

Harry’s kisses continued to move lower and Draco’s entire body quivered as his mind tried to process where, exactly, Harry was headed.

Then, Harry was on his knees, his kisses small and sweet on the inside of Draco’s thigh, his cheek brushing against the length of Draco’s erection as it bobbed, aching for more touch. Draco’s fingers clenched painfully in Harry’s hair as he waited for his hot mouth to engulf him; however, Harry continued his small teasing kisses, his eyes raised towards Draco’s upturned face, watching and waiting. Finally, Draco opened his eyes and looked down; only then did Harry turn his face in, keeping his eyes locked on Draco’s, and pressed a tender kiss to the base of Draco’s aching phallus.

Draco shivered, fighting to keep his eyes open and on Harry’s as his mouth moved over, almost reverently, his erection. However, when Harry tongue emerged from that teasing mouth and flicked inside the slit on the head of purpling erection, the muscles in Draco’s neck turned to liquid and his head fell back with a groan.

Draco’s fingers tightened even more painfully in Harry’s hair as he continued to use his tongue and lips in slow, reverent patterns up and down the base of his phallus and Harry was certain Draco
nearly ripped his scalp clean off when he took all of Draco into his mouth in one sudden movement.

The heat of Harry’s mouth was nearly impossible to bear and Draco found a new respect for Harry’s talented tongue as it continued to work around his erection, swirling, sucking, and dancing, the movements reminding Draco of how Harry used to fly in circles around him on the Quidditch Pitch until he was dizzy and thoroughly defeated.

The moans escaping past Draco’s throat was music in Harry’s ears, urging him onward with a growing passion to make the movements of his mouth, tongue, and throat as he took in more and more of Draco’s weeping erection to be perfection. Harry brought a hand up to run his fingers lightly under Draco’s balls, his mind singing with the sound Draco made when he pressed against that sensitive spot behind them, and his other hand ran up Draco’s stomach, the quivering muscles of Draco’s abdomen dancing beneath the flesh of his palm, and then around his waist to grip his hip and hold him steady.

The heat in the pit of Draco’s stomach was becoming unbearable and the muscles of his entire body quivered uncontrollably. Abruptly, with a gasp, Draco’s knees buckled and Harry immediately removed his mouth and caught him. Standing and in three quick strides, Harry had laid Draco on his back among the sheets of the grand four-post bed and resumed his task, the leverage allowing better angles and a faster pace. Knowing Draco was close, Harry gripped the base of Draco’s erection and pumped while working the head lavishly with his lips and tongue, the noises the Slytherin Prince was making beneath his ministries causing his own erection to become excruciatingly hard and impossible to ignore.

Abruptly, Draco’s hips convulsed and he gripped the sheets until his knuckles were white. A sharp cry was Harry’s only other warning before Draco came with hard, short spasms, his semen shooting down Harry’s throat in spurts. Harry swallowed greedily before pulling away and crawling beside Draco to wait for him to calm from the high of his orgasm.

“Are you still frightened, Draco?”

“Oh, yes,” Draco replied hoarsely. Harry could hear the definite smile in his voice.

***

“Go back to sleep!
Go back to sleep!
Count bodies like sheep to the rhythm of the war drums!”

U.S. MLED, Madison, Wisconsin. Muggle Affairs…
~*~

“Do you deny the charges?”

Cure smiled, his handsome face becoming cold and tight with the seeming innocent expression. “Even if I did, I’m sure you people would find a way to find me guilty.”

“Who hired you?”

Cure blinked. He had expected the question eventually; however, not nearly so quickly.

“Who hired you, Cure?” The same question but with more vehemence.

“The Gatherer.”
The younger Auror, Williams, slammed his fist on the table. “No games, Cure. I want to go home to my wife and kids tonight. Give me answers so we can end this.”

Cure pursed his lips. “So sorry to inconvenience you.”

“Cure,” the older Auror warned.

“He never gave me his name,” Cure said with a shrug. “He wore glamour, so he could be anybody. And he was only interested in Draco Malfoy. He called himself The Gatherer.”

***

“Don’t kiss me, don’t touch me, don’t kiss me, don’t touch me…
…Go back to sleep…
…Count bodies like sheep to the rhythm of the war drums…”

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…

~*~

Butterfly kisses on Harry’s cheek told him Draco was wincing at the invasion when he pressed a finger into the Slytherin Prince’s entrance. Harry immediately pulled his finger out and, instead of re-lubricating it, shifted Draco’s legs to hook around his neck. Again, Harry had forgotten that Draco was a virgin, so active had he been in their foreplay thus far. And, again, Harry wanted it to be perfect. So, pushing his own need aside, Harry bent his head between Draco’s legs, lifted his slender hips, and began coaxing Draco’s puckered entrance to relax with his tongue.

“Shit,” Draco swore as Harry laved at his entrance, and rolled his eyes into the back of his head, electricity shooting up his spine. But damn, it felt good.

When Harry pressed a slender digit back into Draco, the Malfoy heir barely noticed it. Harry moved above Draco again and pressed his face into Draco’s shoulder, their breathing labored and their skin slick with sweat. Draco caressed Harry’s back and moaned periodically as Harry worked a finger, then two, and finally three fingers in and out of him, carefully stretching the tight ring of muscle.

Harry smiled against Draco’s shoulder when the body beneath him jolted violently and Draco cried out. Memorizing the angle mentally, Harry removed his fingers and Draco’s cry became one of disappointment. Positioning himself above Draco, Harry gazed down at his lover with passion clouded eyes before bending his head to kiss him slowly.

“Trust me,” Harry whispered against Draco’s mouth.

Draco wrapped his arms around Harry’s neck and pressed his forehead against Harry’s sweat-dampened brow. “I’ve never trusted anyone.”

“Trust me,” Harry repeated, feeling the magic between them become more energized and spike in red and white bolts of electricity around them.

Draco closed his eyes and nodded. The world seemed to come to a stop when Harry pressed his throbbing, impossibly hard phallus in. The magic between became thick and nearly oppressive as Harry continued to slowly press in until he was buried to the hilt. Then, when he pulled out and pushed back in, the dense energy exploded and lights danced and sped around them, flashing, spinning and crashing, faster and faster until they were lost in it. Draco’s shout was swallowed by the magic when Harry hit that spot and drove into it, over and over, losing himself to the energy that was wrapping them in a vortex of exploding magic, crackling, dangerous, passionate, everything white, and gold, and red, and black, and green, and no color at all. They were deaf, hearing their panting
only in their minds, their moans only in their bodies, as the vortex swallowed them and lifted them higher and higher, faster and faster. Too much and not enough. Too much. Draco clutched Harry’s back, holding on against the spinning sensations and biting down on Harry’s shoulder against the dizzying energy that finally exploded into a brilliant expanse of nothing.

Harry and Draco found themselves holding one another tightly, their breath coming in hollow gasps, and bodies spend and uncoiling in exhaustion.

Eyes wide, Harry pulled back slightly and ran a hand through his damp hair. “Fuck me,” he whispered. “What the hell was that?”

Draco blinked as he tried to catch his breath. “It’s not like that every time?”

As Harry shook his head slowly, Draco managed to look very smug indeed.

Too exhausted to begin a row, Harry untangled himself from Draco’s limbs, muttered a quick cleaning spell, and collapsed against the sheets. Harry’s green eyes watched Draco do the same, albeit with a little more care, and smiled when he settled against the pillows and curled in towards Harry.

Slowly the smile faded as Draco shifted, and then shifted again, each time wincing as he tried to find a comfortable position.

“I tried to be careful,” Harry murmured after a while. “I’m not sure what happened towards the end but—“

“Shh, I know,” Draco said, his eyes drooping and his lips curving into a sleepy smile. “I know.”

***

“I’ll be the one to protect you from…
…Your enemies and all your demons…
I’ll be the one to protect you from…
…A world to survive and a voice of reason…”

London, England…
~*~

The Gatherer read the last page of John Smith’s journal twice before tossing it lazily into the fire. The angry flames ate the notebook greedily as they danced in the reflection of The Gatherer’s pale blue eyes.

Soon, the Dark Lord would return. Soon, His army could be rebuilt.

Soon.

***

“I’ll be the one to protect you from…
…Your enemies and your choice’s sun…”

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…
~*~

Harry awoke in the small hours of the morning, his skin prickling with the cold air that washed over
him in harsh gusts. Harry sat up straight, knowing instantly that Draco wasn’t in the bed and saw him standing before the window, the pane open and the curtains fluttering as the cold, night air swept into the room.

Harry immediately hopped off the bed and approached Draco. “Draco!” Harry ordered. “Snap out of it!”

Draco turned, his eyes dark and lifeless, and regarded the black-haired man before him.

Harry took a step back. “Draco?”

Those dark, colorless eyes stared on, dead and hollow and oppressive.

Harry moved forward and backhanded Draco across the face. When Draco’s head snapped back, it was Draco’s eyes, not the dark hollow ones, which regarded Harry with confusion.

“Draco?”

Draco looked around, his limbs beginning to shiver uncontrollably, and finally stepped into Harry arms. Harry led Draco back to the bed and curled under the sheets with him. Tenderly, he pushed stray strands away from Draco’s face and gazed worriedly on as Draco shivered beside him.

“What the hell is happening to you?” Harry whispered.

Draco tried to smile but failed, the muscles around his mouth refusing to work past the shivering.

“What the hell is happening to us?” Draco managed finally.

Harry bit his lip and pulled Draco closer.

“I don’t know.”

***

“One and the same and I’ll isolate you…
…Isolate and save you from yourself…” ~Count Bodies Like Sheep to the Rhythm of the War Drums, A Perfect Circle.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Black Horizon~

“I hope we're not trying to figure out who he is and more figure out who we are.”
—Gwendolyn. 9/11: The Falling Man

The following morning…

Harry watched the pale dawn trickle through the thick curtains in thin beams of light across Draco’s narrow face and had no desire to dispel the lazy grin that had fixed itself on his features as Draco began to stir.

Harry wondered at the overrated nature of color when Draco’s sharp gray eyes focused on him and sent a remembered shudder through his body. If a color so pale around a set of pupils that made black look bright could make Harry’s blood feel hot and burning beneath his skin, would a red rose or a perfect blue sky begin to fade in comparison? Harry was beginning to think so and his smile grew fonder.

Draco smirked back at him. "You're not getting all soft on me now, are you, Harry?"

Harry’s smile turned rueful but he did not respond.

Draco gingerly sat up against the pillows, the sheets slipping down his naked torso to pool around his waist, and ran a hand through his platinum locks.

“Have you figured out what happened last night?” Draco asked as he curved an arm around Harry’s shoulders and pulled him against his chest.

Harry laid his head back, resting it on Draco’s shoulder, and shook his head.

“Something shifted, though,” Draco continued, his voice quiet. “Can you feel it?”

Harry thought of the near two hours he had spent silently waiting for Draco to wake up and felt his heart twist a little—in a pleasant sort of way…like sucking on spicy, sweet cinnamon candy. “Yes, I can feel it.”

Then, as reality is wont to do during pleasant times, memories of the more disturbing part of the night
before thundered through Harry’s critical mind, forcing a terrible frown to replace the good-natured smile.

“I don’t like it when you sleep walk,” Harry said suddenly. “It doesn’t feel right.”

“If only the world revolved around Harry Potter and all that he feels is right,” Draco murmured with a smile in his voice.

“I’m serious,” Harry said, pushing off of the body he leant on and twisting so he could see Draco’s face. “You’re different. It’s hard to breathe when you get like that.”

Draco’s gray eyes darkened. “What do you mean?”

“It’s your eyes,” Harry murmured somberly. “They’re not your eyes.”

~*~

The Ministry of Magic…

***

Ron stifled a yawn as he pulled another stack of paperwork towards him. That’s all it’s been for the past two weeks. Paperwork and then more paperwork.

Ron finally knew how it felt to be the newbie. By rights, he should have endured this already, being one of the youngest Aurors the Ministry had ever employed. Yet, when he was partnered with Harry Potter, his life-long best mate and the Hero of the Wizarding World, he completely forewent the Newbie Harassment—filing everyone else’s paperwork, taking out the trash, being sent on pointless and ridiculous errands, and otherwise being treated like a common House Elf.

Now, Ronald Weasley was sick unto death of paperwork.

Yesterday, at a quarter to five, Ron had seriously considered burning every tree on the planet so that paper would no longer exist to lend a hand to creating paperwork. Luckily, after enduring the slowest fifteen minutes mankind has ever known, the clock struck five and Ron escaped the Ministry with his sanity; thus trees still exist and all is right in the world.

It was Friday and the last day of the two-week suspension. Ron could barely wait to go and celebrate with Hermione and Harry. Ron would be able to see his fiancée at work again, he wouldn’t have to be the red-haired House Elf to Ministry any longer, and Harry could come back to work.

All things considered, Ron mused as he dipped his quill and began writing on the top sheet, Ron was just glad he wasn’t the one who had to live with a slimy Slytherin Brat Prince for two weeks. Ron would choose the accursed paperwork any day.

Ron glanced up when he heard a familiar voice speak a rushed apology amidst a crashing noise across the room. Raising his eyes above the line of cubicles separating him from the Minister of Magic’s office he spotted Hermione and her wild curls rushing towards the office with a letter in her hand.

Hermione rapped on the Minister’s door and turned and met Ron’s bewildered gaze seconds before Scrimgeour admitted her inside, immediately closing the door behind her. Ron slowly stood to his feet and warily made his way towards Scrimgeour’s office, concerned by the frazzled look in his fiancée’s eyes.

Upon reaching Scrimgeour’s door, Ron raised his hand to knock, curious and a little timid, afraid he
would get in trouble for this too, when suddenly the door flew open.

“WEASLEY, GET IN HERE!” Scrimgeour shouted before registering that Ron was merely inches away from him.

Shell-shocked and mildly irritated, Ron wiped the Minister’s spittle from his freckled face and stepped into the office, where his fiancée tried—and failed—to hide her smile.

~*~

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place...

***

Draco’s smile was quiet and secretive as he accepted his plate from Harry, who had insisted on making breakfast. The meal was light—eggs, fruit, and a bit of cheese—yet it was the endearingly forceful way that Harry had taken it upon himself to dismiss Slightly and make their morning meal himself.

Of course, Harry’s words weren’t any less brittle and his glare any less shrewd, but his actions spoke volumes of how much he had softened towards Draco and what their relationship was evolving into seemingly of its own accord. It was as if what had transpired the night before had broken an invisible barrier inside of Harry; that maybe the cage the Boy Who Lived kept himself locked up in was finally open and a gentler side of him was peeking out.

Draco had wondered, for years, what this side of Harry was like and had spent an entire Hogwarts education teeming with jealousy that Granger and Weasley were of the seldom few who had the privilege to experience it.

That being said, Draco’s victory seemed abruptly bittersweet. Draco could never explain to Harry how terrified he had been seconds before Harry had broken his trance. Draco could not find it within himself to break the spell with the frightening news that he had heard Voldemort’s voice mocking him in his mind mere moments before Harry had struck him or of the unbearable pain that blossomed across his back as his limbs began to tremble when his eyes focused on Harry’s concerned face.

Or, Merlin save his soul, the sweet, tantalizing voice belonging to a lone figure standing beside a roaring bonfire that called to him, urging him to go. Go where, Draco wasn’t sure. However, it petrified Draco to think that the closer he became to Harry, the more the mystery around his being thickened.

Draco couldn’t and wouldn’t speak of this to Harry. How could he when his memory was supposed to have the answers and more than apparently didn’t? How could he when the sweet side of Harry Potter was finally being offered to Draco and this new mystery could possibly destroy everything fragile and bittersweet between them? How could he when it was Voldemort’s voice mocking him? Voldemort was supposed to be dead! He was supposed to have destroyed him for good!

Draco had painstakingly planned and executed the assassination of the Dark Lord. He couldn’t have failed.

Was the ghost of Tom Riddle haunting him? Was that his price now that Voldemort’s death somehow didn’t claim his life? Or was there a more terrible price to pay for cheating Prophecy?

“Come back to earth,” Harry said with a rueful smile as he snapped his fingers in front of Draco’s face.

“Hm?”
“Do you like it?” Harry asked slowly as if he were repeating the question.

“It’s truly scrumptious,” Draco replied as he picked up a strawberry and bit into it.

Harry nearly choked on his orange juice at the odd reference to the Muggle film and shook his head.

“What on earth is so funny?” Draco inquired with a quirk of his brow.

“Nothing.” Harry glanced over at Slightly when she popped into the room.

“Mr. Harry Potter sir,” Slightly murmured, “a letter for you, sir.”

Harry nodded. “Let her in.”

Slightly snapped her fingers and Hedwig flew into the dining hall, a letter attached to her leg. The Snowy Owl landed on Harry’s waiting arm and accepted a bit of cheese for her worries. Harry detached the letter, freed it from the envelope, and read it through.

When he was finished, Harry stood to his feet and told Slightly to fetch his Auror’s cloak.

Frowning, Harry met Draco’s gaze.

“What is it?” Draco asked, suddenly feeling very cold.

“It was from the Minister,” Harry said. “I must return at once.”

Draco looked away. “Our two weeks is up, then?”

Harry smiled a little. “I’m still the head of your case.”

Draco nodded. “I’ll see you when you get back.”

Harry accepted his cloak from Slightly when she popped back into the room and threw it on. “Would you like to come with me?”

Startled, Draco raised a brow. “Ah, no. I’ll take you up on that offer when I am significantly less sore, thank you.”

Harry grinned, despite himself, and shrugged. “I did try.”

“I know you did.”

“I’ll be right back,” Harry said after a moment, flashing a charming smile Draco hadn’t known Harry was capable of.

~*~

The Ministry...
***

“He’s back.”

The whispers echoed loudly as Harry made his way through the first level of the Ministry. It surprised him, and would never cease to, that so many would mark his comings and goings and the space of time in between.

Of course, Harry would never let it show and his face remained neutral as he continued down the
halls of staring faces and pointing fingers. By rights, he should be used to it by now.

Finally, Harry reached Scrimgeour’s office and knocked once before the door opened. Inside, Harry permitted himself half a second to ponder why Hermione, Ron, and every Auror that had accompanied them two weeks ago in Wisconsin—Boyle, Nadger, Mackle, and Anin—were in the Minister’s Office waiting for him.

Harry looked over at Scrimgeour, who was seated behind his desk, his hands clasped in front of him, and saluted, waiting for him, or anyone, really, to drop him a bone.

Scrimgeour regarded Harry for a moment before nodding at Hermione.

“Harry, the Americans have closed their Apparatal Borders.”

“They, what?” Harry whirled around and stared hard at Hermione. The last, and only, time in Wizarding History that any country anywhere had closed their Apparatal Borders was when it was confirmed that Lord Voldemort was back from the dead and gathering his army some five years ago.

Anin stepped forward, in his quiet sort of way. “That man at the Muggle station, the one you arrived with—“

“Deans,” Harry said immediately.

“Yes, well, actually, his name is Maximus Cure,” Anin said. “And he was expelled from Sequoia’s School for American Witchcraft and Wizardry in his second year.”

Harry’s mouth fell open seconds before he pressed his lips into a thin line, his green eyes blazing with understanding. “For what?”

“Using the Inversion Enchantratem on another student and thereby causing the child’s death,” Nadger said.

Scrimgeour watched Harry carefully as he took in this information.

“That’s what happened at Willow Station,” Harry said. “Isn’t it?”

Ron nodded solemnly and held Harry’s eye for a long time. Ron had read the report Harry had written about the hours before the accident at Willow Station. They both knew that Draco had only been in that apartment for two days and Deans was present for both of them. In fact, Deans had expressed to Harry that “Smith” had convinced him to make his supper.

Real nice.

Harry took in a deep breath and turned back to the Minister. “Okay, so Deans is not a Muggle and tried to kill Malfoy. Why would the Americans close off the Borders over that?”

Hermione stepped forward. “That’s just it, Harry. The Inversion Enchantratem isn’t designed to kill. It’s designed to separate a wizard from his magic.”

“But Malfoy didn’t—“

“Draco Malfoy had focused so intently on recovering his memories,” Hermione interrupted, “that it was his memories that kept him connected to his magic.”

“Though, I dare say,” Boyle interjected. “The Inversion Enchantratem was working hard to sever the connection. Remember those pulses of energy?”
Harry nodded, still trying to piece the other puzzle together in his mind.

Nadger lifted his chin. “What we have concluded is that something in the Horcrux you share with young Malfoy saved, not only his life, but his magic as well. If you hadn’t acted as you did, Malfoy would really have been a Muggle.”

Harry frowned. “What on Earth would anyone want with Draco’s magic?”

“Cure is a Wizard who cannot use his magic, Potter,” Mackle said. “If he used Malfoy’s, the Americans wouldn’t be able to tell when he was breaking the law.”

“Which all seems a bit less severe than you are all making it out to be,” Harry said quietly. “Why have the Americans closed their Apparatal Borders?”

Scrimgeour smiled approvingly and flicked his wrist to no one in particular.

Ron stepped forward and the severity in his gaze made Harry apprehensive.


Finally, Harry shut his eyes and heaved a sigh. “Merlin, its Death Eaters, isn’t it? The Gatherer is gathering Death Eaters.”

“The Americans think so,” Ron answered. “And so do we.”

Harry nodded and opened his eyes. “Interesting.”

“What is?” Scrimgeour asked, the first thing he had said since Harry had arrived.

“That The Gatherer wouldn’t just call himself the Dark Lord.”

The Aurors present glanced around the office at one another. “Explain,” Anin demanded. “You think You-Know-Who is coming back? Why?”

A darkness fell over Harry’s eyes. “Of course not. Voldemort is dead. My point is that this Gatherer rounding up Death Eaters seems suddenly separate from the assassination of Draco Malfoy. As if it is just on their to-do list. Why would they be re-assembling their army without a Dark Lord? Why now?”

Scrimgeour pointed to Mackle and Anin. “Figuring that out is their job. Nadger and Boyle will be their seconds and in control of civilian distress. Potter, you and Weasley will continue to keep Mr. Malfoy safe. Of course, if there is any information to be had from young Mr. Malfoy, by all means, get it out of him. Granger will continue to monitor the Apparatal Borders. Anything new arises, inform me immediately. Questions?”

Silence.

“Good, now get out of my office.” Scrimgeour sat back in his chair and watched with shrewd eyes as Harry lingered near the door until everyone else had gone.

“Potter?”

“Minister, Voldemort’s not coming back,” Harry said, his eyes blazing with green fire.

“And if He does?”
Harry was silent for a fraction of a second before he smiled grimly. “I’ll take care of it.”

~*~

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place…
***

Severus Snape, his godfather, had warned him against the portrait of Lady Walburga Black, Draco’s great aunt.

And Draco had heeded it. Knowing that stirring up the ghosts of his mother’s line would be less than opportune unless absolutely necessary.

The Black Legacy was long and pure, due to their watchful eyes and merciless, unforgiving ways. The Legacy reached far into history and knowledge that seemed to be lost to mankind, the Black’s knew.

All he needed was a clue. One clue and he could unravel the rest of this mystery himself without disturbing the ghosts of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

One clue.

She would know he was a Blood Traitor. She died long before his birth, but she would know all the same. It is their way, the dead communing with the dead.

His aunt had shown mercy once, the day he was exiled. And if there was anyone in the Black Legacy who had the most right to loathe Draco Malfoy, it was Bellatrix LeStrange.

Perhaps, just perhaps, Lady Black would show mercy too.

All he needed was one clue.

Just one.

Draco pulled back the curtain and regarded the portrait.

~*~
A Secret Prophecy

Later that afternoon…

~*~

“Narcissa’s boy.”

Draco wasn’t altogether certain what he expected the woman to do or say when he pulled back the heavy curtain. Scream, perhaps, as she was rumored to do. His godfather had told him of the incoherent screeches she would afford the Blood Traitors that had taken over her household at Sirius Black’s behest and was surprised at the heavy calm that surrounded her being.

Walburga Black wore a heavy laced Victorian gown, the colors dark and somber, and an exquisite cameo fixed at her throat. The tilt of her chin was cultured, her smile quiet but not pleasant, and her hands delicately laid over one another atop her lap as she sat in a beautiful Henry IV chair, the gilded base elegant but not overbearing. Purebloods always knew exactly how to arrange their surroundings to accentuate their own majesty and never over-shout it.

“My lady,” Draco murmured respectfully, affording her a courtly bow before straightening, his hands clasped tightly behind him.

“The Lion whispers to me of a growing closeness between you and the Blood Traitor that has inherited my estate,” Lady Black said, her eyes cool and piercing.

“Yes, my lady,” Draco replied, years of training keeping his voice level and his body calm even at the revelation that the painting of the lion in his room had been gossiping to his great aunt.

“It is true then?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“A passing dalliance, no doubt?”

Draco wondered where this was going. “Of course, my lady.”

“And you will break his heart, then?”
Draco relaxed his features. “Certainly, my lady.”

“I see.” Lady Walburga Black turned her face away, suddenly looking younger. She almost seemed disappointed.

Minutes passed and Draco waited for Lady Black to say something else. Finally, after nearly ten minutes of watching Walburga Black stare off into the distance, Draco could no longer contain himself.

“Lady,” Draco said, “Does my mother visit you?”

“She speaks to me,” Lady Black murmured, her piercing gaze returning to rest on Draco’s upturned face. “I am but a painting, dear boy, but I can hear her.”

“Lady, please,” Draco said, trying not to sound too earnest. “How fares my mother?”

Lady Black’s eyes softened into something more akin to sadness. “She grieves for you.”

Those four words hit Draco like a slap in the face and he stepped back. “Pardon?”

“Narcissa grieves for you, boy,” Lady Black repeated, the sadness gone and replaced by something shielded and cruel. “Her son will pass soon…in accordance with the Prophecy.”

Draco frowned. “What Prophecy?”

Lady Walburga Black’s eyes blazed, as if his words were a direct insult to her. “Insolent boy! The Host doesn’t know his own Prophecy?”

“Forgive me, my lady,” Draco said, giving her another bow, one lower and apologetic. “I have been asleep for many years.” His heart raced and his blood beat in his ears as he waited for Lady Black’s next words.

“A Pact is made on the Quest for Immortality…a God of Darkness relinquishes the Seven Keys…a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb…a Child born to Heal severed Lines…a Marking of the Near-Man…when the Dark Lord perishes at the Hands of Love half-remembered…The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night…a Sacrifice is laid on the Alter of Justice…and Purity wears the Face of Maul…Darkness reigns over the Land of Men…so be quiet Child…for the Black Tulpa fears only the Eighth Key.”

~*~

The Ministry…

***

“So…do you want to take Malfoy in shifts now?”

“What?!” Harry exclaimed a little too loudly, his head jerking up to look at Ron incredulous.

Ron spread his hands. “Well, I just figured you’d want a little time off with the little git. Two weeks is a long time.”

Harry forced a laugh and ran a hand through his jet-black hair. “No, its not nearly as bad as all that. I need you to be my eyes and ears here at the Ministry, Ron. I’ll inform the minute anything comes up.”

“All right,” Ron said, not even slightly attached to the idea of babysitting Malfoy when he could be
“spending quality time with his fiancée. “Even if you are a glutton for punishment.”

“If you only knew. How is Hermione?”

Ron leant over his desk and plucked a paperclip to fasten a set of papers. “Oh, she’s fine.”

“She still vexed with me?”

Ron shook his head. “You should know by know that staying angry at you is one of the hardest things she can do.”

“True,” Harry said with a smile as he sat on the edge of Ron’s desk.

“Are you sure Malfoy’ll stay put if you leave him alone for this long? How do you know he won’t take off or something?”

Harry hesitated before answering, knowing he couldn’t possible tell Ron he was shagging him. “I trust him.”

“You’re completely mental.”

“I am not.”

“Mad. Utterly, mate.”

“Ron…”

~*~

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place...

***

Lady Walburg Black would speak no more on the subject and left her portrait, leaving Draco trembling in the middle of the hall.

His mind was blank save for the words of the Prophecy ringing through his mind. He was shocked, realizing, even as Lady Black was uttering the words, that they were the same that Voldemort had mocked him with the night before.

Soon, his trembling became violent and his anger grew. Shouting, Draco picked up a chair and threw it across the hall. Seconds later, the entire hall was a mess as Draco tried to spend his rage by breaking and hurling anything within reach.

When there was nothing left to break, Draco collapsed to his knees and wept. His tears were angry, defiant at what that Prophecy meant, knowing, as he had always suspected, that he was not merely born, he was bred.

He was the fulfillment of a promise, the host. He would become the one thing that he had fought to destroy. The Dark Lord.

Unless…unless he could find the Eighth Key.

The Eighth Key.

Abruptly, Draco’s tears vanished and he set his chin. That’s it, then.
He would have to decipher the Prophecy, find the Eighth Key, and figure out a way to stop this whole thing before it took him over.

No use crying. Draco stood to his feet and called Slightly to clean up the hall. He had no idea how long he had…but if he ran out of time, he would make sure Harry Potter killed him.

Therefore, he would have to keep Harry close and thinking everything was fine. He needed Harry’s resources and protection.

Draco smiled, knowing that Harry’s hate for evil would make him the perfect candidate to end it all of things went astray.

It was perfect, in a strange sort of way. Bad faith.

~*~

Number Twelve Grimmauld Place...

***

Harry hung up his cloak in the hall and strolled quickly to the staircase. “Malfoy!” he called but received no answer.

Harry jogged up the steps, taking two or three at a time. He found Draco in the Study up to his elbows in scrolls and dusty books.

“Looking for something?” Harry asked when he entered the room.

Draco sent him a guarded look but shook his head as he stood to his feet. “No, just humoring myself.”

“Ah.” Harry walked over to his desk and picked up a file, flipping through the pages intently.

Draco stood to the side and waited patiently.

Finally, Harry pulled a photograph from the file a lifted it up. “Do you remember this man?”

Draco raised a brow. “Of course I do. He was my Social Worker, Michael Deans.”

“He was hired to steal your magic and kill you.”

“Ah.” Harry walked over to his desk and picked up a file, flipping through the pages intently.

Draco snorted. “He failed then, didn’t he?”

“Miserably,” Harry conceded with a grin. Harry put the file away and went to stand before Draco. “Here’s the fun part. The American Aurors have Cure in custody and claim that he was hired by someone calling himself The Gatherer.”

There are many skills necessary to tell and maintain the perfect lie. Some would even claim it to be a science. Severus Snape claimed as much. His ability to convincingly lie kept him alive when he had the most dangerous role in the Order of the Phoenix as a double spy. Severus passed down the secrets to his godson, teaching him how to maintain an even heartbeat, to control the iris dilation in his eyes, and school his features into one of mild interest but complete innocence. Severus had taught him to look up and to the left as if trying to recollect some vital fraction of retainable memory that
may, even in the slightest, be helpful, and then look the opposite person directly in the eye whenever actually delivering the lie. The eye contact is never to convince the recipient of honesty, it is always to challenge the recipient to disqualifying their claim. Most are ashamed of eye contact and the challenge is often misinterpreted as confidence.

And so, when Harry asked Draco if the name “The Gatherer” meant anything to him, Draco’s reply was even and convincing; the perfect delivery of a lie. And Draco’s heart twisted guiltily. It’s for the best, he reminded himself.

“And what is this person gathering,” Draco asked.

“Death Eaters, we think,” Harry replied, turning away and pouring himself a glass of water.

“Death Eaters to kill me?”

“A few think so.”

“But not you,” Draco stated.

Harry shook his head and took a sip of water. “I’m beginning to think there’s more to it. I was one of three who devised the plan to send you to America. That someone knew you were there outside of Ron, Hermione, and I must mean that there is a spy inside the Ministry. Why spend so much time and effort turning you into a Muggle?”

Draco looked suddenly as if he had eaten a bug. “I beg your pardon?”

“Oh, right, Cure poisoned you with the Inversion Echantratem in an effort to steal your magic.”


“Before today, neither had I,” Harry replied. “Well, again, it just all seems so much more involved for it to be just an attempt to assassinate you.”

“I agree,” Draco murmured, inclining his head a little.

“And the Americans have closed their Apparatal Borders.”

Draco was silent for a moment. “That ought to keep the world nice and calm.”

“Do you think they overreacted?”

“I don’t know enough about anything to say.”

“You seem awfully calm.”

Draco’s eyes were blazing when they met Harry’s. “What do you want me to do? Dance a jig or tear my hair out in fear?”

“I just thought your interest would be slightly more piqued at the notion that someone is organizing the surviving Death Eaters into an army,” Harry said slowly, wondering why Draco seemed angry all of a sudden.

Draco shrugged. “Am I not safe here with you, oh hero?”

“It’s not about you, Malfy. It’s the possibility that these Death Eaters think their Dark Lord is—“
“Don’t you fucking say it,” Draco interrupted heatedly. “Voldemort is dead. I killed him. He is never coming back.”

“What has gotten into you?” Harry asked, reaching out a hand that Draco brushed away.

Draco paced for a moment, trying to reign in his temper. He must have less time than he thought. It was all happening way too fast.

When he finally looked back at Harry, his heart twisted again at the look behind Harry’s brave, green eyes.

“I wish to see Pansy.”

“I don’t think—“

“I am not asking for your permission, Harry,” Draco said, his voice barely above a whisper. “I’m asking for your help. I wish to see Pansy.”

Draco watched Harry take his words like blows and a confused, helpless look crept into that true green of his eyes before something stony and hard replaced it.

“Fine, I can arrange that,” Harry said, turning to leave the study. “We’ll leave at dawn.”

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Understanding Pansy~


“We are all angels with a single wing. It is only when we embrace one another that we can truly fly.” ~Anonymous, 1999. Graffiti painting in Korea Town, CA.

The next morning…

~*~

By ten o’clock, Harry was ready to strangle one Draco Malfoy.

Harry had risen early, before the sun had come up, and Apparated to the Ministry to get the necessary permission to move Draco. Even with the early start, Harry had been in high spirits.

Of course, Draco would never apologize for something as small as hurting Harry’s feelings, but, in his own way, Harry felt Draco did so silently when the blond had urged him to return to the bed they shared the night before, holding him sweetly until he relented. It made Harry smile, even as Scrimgeour lectured him on the necessity to take every precaution if Malfoy was insisting on visiting an old family friend, that Draco would feel the need to do…something to ease the near stifling tension that had sprung up between them the instant Pansy Parkinson’s name was mentioned.

Although, in all honesty, Harry had no real right to be upset that Draco would choose to confide his secret distress to his ex-fiancée. And Harry knew something was bothering Draco, it swam like murky water behind his gray eyes. Harry supposed it was a Pureblood thing. Perhaps whatever it was that upset Draco was only something that Pansy would understand. Or…maybe it was that Draco knew Harry wouldn’t.

Either way, after bartering Scrimgeour for the Portkey that would transfer them directly to the Parkinson estate Pansy and Pandora now lived and sending the Parkinson women an owl alerting them to a visit, Harry had cooled his temper and re-established his patience, knowing that anything that would happen, would happen, and that Harry could expect nothing less than the continual ‘touch-and-go’ until this whole mess was sorted out.

However, upon returning to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, Harry discovered Draco standing by the door with two brooms, insisting that they fly to the Parkinson estate.
“I haven’t been outside in two weeks, Potter,” Draco had said, setting his chin in that insufferable way. “I am going to milk it for everything its worth.”

Instantly, Harry’s black mood slid back into place and, with an exasperated sigh, he Apparated back to the Ministry, bartered once again with the Minister of Magic, had to endure yet another lecture, and returned to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place fairly steaming.

Wisely, Draco did not speak a word to the irritated young Auror until they were astride their brooms and flying smoothly through the air towards the countryside.

“Did you eat breakfast?”

Harry shot Draco a single baleful look before resuming his glower in the direction they were headed.

Pursing his lips, Draco leaned forward on his broom and twisted upside down, edging over until he was flying directly beneath Harry. “Look, Potter,” Draco said slyly, carefully locking his ankles around his broom and releasing his hands from the neck of the broom until he dangled beneath Harry, upside down, by his knees. “No hands.”

“Knock it off, Malfoy,” Harry muttered, trying not to grin. Truly, it was probably the funniest thing he had ever seen Draco do.

“Race me,” Draco demanded, pulling himself up and twisting again so that he flew parallel to Harry’s broom. Below them, the city began to shrink smaller and smaller and the clouds darted between them.

Harry snorted. “It won’t be much of a race.”

Draco sighed. “All right, I’ll be fair. You can have a head start.”

“Please; you haven’t flown in nearly three years.”

“Natural talent never dies, Potter.”

Harry laughed, feeling his terrible mood begin to recede. “You’re such a prat. Try to keep up.”

Suddenly, Harry leaned in and his broom surged forward. With a knowing smile, Draco followed, using every trick he knew just to keep the pace Harry was setting. They spiraled, twisted, dodged, and dropped, the race becoming more and more like a Seeker competition as the morning faded to midday around them. The air was cool on their faces and the wind just on the one side of harsh, but on they flew; relishing in their competition, their need to be first, their love for flying, and all the rest.

At one point, Harry paused in the air, glancing around him to gather his bearings. Draco reared in next to him, his impeccable hair wild and askew, his cheeks rosy and his eyes bright and alive. Finally spotting the Parkinson Manor, Harry grinned once at Draco before bending his angle on the broom and plummeting towards the ground in a sheer drop.

“Bloody show off,” Draco muttered, rolling his eyes, before following suit…albeit, at a much less severe angle.

~*~

Draco’s senses were overwhelmed the instant they stepped inside the manor. As they followed their House Elf guide—a likable little fellow with bright green eyes and trimmed ear hair—through the main hall, Draco was buffeted with memories of his own home and, Merlin, the way it smelled
during times of mourning.

Around every corner, there were sticks of incense, heavy with the scent of frankincense and myrrh, lit and smoking, candles burning brightly, and the draperies black and deep, deep purple velvet, causing the trademark Parkinson gilded furnishings to bask in a wallowing, somber glow. The figures in the tall paintings of the main hall gazed down at them sternly, watching their passing with alert and thoughtful eyes. Draco could feel the grief in this place seeping into his skin and, glancing sidelong at Harry, he knew the young Auror was oblivious to it.

Yet, it felt like coming home.

The likable, green-eyed House Elf instructed them to wait inside a reserved sitting room near the back end of the East Wing, furnished in earthy tones of green and gold, and Draco wasted no time to find a gilded mirror and fix his wind blown hair. Harry strolled over to a small table and poured himself a cup of tea, hoping it would warm him from the chill of the wet spring outside and snickering a little at Draco’s vanity.

Minutes passed as they waited. Eventually, Harry frowned and became irritated. Pandora had never had him wait this long. Turning towards the door, Harry froze when he heard the sound of glass shattering and the distinct hiss of a woman’s gasp.

In the doorway, the light from the hall behind her illuminating her frame, stood Pansy Parkinson, her blue-black hair coiled at her neck and twisted into a loose caul and her dark eyes as wide as saucers. Guiltily, Harry glanced towards Draco, knowing that in the letter he had sent the Parkinson’s, alerting them to their visit, he had not specified his guest. As far as Pansy knew, prior to this moment, her ex-fiancée was still in a coma at St. Mungo’s.

Draco did not return the look and gazed steadily at Pansy, waiting for her to process through her shock. He knew there was an enormous quantity of things that could be said, but some things should be left to the silence.


Draco’s severe gray eyes softened a fraction and he inclined his head. “Hello, Pansy. You look well.”

In three long strides so quick, Harry barely saw her move, Pansy was in front of the Slytherin Prince and hitting him so hard across the face the sound reverberated through the room with a loud echo.

Shocked, Harry watched Pansy step back and observe Draco wipe the blood from his mouth with a knuckle, her intense glare like dark fire.

“You scared me to death!” Pansy hissed. “Why would you do something so stupid?”

Draco opened his mouth to reply but Pansy struck him again with equal force. Sighing, Draco turned his face back to her, his eyes stern and unrepentant, silently musing on how one week could have him being struck in face so frequently, as she continued to glare. Pansy raised her hand again, but this time Draco caught the blow by her wrist. A battle of wills ensued and on they stared, seemingly forever.

Then, without warning, Pansy Parkinson burst into tears and collapsed into Draco’s embrace. Draco held her tightly and stared straight ahead of him, the pain in his eyes wrenching.

Pandora, whom Harry had not seen enter the room, quietly touched Harry’s elbow and led him into
the hall. Draco did not once meet Harry’s gaze.

Silently, Pandora closed the doors behind her.

~*~

The Gatherer was cold and wet as pale eyes watched the contact return to the Ministry of Magic, but did not feel it. The Gatherer could tell the spy thought it would be disconcerting to know their target was on the move. But, no.

Every mouse should have the chance to at least try and find the cheese.

Their chase hadn’t even really begun. At least not on The Gatherer’s part.

The Dark One, however, was already making His move.

~*~

Draco watched, half-interested, while the likable little green-eyed fellow of a House Elf popped in and swept up the broken glass of Pansy’s tea cup as the young woman continued to sob and tremble in his arms. His heart twisted, knowing that her relief was so bitter, it was nearly unbearable.

Draco knew he had been a coward towards his only two…somewhat friends. Not friends in the fashion one would usually consider, but, for a Pureblood Prince, they were the best money could by. It just happened that three of them grew fond of one another.

That is to say, Draco Malfoy, Blaise Zabini and Pansy Parkinson.

A coward indeed, Draco thought miserably as a shaking Pansy clung to the folds of his robes and buried her face in his neck. He had not confided in them his plan. He had simply disappeared, knowing that they both would persuade their families to hold him in the sanctuary of their homes had he asked…knowing that they would fear him dead and grieve him when he was gone. He had left for Asia without a note nor an owl.

And upon his return, Draco knew with utter certainty that he would not have to pay for the mistakes of his severed friendships because he would die a martyr and never, ever have to see the look of betrayal and pain on their faces.

Draco Malfoy believed himself to be an iconic fool.

Draco had avoided the subject of Pansy Parkinson since the second his memories returned to him for this very reason. And Blaise…

Well, Merlin save him if Blaise Zabini held a grudge.

Though, Draco mused as Pansy’s snifflles began to quiet and she relaxed her death’s grip on his robes, Blaise was of the loyal sort. And he was also of the eccentric sort, which might have a wild card hidden in there somewhere.

Perhaps that wild card may one day save their friendship. Then again, maybe Draco would never know.

Pansy gently stepped away, her eyes lowered, and dabbed at her face with a handkerchief until her tears were fully dried.

Then…she smiled at Draco in a quiet, muted fashion. “You’re alive,” she murmured.
“I am,” Draco said, and his heart nearly broke all over again.

“For how long this time?” Pansy’s voice was soft but her eyes were hard as stone. Pansy Parkinson can never be accused of being weak.

Draco smiled sadly, but to Pansy, it was the sweetest thing she had seen in many years. “You can never rid yourself of me, Pansy. I imagine that is what your tears are about.”

“You’re lying to me,” Pansy stated, her whole body suddenly becoming alert. Pansy peered at Draco through her dark, thick lashes. “You know I can always tell, Draco.”

“That’s why I’m here, actually,” Draco said quietly, holding her gaze in a way only Draco Malfoy could. “I need to tell you something.”

~*~

Pandora watched Harry feign calm for many minutes but caught his uneasy glances towards the door. Smiling in her alluring way, Pandora conjured a fire in a fireplace near the end of the hall and invited Harry to sit with her beside it.

Conceding silently, Harry continued to seem distracted by whatever thoughts raced through his head and around again. Pandora could see the shadows of those thoughts flickering behind the young Auror’s bright green eyes. Such lovely eyes.

“He’s smitten you already, has he?” Pandora said, breaking the silence with her melodious voice. Harry snapped his head towards her, startled nearly out of his skin. “Excuse me?”

“Really,” Pandora said, leaning gracefully back into her seat, her dark blue eyes luminous and knowing. “It isn’t so surprising. You’ve been fascinated by him since he saved your life.”

Harry’s lips flattened into a straight line before he answered. “Pandora, don’t go opening your box of tricks. I’m trying to keep him alive.”

Pandora laughed, the sound like tinkling crystal. “No, dear boy. This isn’t about my box of tricks, is it?”

Confusion flickered through Harry’s bright beryl eyes and Pandora leaned forward.

“Tell me,” Pandora said in a throaty whisper, her smile deep and mysterious. “Has Draco been cruel?”

~*~

“Well, let’s see it then.”

“See what?”

“The Mark the Dark Lord branded your spine with,” Pansy said with an impatient tap of her foot.

“Why would that be important?” Draco asked as he slipped from his flying robes and set them to the side.

“…The Marking of the Near-Man…”” Pansy quoted. “Maybe there is a reason why the Dark Lord had you Marked so young. Also, you said it hurts when you sleep walk and you can still see it when you look in the mirror.”
“Why would me seeing it be strange?” Draco asked as he began to unbutton his shirt.

“The Dark Marks have faded, Draco,” Pansy said in a quiet voice. “When Voldemort died, when you killed him, the Dark Marks on Death Eaters began to disappear. That’s why it’s so hard to catch them all.”

“Really?”

“Potter never told you?”

“Oh, he may have,” Draco said with a slight smile as he shrugged out of his shirt and stood before Pansy bare-chested. “He says many things.”

“Are you fond of him now?” Pansy asked with forced nonchalance as she circled around Draco and observed his back.

“Would it matter to you if I was?” Draco inquired as Pansy pressed her cool fingertips between his shoulder blades and traced the tattoo with them softly.

“It shouldn’t, should it?” Pansy replied.

“I refuse to be the person to tell you how to feel, Pansy,” Draco said as Pansy removed her fingers and wrote something down on a bit of parchment. “But I stand by what I said to you at Hogwarts.”

Draco turned around and looked at Pansy, who refused to meet his gaze and stared unseeing at the parchment in her hands. “I will always carry a part of your heart,” Pansy recollected, her head bent and her lashes sweeping low on her cheek. “But I can never have the whole of it.”

Moments passed in silence before she finally looked back at Draco. Surprisingly, her eyes were soft but dry, the epitome of the brave face she always wore for him. But her voice, when she spoke, was hard and unwavering.

“Your honesty is crueler than your lies, Draco Malfoy,” Pansy said. “I almost pity the one you do give your heart to. You have yet to relinquish your hold on mine. Here.” Pansy handed the parchment over Draco. Draco took it and his eyes swept over the page.

Runes. Old runes like none he had ever encountered were written on the scroll. “What is this?” Draco demanded.

“They run the length of the coiling serpent,” Pansy explained before singling out some other markings. “These runes here are inside the eye sockets of the skull. I don’t recognize the markings, but I do know no one else’s Dark Mark had these.”

“You’re certain?”

“Yes, I am.”

A knock sounded and they turned in time to see Pandora pull open the gilded doors. She smiled sweetly and asked if Draco would stay for dinner.

Draco did not answer right away. His arm was frozen halfway on its journey to retrieve his shirt and his eyes were locked with two icy green orbs belonging to one Harry Potter who stood some ten feet behind Pansy’s aunt.

Draco cursed himself silently, knowing Harry would come to a million conclusions for why he was
without a shirt while alone with Pansy Parkinson before allowing him to explain. Draco took a deep
breath and finished collecting and putting back on his clothes. It didn’t matter.

It wouldn’t, would it?

But then, that’s what Draco told himself about Blaise and Pansy before he left for Asia.

“No”, Draco said as he righted his robes around his shoulders. “Potter and I must pay a visit to
Hogwarts before our return.”

The surprised look on Harry’s face was actually quite worth the sour mood his old school rival
turned sometimes-lover immediately slipped into; at least, in Draco perspective.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Nostalgia, An Even Darker Journey~

“A further major way to distinguish different memory functions is whether the content to be remembered is in the past, retrospective memory, or whether the content is to be remembered in the future, prospective memory. Thus, retrospective memory as a category includes semantic memory and episodic/autobiographical memory. In contrast, prospective memory is memory for future intentions, or remembering to remember (Winograd, 1988).”

Shortly after…

The flight to Hogwarts was quiet. Very quiet.

Wisely, Draco let Harry fume. Well, wise as Draco would consider it.

If he instigated yet another argument with Harry by trying to explain, Draco knew he might end up telling him about the Prophecy and the runes and the whispers of Lord-fucking-Voldemort in his ear. Draco couldn’t think of a single thing worse than doing that and, in his mind’s eye, could already see that cold, hateful Harry Potter that he had loathed for years slide back into place. Something twisted inside Draco’s stomach when he thought of that and he shuddered as they neared the castle. Despite himself, Draco was quickly becoming attached to the young Auror.

In fact, a part of him was less interested in finding the Eighth Key for his own sake and more interested in finding it so the one flying on his left would never be disgusted with him again. Draco didn’t like to think of what that meant or even what Harry less-than-subtle but silent jealousy meant either because protecting him with this lie could permanently sever whatever they may have had if the present situation had not made itself known.

Draco was more than aware of the consequences his actions with Harry could have but could not fathom another way. Or, rather, another way where his bloody pride wasn’t at stake.

And no one could claim that Draco Malfoy didn’t have his pride.

He had killed Voldemort once, he could stop him again. He could do it and he did not have to endanger anyone else while doing so.

At least, of course, this is what Draco told himself to keep the guilt at bay; though, the burning in his
lightening bolt scar had returned and ached the entirety of their flight to Hogwarts.

Silently, Harry landed outside of Hogwarts’ Northern Gate and did not glance behind his rigid shoulder as Draco followed suit behind him. The air was thick between them and the Horcrux they shared continued to burn and tingle as they made their way to the castle on foot. Upon reaching the castle’s entrance, Harry hung back as Draco entered.

Briefly, Draco closed his eyes and saw the Quidditch Pitch burning in Harry’s mind. Nodding, he too continued forward without looking back as Harry headed to the Pitch. Draco made his way through the castle, avoiding students so as not to be recognized, and descended into the Dungeon where he found Severus returning to his office from a Potions class.

Severus pursed his lips and regarded his godson with disdain. “Have you terrorized Potter so fully that you are already escaping his establishment?”

Draco’s smile didn’t quite reach his eyes and he shrugged minutely, picking up the picture of his mother that Severus kept on his desk, glancing at it briefly, and set it down again. “Actually, he’s headed for the Quidditch Pitch.”

“I see.”

“Do you?” Draco walked the expanse of his godfather’s office and studied the books lining the far wall.

“Draco, what are you looking for?” Severus asked directly, in absolutely no mood for his godson’s games.

“A book.”

“I can see that. What book?”


“Precisely,” Draco said, turning to face his godfather with a false smile.

Severus regarded Draco suspiciously. “What do you want with the Restricted Section?”

“I’m studying runes.”

Severus snorted. “Runes do not exactly qualify for the Restricted Section, Draco. No more of this. What are you doing here?”

Draco pointed an accusatory finger at the Hogwarts Potions master. “This is exactly why I do not bother being honest. No one ever believes me. I’m look for certain runes and their meaning. I need the key.”

“What runes?” Severus demanded, holding his ground. Severus never doubted or mistrusted Draco, but his godson was, in fact, a Slytherin Prince. Better to err on the side of caution with this one.

Draco made a show of sighing. “I promise I’ll show you the runes only once I am ready to leave.”

“For time.” It wasn’t a question. They both knew how their minds worked.

“What’s a five minute advance to you, godfather?” Draco asked with deceiving softness. “You are
awfully clever.”

Severus rolled his eyes and pulled a key from his desk drawer. Then, the Potions master jotted a note onto a small sheet of parchment and closed the message with his personal seal before handing both to Draco.

“Be sure I do not regret this, Draco,” Severus said in that deadly quiet of his voice. “It is too soon for you to be starting trouble already.”

Draco merely smiled and left, a shadow as dark as the one trailing his feet swimming behind his eyes.

~*~

Outside, letting the cool breeze ruffle his flying robes and sift through his messy hair, Harry Potter stood on the Quidditch Pitch and lifted his face to the sky. In his hand he held the Golden Snitch, whom Madame Hooch had entrusted to him for a bit of therapeutic flying.

Of course, the look Madame Hooch had given Harry had been on a certain side of dubious when he had arrived for the Snitch, but then, being Harry Potter did have its perks and she handed the Quidditch Case over to him without any interfering questions.

Harry took in a deep breath, trying to dispel any thoughts of Draco and the unwarranted feelings of frustration that had surfaced sense the day before, only to be heightened by the sight of him and Pansy so *comfortable* with one another.

And what was more, Harry’s signature temper was beginning to slip past its restraints at suddenly being just someone along for the ride as Draco went on his own little mission of secrets and whispers. A part of him felt used, another part felt ridiculous for feeling so, and the rest shook with frustration.

After all, Harry had known it would mean nothing but trouble to sleep with Draco Malfoy. He had known it.

What he hadn’t expected, however, was that it would be him, not Draco, who would have the emotional attachment. Harry had really thought that it would be like Cruent and purely physical consent to a heightened sensation for an hour two, not amazing sex with feelings and tenderness thrown into the messy mix. Harry hadn’t been prepared for that. And now Draco seemed to be changing yet again right before his eyes. It almost seemed he was turning back into the Malfoy that Harry had always took him for.

Why would he do that?

Harry opened his eyes and released the Snitch.

~*~

Blaise Zabini uncrossed his legs and stood, putting out his cigarette as he did so. He glanced once at the pair of women sleeping serenely in his bed before strolling across the room and opening a far window, where an owl perched with a message for him.

Nodding his thanks to the owl, Blaise took the letter and read it. Slowly, Blaise’s handsome face concentrated into a deepening frown as his eyes roam down the handwritten scroll. It was a letter from Pansy Parkinson.
Draco was awake and wandering around London with one Harry Potter in tow. Idiot.

Blaise shook his head in mild disbelief as he finished the letter and burned it when he was through. Locating his pants and putting them on, Blaise decided it was time to return to England.

Pansy had, after all, urged him to go “Underground”.

~*~

Draco turned in a circle, eyeing the stacks of forbidden books and scrolls that piled high in the Restricted Section of the Hogwarts Library, and tried to decide where to begin.

The Prophecy replayed in his head for a thousandth time, teasing him with a hidden answer just out of reach, holding back the key as it held back its laughter.

“A Pact is made on the Quest for Immortality…a God of Darkness relinquishes the Seven Keys…a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb…a Child born to Heal severed Lines…a Marking of the Near-Man…when the Dark Lord perishes at the Hands of Love half-remembered…The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night…a Sacrifice is laid on the Alter of Justice…and Purity wears the Face of Maul…Darkness reigns over the Land of Men…so be quiet Child…for the Black Tulpa fears only the Eighth Key.”

As his clear grey eyes took in his surroundings, Draco breathed in deeply, filling his lungs with apprehension and stale air, and stepped forward to begin his search.

For the first hour or so, Draco concentrated solely on puzzling out the strange runes that were etched into his back. A few of the symbols were actually quite simple; being rustic connotations for words such as ‘of’ and ‘the’. The easy transliteration pretty much ended there, however. It took Draco longer that he would have liked, poring over cracked and brittle pages and squinting against their pluming clouds of dust, to translate one rune into ‘chosen’ and then the next rune into ‘host’; which, really, could pass for three symbols that damn near overlapped one another into the Land of Indecipherable. A rune further down the list finally turned out to be ‘black’, once Draco found the common thread of vowels per swish. The remaining two runes seemed nigh impossible to translate and Draco, muttering to himself in irritation, pushed the pile of runic documents he had collected away from him at the desk he stood over, causing a cloud of dust to rise and nearly suffocate him.

Draco dropped his head in his hands and groaned. When he lifted his silvery head, Draco’s pale eyes fell on a large vellum book that had toppled over. Frowning to himself, he stood and retrieved the heavy book. Turning the pages, Draco read a few lines here and there about this dark creature and that evil force and all manner of foreboding presences until his hands stilled over a torn page.

There, at the top of the aged and ripped document, was a sequence of runes identical to some of the markings on his back…and one of which he had already translated. Beneath the runes was written: “Maul, the Black Tulpa.”

Draco heart thudded in his chest as he recognized the words and peered closer to read the rest that wasn’t missing.

“Maul, whose name must not be spoken aloud, is the Black Tulpa. When tainted souls of evil unmentionable are released from bodily confines, it is directed to the Black Tulpa; where it swirls in an abyss of darkness. This darkness was so dense that it spawned a mind like a demon, bearing a heart of hatred and contempt. This being was named Maul, which must not be spoken aloud, and
given the Seven Keys. The Seven Keys…”

And there, it ended. The rest was torn and missing.

Draco cursed aloud and turned the page in an attempt to track the information. Failing, Draco turned back and used the translation to piece together the markings etched into his skin so long ago by Voldemort. When he finished, Draco’s mind became a muddled blanket of terrible fear and his blood ran cold.

The translation read: “Chosen Host of Maul, the Black Tulpa.”

Draco stared at the words written in his thin scrawl across the scrap piece of parchment, blood roaring in his ears, his mind screaming denial while his heart sank hard and heavy with acknowledgment.

“All things considered,” a snaky voice whispered in his ear, “you’ll probably make a better Dark Lord than you did a Death Eater.”

Draco whirled around, eyes wide and heart pounding. There was no one there.

“Your father’s greatest pride,” the voice came again, “was that you would become the host of Maul.”

Draco stood shaking in the middle of the Restricted Section, the hairs on the back of his neck raised as he recognized Voldemort’s voice.

“Who is Maul to you, Voldemort?” Draco hissed through his teeth.

“Already you,” the ghost of Voldemort whispered again, the sound seeming to come from everywhere at once, echoing madly through his mind. “Already you.”

“Where are you?” Draco demanded, turning around again and expecting Voldemort’s ghost to materialize.

“In you,” Voldemort whispered, those to words seeming to reverberate off the walls and dance in circles around Draco, the Chosen Host of Maul. “In you.”

Draco clutched his head and clenched his eyes shut. “No.”

Somewhere, Voldemort laughed. “Bellatrix knew. I never expected her to care. She mourned you.”

“No,” Draco said again. “No.”

“You will become a darker Lord than I ever was, little dragon.”

“Get out of my head,” Draco spat, panic closing his throat. “Get out of my head!”

~*~

A searing pain laced through Harry’s forehead and he missed the Snitch yet again. Truth be told, Harry was chasing the Snitch half-heartedly anyway; but, of course, that was no reason not to become even more irritated with one Draco Malfoy, who was undoubtedly the cause of the pain in his mind.

That being said, faster than it had come, the pain receded to a small ache; and Harry continued to fly in lazy circles around the Quidditch Pitch until he spotted Draco approaching the field.
Nimbly, Harry shot further into the sky and arching to the left to catch the Snitch before making his decent to greet his ward. Landing, Harry stood in the center of the field and watched Draco come towards him.

Draco’s usually impeccable locks had fallen forward to shadow his eyes and his robes hung limply around his hunched form. Draco continued his even, seemingly defeated, pace and did not pause in front of Harry but, instead, walked straight into the young Auror’s arms, which came up automatically to hold the Malfoy heir.

Draco buried his face in Harry’s shoulder and trembled, the shock of his new-found knowledge hanging about him still.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Harry asked softly, any trace of irritation or resentment he might have felt completely gone. Draco did not answer and Harry held him tighter. “I wish you would tell me what’s going on, Malfoy.”

Draco stiffened in Harry’s embrace and pulled away. Harry peered at Draco, trying to catch his gaze. When his worried green eyes met Draco’s slate ones, Harry took in a sharp breath. Aside from looking completely miserable, sheer terror and wrath seemed to battle for the upper hand in Draco’s hard grey eyes.

“Draco——“

“I need you to swear an Unbreakable Vow,” Draco interrupted, his voice sounding hoarse and pained.


“Please, Harry,” Draco whispered, the urgency in his voice allowing the sheer terror in his gaze to resurface. “I'll tell you everything, I swear it. I wouldn’t ask you to do this if it wasn’t important. The last time someone swore an Unbreakable Vow in my presence, Albus Dumbledore ended up dead. I understand better than anyone the seriousness of the Unbreakable Vow and I’m asking you to swear one now. Please.”

“Tell me what’s going on and I'll consider it,” Harry said slowly.

Draco shook his head. “No, you must swear.”

“Draco, I won’t——“

“Harry!” Draco all but shrieked and another bolt of pain shot through Harry’s mind. “There is more going on here than you and me! A lot of people could die! You need to swear it. Swear it now!”

“Swear what?” Harry shouted exasperatedly. “Merlin!”

“Swear the Unbreakable Vow and I’ll tell you what you swore.”

“Malfoy, have you lost your damn mind?”

“TRUST ME!”

Harry clamped his mouth shut, his mind swimming. Draco had never asked for his trust before…nor would he, Harry thought, unless it was truly important.

Harry lifted his wand and swore the Unbreakable Vow.
The spell was yet unfinished and Harry waited as Draco took in a shuddering breath and let it out slowly.

Then, Draco closed his eyes and spoke the terms, completing the Vow. “Harry Potter, you hereby Vow to terminate my life should I become a danger to any Innocent Creature by any means necessary. This Vow will last for the entirety of one year.”

“No…” Harry breathed. “Ah, no…Draco, what…no…”

But it was done. An Unbreakable Vow was an Unbreakable Vow.

“I promised I would tell you everything,” Draco said, and when he opened his eyes again, Harry could see that the boiling wrath was shifting past the terror, making his eyes blaze a strange silvery color. “And I will…as I burn my father’s body.”

Truly shaken, Harry conceded with a small nod.

~*~
Father, Be Proud

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Father, Be Proud~

That night…
~*~

Severus Snape stared at the parchment Draco had left on his desk. True to his word, Draco had scrawled a series of runes across the parchment with what Snape decided was an unsteady hand. Whatever these runes meant, it had frightened his godson when he had discovered their translation. Robes billowing behind him, Severus made his way across the castle to the Restricted Section and set about tracing Draco’s steps.

~*~

Lucius Malfoy had been buried in the weed-strangled cemetery outside of Azkaban called Dementor’s Circle. Draco, who had refused to speak for the entirety of their journey to the dreaded prison, quietly located his father’s marker. Upon reaching it, Harry trailing worriedly behind him, Draco took the shovel they had found in a nearby shed and shoved it into the ground. Placing one foot on the shovel, Draco buried it deep into the earth and pulled out a chunk of dirt.

Harry watched for a few minutes, wondering why Draco, of all people, was not using magic for the grizzly task at hand. At one point, while Draco continued to labor silently over his father’s grave, Harry turned to retrace his steps to the shed, fairly certain that there was another shovel in there somewhere.

Behind him, Draco shoved his tool into the dirt again and read Harry's thoughts. “No, Harry. This is something I need to do alone.”

Harry turned back and watched the blond Slytherin resume his task. “Why won’t you use magic? You weren’t exactly built for hard labor.” Harry wasn’t sure what had made him say something cruel but Draco seemed to shrug it off with a harsh laugh, pulling another clump of dirt from atop his father’s grave.

“If you had been in China with me,” Draco murmured, grunting softly as he shoved and heaved pile of dirt after pile of dirt, “you would not say such things.”

Shamed into silence, Harry did not speak for a long moment. Then, “Draco, maybe you should let
Draco paused and let out a shout of despairing laughter before setting to work again. After that, Harry did not bother Draco again.

Finally, Draco’s shovel hit the coffin and the Slytherin Prince disappeared into the hole he had made. After some sounds of scuffling, Draco pushed the lid of Lucius Malfoy’s coffin over the edge of the hole before, literally, dragging his father’s body out of the grave.

Harry watched, somewhat horrified, as Draco hunched over his father’s corpse, panting and glaring at him with such a sickly expression Harry thought Draco might lash out at Lucius’ lifeless body. Which he did.

With a shout, Harry clutched Draco’s robes and flung the Slytherin off of the corpse. “Malfoy, what is wrong with you?!”

Their eyes met and something in Harry’s emerald green graze seemed to subdue Draco’s wrath. “Help me build the fire.”

Slowly, and without magic, they built a large bonfire; all the while, Harry shot Draco wary sidelong glances. After pulling Lucius’ corpse atop the pile of wood and lighting it afire, Harry and Draco stood side by side, breathing hard against the stench of burning rotting flesh and watched the entire thing burn.

It was hot; hotter than Harry would have thought, standing next to a funeral pyre. Harry wiped a few droplets of sweat from his brow as he gazed at the roaring fire. Yes, it was hot and it smelled terrible…but it was beautiful, in its own way. Harry watched a great billowing of smoke rise from the fire and twirl into the night sky, dancing within the space between the stars. Harry could not see the moon and it bothered him.

“Do you know what a Tulpa is?” Draco asked quietly, the sound of his voice nearly lost in the roaring of the fire.

“Residual spirit energy?” Harry answered uncertainly, trying to place the word. “Condensed to a certain focal point? Am I close?”

Draco stole a wry sidelong glance Harry’s way. “Surprisingly,” Draco said dryly. “What do you know about Maul, the Black Tulpa?”

Harry frowned, the word sounding foreign to him. “Nothing.”

“There was a Prophecy,” Draco murmured after a long moment, staring at his father’s burning body. “Walburga said it was the Prophecy of my birth.”

“What Prophecy?” Harry demanded, turning to Draco.

“The portrait,” Draco explained patiently. “The portrait of Walburga Black spoke to me when you went to the Ministry. She spoke of a Prophecy.”

“What Prophecy?” Harry repeated through clenched teeth.

“A Pact is made on the Quest for Immortality…a God of Darkness relinquishes the Seven Keys…a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb…a Child born to Heal severed Lines…a Marking of the Near-Man…when the Dark Lord perishes at the Hands of Love half-remembered…The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night…a Sacrifice is laid on the Alter of Justice…and Purity wears the Face of
Maul…Darkness reigns over the Land of Men…so be quiet Child…for the Black Tulpa fears only the Eighth Key.”

Silence clapped in their ears like thunder after Draco had finished the recitation. Harry swallowed and opened his mouth to speak; yet, nothing came out.

Draco continued, angry words spilling from his mouth as he watched the Harry Potter he’d always despised slide back into place…just like Draco had predicted, judgmental and full of spite. “I thought perhaps Pansy would know something. That perhaps Pandora had divulged a family secret I could use to my advantage as I searched for the Eighth Key. But, no. The only thing she found was that I had strange Runes etched into the Mark on my back.” Draco glanced at Harry as a muscle worked in the young Auror’s jaw. “Then, at Hogwarts, I learned the meaning of the Runes.”

“The Restricted Section,” Harry remarked, less than amused.

“Yes, well.” Draco fell silent, staring into the flames, his entire body quivering as the rift between them grew wider and wider.

Finally, Harry turned to the Malfoy heir. “What do the Runes mean?”

Draco didn’t answer right away. Then, “‘Maul, whose name must not be spoken aloud, is the Black Tulpa. When tainted souls of evil unmentionable are released from bodily confines, it is directed to the Black Tulpa; where it swirls in an abyss of darkness. This darkness was so dense that it spawned a mind like a demon, bearing a heart of hatred and contempt. This being was named Maul, which must not be spoken aloud, and given the Seven Keys.’ That’s all I found about Maul. The rest was torn and missing.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair and fixed Draco with an intense look. “Malfoy, you’ve dragged me all over the countryside, confused and worried the fuck out of me, made me swear an Unbreakable Vow to kill you, desecrated your father’s grave, and now you’re telling me loads of mad bollocks about Prophecies and evil spirits. You have about thirty seconds to start making sense —“

“The Runes translated into ‘Chosen Host of Maul, the Black Tulpa’.”

Draco and Harry stared hard at one another.

“No,” Harry breathed as Draco continued to speak. “When Voldemort marked me the second time, he marked me for possession. This Maul is already inside me Harry—that’s why I had you swear the Vow…I…I can feel him…”

“The sleepwalking?” Harry whispered, closing his eyes. “That thing behind your eyes?”

Draco looked away but stood his ground even as he swallowed his pride. “I need your help to find the Eighth Key. I don’t think I can do this on my own—“

“No shit, Sherlock!” Harry exploded. “You are such a witless, self-absorbed prick, you know that?”

Draco fell silent and watched as Harry fumed and paced. Draco braced himself for the possibility that Harry might give up on him. After all, Harry Potter’s mission was to keep him safe from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Now that Draco had forced him to swear an Unbreakable Vow to end his life, should it become necessary, the terms of this case have drastically shifted.

Harry quit his pacing and turned to Draco, their silhouettes against the angry fire stark and black.
“Why did you lie to me? You shouldn’t have lied to me.”

“Why didn’t you tell me who I really was when I woke from my coma?” Draco shot back quietly. “Why did you send me to America as some Muggle?”

“To protect you.” Harry looked suddenly tired. “Draco, I don’t need protection.”

Draco would have disagreed, but he didn’t need to; Harry read it in his face. “Malfoy, it is my job to protect *you*.”

“So, protect me, Potter!” Closeted emotion made Draco’s voice raw. Something tremored deep inside him and Draco couldn’t put a name to why he suddenly panicked.

Harry shook his head and Draco clenched and unclenched his fits, that tremor playing nervous music on the erratic beats of his heart.

Minutes passed and they said nothing to one another. Anger, guilt, and fear shrouded Draco like a cloak while Harry managed to look very, very tired.

Finally, a whisper worked its way passed Harry’s full lips. Three words.

“I hate this.”

Draco cracked a wry, hopeful smile and lifted his shoulders in a small shrug. “It always gets worse before it gets better.”

Harry eyed his Slytherin comrade. “Did your mother used to say that?”

Draco smiled genuinely this time, a flash of perfectly white teeth. “Ah, no. Dumbledore, actually.”

Harry took in a deep breath, his green eyes large and wary. “If this is going to work, we have to always be honest with one another. No more lies.”

Draco nodded minutely, his eyes hard with understanding; though, secretly, his heart leapt.

Harry looked back at the funeral pyre.

“So, what’s next?” Draco asked, coming to stand beside the young Auror. “To the Ministry?”

“They need to know.” Harry conceded with a nod. “Especially that the Gatherer seems to be under Maul’s command and his Death Eaters are no real threat to you…and that the Death Eaters refusing the Gatherer’s call could be friend or foe and there is no real way to know for sure…”

Draco blinked. He hadn’t thought of that.

“But…no. I’ll take you back to Grimmauld Place first. If I take you straight to the Ministry with this crazy story about you turning into the most evil creature mankind has ever known, you might just disappear within the Ministry and some story about you breaking your neck in Asia will show up in the Daily Prophet.”

Draco nearly choked on his own saliva. “Truly?”

Harry smiled gently. “I’ll be able to protect you from Grimmauld Place. Anyone who can get in is either loyal to you or me. I’ll go to the Ministry and make an official report.”

Draco nodded and they turned back to the fire, watching it burn itself into small embers.
“I really do hate this,” Harry said with a sigh.

Draco shuddered. “But not me?”

Harry caught his eye. “No, not you.”

Draco watched the smoke plume skywards and thought of his father.

~*~

Underground.

To a Wizard, that meant without the use of magic…so that travel would go unmarked and undetected.

To Blaise Zabini, that meant strictly horseback. Except, of course, the few times he had to cross a river or a bit of ocean.

A pureblood would never be caught making use of a Muggle contraption unless it was a dire emergency. And truly, as much as he and Draco Malfoy were near-cousins, one ambiguous letter from Pansy Parkinson did not qualify as a ‘dire emergency’.

So, Blaise made good time changing horses every hundred miles or so.

Pureblood or no, Blaise was not so pretentious as to never use Muggles to his advantage. His network was spread all over Europe, Asia, and the Americas…which made him quite unwelcome at most Death Eater parties during the war, though he was often used as a spy nonetheless, and from both sides.

However, regardless of his usefulness to the Ministry during the war, he was blacklisted when the warrant for Draco’s assassination came and he, Blaise Zabini, just happened to be at the top of the list of suspects. With his shady reputation, and no desire to bring unwelcome light to his best friend’s unusual predicament, Blaise had fled to Italy and waited.

Now, he raced; hell for leather, northbound on a chestnut bay. The animal beneath him sweated above the churning muscles that carried her master ever-onward. White frothed from the bit clenched between the bay’s teeth and her eyes rolled as Blaise steered her through a dense forest at a faster pace than was probably wise.

Blaise’s sharp eyes darted around them as he steered, wondering if the bay would make it to the next pick-up point where another steed waited, fresh and fully fed and watered, for Blaise to run it into the ground like the countless animals before it. It wouldn’t be the first time he had to put down a horse. In the mountains, Blaise’s spotted stallion had crushed his foreleg on a crest of sharp rocks hidden by a thin layer of snow.

Blaise was a hard master, but not a cruel one. After the stallion had thrown him, Blaise had circled back for an extra water skin and to slit the poor beast’s throat. Blaise had trudged the rest of the distance to the next pick-up point on foot, stopping only to make blood-tea enough to sustain him for another long trek.

But, no; the bay lasted and after nodding to the Muggle who waited patiently with the next steed and mounting the fresh horse, Blaise was off again, racing up the French coast like a thousand demons were after him.

It was raining hard by the time Blaise reached the part of the French coast where one could barely
see the English coast from across the straits if it were clear and sunny out and he was as bone weary as his steed when he dismounted. Bellatrix had warned him about a strange Prophecy before she had set off to retrieve a Horcrux for Voldemort and Blaise, squinting across the sea against the downpour, hoped against hope that Pansy’s letter didn’t hold a hidden warning about the only thing that could deprave sleep from the most jovial Pureblood ever to grace English Wizarding circles.

Yet, a chill crawling up Blaise’s spine told him he was running out of time.

~*~

The flight back to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place was prickly. That unstable, crackly tension had returned and Harry shivered whenever Draco glanced at him.

They found themselves staring at one another in the hallway, energy crackling between them.

“My worst fear,” Harry said at great length, “was that I would become like Voldemort.”

“At Hogwarts,” Draco murmured with a nod, remembering. “I saw.”

Harry sighed and swept a hand around him, gesturing at the house around him. “I’m not sure I’ve done much more than buy us some time. If they order me to bring you to the Ministry, I might have to.”

Draco nodded again, his eyes burning with something unsaid. “I understand.”

“I hate this,” Harry muttered for the third time that night, making to move past Draco towards the door.

Draco grabbed his arm and pushed Harry against the wall, pinning him there with his own body. “You bought us some time, Harry,” Draco whispered, his lips pressed against his ear. “Let’s use it… we may not have another chance.”

Harry made a sound somewhere between a sob and a groan before clutching Draco’s face and crushing his lips against his, kissing him like a drowning man.

It was violent; filled with desperation and passion. Draco shoved his tongue passed Harry’s teeth, moaning as Harry’s tongue rose up to meet his, velvety and insistent. Harry clung to Draco’s shoulders as he pressed his leg between Harry’s. Their minds were swimming, fingers ripping at clothes, tripping over buttons and ties, trying to breathe against the awful, wonderful pressure of each other’s bodies.

How they became naked, Harry wasn’t sure. Perhaps their wandless magic helped where their fingers were useless. It didn’t matter, not really. They were unspeakably hard already and they rutted against one another, gasping into each other’s mouths. Draco pressed in as much as he could, wanting to touch every part of Harry’s body, breathe in every possible scent, taste every possible flavor. Pinned against the wall, Harry let Draco ravish him. He hadn’t submitted in a long time. Draco’s mouth and hands seemed to be everywhere at once, reverent and thirsty, making sounds of wonderrment at every touch that elicited a moan from Harry’s lips.

Draco left a trail of sweet saliva as he kissed down Harry’s throat. He murmured soft prayers against the skin of Harry’s chest, taking time to pay homage to each taut nipple before moving ever-downward. Harry quivered when Draco dipped his tongue into his naval and placed a firm kiss on his lower abdomen.

When Harry found the strength to open his eyes and glance down, his eyes locked with Draco’s
bright gray ones and nearly wept. Slowly, reverently, like the severity of temple worship, Draco kissed the bobbing head of Harry’s erect phallus. Harry’s neck turned to water and his head rolled as Draco continued his torturous worship. Lips and tongue worked the impressive length of Harry’s shaft, tasting with long sweeps of the velvety muscle and placed a kiss to cool the discovered area.

Soon, Harry was quivering and moaning above Draco’s kneeling form as if every harpstring was being plucked. Then, when Harry thought he couldn’t stand it any longer and the growing heat in his stomach was going to explode, Draco took Harry’s entire length into the warmth of his mouth and throat.

Harry gasped, swearing obscenities under his breath, and clutched at Draco’s silvery head as it bobbed over his phallus. Too much and not enough; the swirling, crackling energy was back, surrounding them and penetrating them and with a shout, Harry spent himself into Draco’s surprisingly talented mouth.

Draco rocked back on his heels, eyes filled with wicked laughter, a wry smile hovering over his glistening lips. “I’ve never done that before. How was I?”

Harry groaned and his eyes fluttered closed, Draco’s clear laughter ringing off the walls of the hall. And then it was quiet again as Draco waited for Harry to catch his breath.

“You look so beautiful like that,” Draco murmured as his eyes soaked in Harry Potter, gloriously nude, cheeks flushed and lips parted, breath coming in pants as he leaned against the wall with his eyes closed.

A slow smile curled Harry’s lips as he cracked an eye open, watching as Draco stood, lithe as a cat and twice as predatory. “Thanks.”

Draco pressed in close again, wrapping his arms around Harry’s lean waist. “I want to fuck you,” Draco whispered in his ear.

Harry turned his face and kissed Draco. Harry could taste himself on his lips. “Do you think you can handle it?”

Draco swept his arm across a small table laden with candlesticks and small adornments, sending them clattering on the floor. Pushing Harry down on the table and watching his face change from languid pleasure, to surprise, and back to a minxy little smirk, Draco situated himself between Harry’s legs and placed another kiss on Harry’s stomach.

Draco stumbled through the preparation, listening with rapt attention as Harry guided him with his own fingers through the stretching and searching for and stimulating the prostate. When Draco’s trembling fingers hit their mark, he marveled at how Harry hissed and arched off the table, smiling a little to himself.

“Yeah,” Harry gasped. “You’ll want to aim for that.”

Whispering a quick lubricating spell, Draco positioned himself between Harry’s legs and pushed in slowly. Draco was larger than average and Harry winced at the intrusion, but he hid his expression until Draco had filled him completely.

Draco’s features were open with awe and passion. “Fuck, Harry…you’re so hot…and tight…”

Harry smiled gently and touched Draco’s wondering face. “Move, Draco.”

Draco placed his hands on either side of Harry’s face and pulled out slowly before pushing back in,
beginning the ages old rhythm. “I’m not hurting you, am I?” Draco asked, concerned when he saw Harry wince and bite his lip.

Harry met his worried gaze. “No, Draco. You haven’t hurt me; not yet.”

“A passing dalliance, no doubt?” Walburga had inquired.

“Oh, course, my lady.”

“And you will break his heart, then?”

“Certainly, my lady.”

Walburga had seemed disappointed in his answer. Draco was beginning to agree with her. He pressed a fierce kiss against Harry’s mouth, latching with hungry lips that ravished as Draco slammed into him, over and over, no longer concerned with being gentle. This nameless thing between them wasn’t gentle. It grew large, so all encompassing, that it made to swallow them whole. It burned them and claimed them and latched them together. It did all these things, but it wasn’t gentle in its doing. Draco understood at least that much. He understood what it was to be cruel. And so did, it seemed, Harry, who met his harsh thrust each and every time, grunting and gasping and biting down on Draco’s shoulder when the pain became too much to bear alone. And then the sweet, blessed magic between them reared up and danced around and through them again. Swirling with lightless color and pranced and twinkled until their screams were lost in it.

Too much and not enough. It would never be enough.

Afterward, Draco watched Harry slowly get dressed, taking care to mend his ripped clothing as he did. Draco pulled on his trousers, feeling slightly guilty at giving Harry such rough treatment.

“Don’t,” Harry said, breaking the silence.

“What?” Draco blinked, startled.

“Don’t feel bad. I wanted it too. I was gentle with you the first time, but it’s not always so.”

Draco took in a deep breath. “Really?”

Harry nodded and put on his Auror’s robes.

“Well, it’s fitting, then.”

Harry smiled sadly. “It is, isn’t it?”.

Draco stood to face Harry and the young Auror gathered him in his arms. “I hate this,” Harry hissed. Draco stirred and lifted his head. “But not me?”

Harry pressed a chaste kiss to Draco’s lips and shook his head. “No, not you.”

Draco pried himself loose of Harry’s embrace, sick unto death of heart ache and things left half-said, and did not watch Harry leave for the Ministry.

~*~

Severus Snape, up to his elbows in ancient documents and sick with worry, cursed aloud as he re-read--for the third time--the translation of the Runes.
Severus took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. This was bad.

It always gets worse before it gets better.
Deny the Martyr

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: By request--and rightly so--I have revised Chapters "All that is Unholy" and "Deny the Martyr". Now, they are one, single chapter under the title "Deny the Martyr". I hope this abates any further confusion. Feel free to ask questions if you do.

Enjoy.

The term martyr (Greek μάρτυς "witness") initially signified a witness in the forensic sense, a person called to bear witness in legal proceedings.

Martyr is also a term in psychology for a depressed person with a very negative, pessimistic attitude about everything in life. ~Wikipedia

"III id. ian. Rome, in cymiterio Callisti, via Appia, depositio Miltiadis episcopi"

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."
- William Shakespeare (1564-1616), The Merchant of Venice, I.iii

"Better to light a candle than curse the darkness."
- Chinese Proverb

~Deny the Martyr~

Later…
~*~

Elbow deep in ancient parchment, Severus Snape shuddered to the depths of his core. His mind raced beneath his unruly, oily locks and despair settled itself like a cold rock in the pit of his stomach.

Maul.
Draco was researching Maul.

Severus knew of only two other people who knew what Maul was and what that blasted thing held in its keeping—both of whom were dead. Albus Dumbledore and Tom Riddle...Lord Voldemort.

And when Voldemort had unearthed the secret of Maul, he had discovered the secret to ensuring his own immortality.

The Seven Keys.

Or, as Dumbledore called them, and later Harry Potter—who destroyed them—Horcruxes.

Only Maul has the power to bestow the Seven Keys...and only Voldemort had attempted to create all seven; shredding his soul into pieces through murder and darkness, storing them into trinkets and...other things...and keeping them hidden.

A locket, a ring, a cup, a headdress, a journal, a snake, and a boy...Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. Again and Again.

The exact art of it, the actual formula in its entirety, was Maul's to horde. The ancients made sure of that. But Voldemort had wrested the secret from the Black Tulpa somehow and used it to his own means.

Was Draco Malfoy thinking to create Horcruxes for himself?

That thought alone made cold sweat break over his brow. Severus had been concerned about his godson ever since Narcissa had passed. The years when Draco was in St. Mungo's had allowed Severus to breathe a little easier, knowing at least he was safe...from himself as well as others.

How much could one person take before they broke?

Severus Snape feared he may have passed that point already...if he was following in Lord Voldemort’s footsteps and looking to shred his soul into pieces.

~*~

"Ah, Pansy, you're looking well," exclaimed a weary-looking but nonetheless suave Blaise Zabini as he swept through the main hall of the Parkinson Manor and into a sitting room where a fire blazed to keep out the late night chill. Pansy and Pandora Parkinson followed close behind, the former gritting her teeth against her irritation at being woken at the unseemly hour of three in the morning, and the latter blinking blearily and trying to be gracious as she conjured lights and murmured short, crisp orders to the House Elves to bring light refreshments and tea. "And Lady Pandora, lovely as ever."

Pandora nodded, exchanging a glance with her niece.

"I swear," Blaise continued, plopping down on a couch and propping up his feet. "For summer, it's awfully cold. All this rain, chills to the bone it does--"

"Actually, we've had fair nights for some time," Pansy tried to interject with an impatient flick of her wrist.

"The Straights were a right bitch to cross, all that wind," Blaise continued, unperturbed. "In any case, this place is quite charming. Cozy. I like a bit more green in my palette. Truly, Lady, you could use a few plants here and there. Did I mention? The hyacinth is in bloom all over the south and France positively reeks of lavender, the mists and rain is making it all permeate something awful. And the
"Zabini!" Pansy shrieked.

"Pansy, not so loud," Pandora admonished softly.

"Blaise," Pansy said in a more even tone. "Really..."

Blaise and Pansy regarded one another until Blaise flashed his impenetrable grin, hard white teeth glinting off the firelight. "So," Blaise said quietly. "Draco's in trouble."

Pansy exchanged another glance with her aunt, who nodded, blue-black hair shimmering in waves. "Were you aware," Pansy inquired, grave as a courtier, "that Draco had been re-marked by Lord Voldemort, in the center of his spine?"

Blaise's brows arched, but he made no other response.

"Well," Pansy continued, "his Mark is still quite visible and there are runes, ancient runes, etched along the edge of it."

"Still visible, you say?" Blaise rubbed his forearm uncomfortably. "And ancient runes?" Blaise stood to his feet and regarded the fire, his face unwontedly sober as he stared into the flames. "Where is he now?"

"I don't know," Pansy murmured. "He...he was here yesterday morning. He and Potter were headed for Hogwarts when they left."

"Hogwarts..." Without warning, Blaise lashed out and punched the mantle, whirling on the two women standing a healthy distance away. "That doesn't help me, Pansy! Where. Is. He. Now? He wouldn't still be at Hogwarts."

"What's going on, Blaise? I knew you would know more than me. He said something about a Prophecy--"

"Pansy!" Blaise growled, his features turning a certain shade of dangerous. Pandora placed a warning hand on Pansy's elbow and stepped forward.

"I overheard Potter speaking to the young Malfoy about a 'grim old place'," Pandora said evenly. "In reference to returning there."

"Grim old place," Blaise echoed slowly. "Grim old place..." Suddenly, Blaise's irrepressible grin was back. "Ah, well." Blaise took a cinnamon candy from a nearby table and popped it into his mouth before reaching out with a slender finger and caressing Pandora's regal chin. Madam Parkinson tried to suppress her shiver but, well, they are what they are and Blaise knew it as well as she did. Blaise's golden eyes gleamed wickedly before lowering his hand to grasp hers. "Thank you, my lady," Blaise murmured, dropping a kiss on Pandora's wrist. Blaise turned to Pansy and offered her a mocking, sweeping bow. Then, he was gone as quickly as he had come.

Grim old place.

Try, Grimmauld Place.

~*~
Harry felt the familiar lurch in his stomach as he Apparated outside the Ministry and took a moment to catch his breath before beginning the long, somewhat--no, very--odd and arduous journey into the large magical building. Finally, forcing each step in front of the other, he entered, dodging charmed paper air planes as he headed for the elevator. He recited the speech he was going to present to the Minister, over and over, in his mind. And every time, Harry knew he sounded insane.

At best, Scrimgeour would demand that Draco be reprimanded into the Ministry's custody and Harry removed from the case. At worst...

Harry didn't want to think about the worst that could happen. He wouldn't think about it.

Harry entered the Auror's Division and looked around, feeling dizzy. Squinting, he could make out the Minister's Office across the valley of cubicles. The door to the office opened and Hermione Granger walked through the doorway, followed closely behind by his partner, Ron Weasley. Harry's scar began to ache and he shook his head to dispel the familiar feeling.

No, wait.

Harry no longer had the scar. The Horcrux scar. Now, the lightning bolt brand, courtesy of Lord Voldemort, was imprinted on Draco Malfoy's forehead.

Whom he left alone and unprotected at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place.

Harry made out Hermione and Ron turning towards him as the Auror's Division swam in his gaze. The ghost of his scar began to burn fiercely and Harry heard a furious scream that echoed into despair. Harry wasn't sure if it was him, but, Merlin, it sounded like Draco. No, no, no...ah, no!

Aurors rushed up to him as Harry clutched his head, fisting his hair against the fierce pain. The sound of a violin, haunting laughter, cold, so cold. That scream again.

Rushing, rushing, rushing, the Aurors were rushing at him, the floor was rushing at him, the pain came from all around him...and then erupted from the center of his spine. Bone-shattering pain that he thought would never end. He writhed against it, shouting unintelligibly.

Then, there was nothing but a pit of never-ending blackness.

And the sweet, awful sound of a bow running across the strings of a violin.

~*~

Maul smiled, lips, new lips, young lips made for pleasure and cruelty, stretched over perfect white teeth that were not his own. That Riddle had made a perfect choice for him. This body was perfect. Perfect. Yes, perfect. Youthful, slender muscles coiled under pale skin, hiding secret physical strength beneath the seemingly frail anatomy. Maul stretched out his hand, gazing at the long fingers with well-manicured fingertips, and slowly closed the digits into a fist, feeling himself fill every limb of this young, beautiful body. The soul of the body's owner struggled valiantly against him and Maul knew he wasn't strong enough to possess this body completely for very long. But his strength was returning quickly and his Gatherer would be able to seal him inside the body and cast away the soul that fought with him. Strange memories of the young soul filtered and mixed with his own and Maul shook his head to dispel them, shimmering, silver-white hair falling into the eyes he looked out of. Maul smiled again. Hair the color of moonlight. How wonderful. Yes, this body would do just fine.

Maul gazed out of the window of this strange house he found himself in, listening to his Gatherer play the Song of Summoning over and over again on some stringed instrument. He could hear the music, but could not see the mortal who summoned him. He could find him. His precious Gatherer.
Maul turned, feeling his ancient power course through him like electricity, surges like sea waves spiking to the ends of his fingers and toes. Ah, toes! How long since he had those? Maul could not remember. All he remembered from before his pact with Tom Riddle, the rash, power-hungry young man who yearned for immortality, was the slow-burning hate, the demanding anger, the irrational wrath that made up the core of his being, that solidified him into a thinking entity, that earned him the right to possess the Seven Keys that so many coveted; and he held them at his center, clinging to their secrets and piously knowing that even though he had no use for this mighty power, it threw so many into pits of unending despair as Maul kept the Keys beyond their reach. Maul smiled again and headed for the stairway, the ears he was using straining to hear the Song of Summoning in the narrow corridor. But his lust for human form, his lust to control more souls had driven him to concede to Riddle's offer.

Maul descended the curving stair, marveling at how the ankles curved and the knees bent, how the limber legs supported his form. Another long corridor. And, there, at the end, a door leading to his freedom, to his weapon, to his Gatherer who would aid in the claiming of this body. This marvelous, beautiful body. And then more. More. More, more, more. Ah! How he hungered for it!

"Child, where are you off to now?" Madam Walburga Black inquired behind him from her portrait. "Your Auror instructed you to stay here."

Maul turned slightly, regarding her over his shoulder. His wonderfully sculptured shoulder.

Walburga gasped, a frail hand lifting to cover her mouth. "You're not Narcissa's boy."

Maul smiled darkly, even as the young soul roiled against him in his ever-valiant struggle to re-claim his body. "No, painted woman," Maul murmured. "I am not."

And for the first time in an age, Walburga Black had the grace to look frightened.

Maul reached the door and, with an awe-inspiring twist of his wrist and clever grip of his fingers, the doorknob was turned and the door opened. A fresh wave of music, no longer encumbered by walls and magic, washed over him and Maul breathed in the lovely smell of human stench, pollution, and oil-slickened asphalt streets. Ah, what wonderful creatures, these humans! Maul thought perhaps he had been one once. But he could not remember.

Maul followed the Song of Summoning down streets, quiet mostly due to the late hour, through alleys, under a dark highway ramp awash in an orange glow and humming with the few automobiles that drove across it, a small granite tunnel that landed him amidst a thicket of trees, and there, on the far side, was a field of grass dotted with a few more trees--a clipped, molded park of sorts--and a bonfire. Standing before the flames was the black silhouette of a man, a violin perched between his clean-shaven chin and his shoulder.

With one last fluid motion, the man brought the bow across the strings, ending the lullaby with a harsh, haunting, resounding note, the shrill sound filling the air between them.

His Gatherer.

Maul smiled his horrible smile.

~*~

Harry awoke with a start, blinking furiously and shaking off the hands that tried to help him up. He must have fainted. A blush of red burned his cheeks as he thought of the teasing Draco Malfoy had once scrutinized him with for fainting on the Hogwarts Express when Dementors had been looking
for his now-deceased godfather Sirius Black.

Draco.

Harry jumped to his feet, ignoring the sounds of protest from the Aurors and medics surrounding him, and bolted, running at breakneck speed for the elevator. Distantly, Harry registered the sound of Ron yelling at him to come back and Scrimgeour shouting for an explanation. But then the elevator was shut and he was gliding down to the main floor. His head ached and the ghost of his scar tingled. And, Merlin, his back hurt like fury. Finally, the elevator hit the main floor and Harry was off like a bullet again, breathing hard and fast, his adrenaline pumping away the sheer and unexplainable terror that told him something was very, very wrong. He had to get back to Grimmauld Place. Immediately.

Outside of the Ministry of Magic’s magical defenses, Harry Apparated to the doorstep of Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. A horrible sinking feeling settled in his stomach as he realized the front door was ajar. Harry ran inside, ignoring the rampant shrieking of Walburga Black and searched the bottom floor, shouting for Draco. He wasn’t there. Harry ran to the stairway, taking the steps two at a time and scoured every room. The window was open in their bedroom again. The only time it was open was when Draco sleepwalked. Harry felt despair coil the muscles in his body, clenching his heart relentlessly. He was too late.

Harry sprinted back down the stairs and approached Madam Black’s portrait, his eyes burning a furious shade of green. "Where did he go?" Harry demanded. "I know you saw him leave."

Walburga paused mid-shriek. "How dare you speak to me, you filthy Half-blood?"

In a surge of anger, Harry punched the wall next to the portrait. "Where is he?!!"

Walburga opened her mouth, a sharp retort on her lips dying with a sigh. "Narcissa’s boy is gone."

"Where?!!"

"No," she said, her voice trembling. "He has been replaced. He is all that is unholy. The Dark One has returned."

Harry clutched at his hair, anger and fear shaking his body. He turned in a circle, spared one last look at Walburga before summoning his broom, and flew from the hall, out the door, and into the night.

The Unbreakable Vow he swore itched at the corner of his mind as he flew, following the tingling and burning of the ghost-scar, wind whipping his hair erratically. He had sworn it. Harry just hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

All that is unholy.

Walburga Black's words sent shivers down his aching spine as his eyes darted here and there, searching for the white-haired, grey-eyed Slytherin whom he had grown so many feelings for, the man he might have to kill. Harry wondered if this was how Severus Snape had felt when he rushed into the Astronomy Tower, knowing his godson wouldn’t be able to kill his Headmaster.

A searing pain struck his forehead and the ghost of his scar burned ever-stronger. Harry set his mouth in a fierce, grim line. He was getting closer.

~*~

Blaise Apparated onto the street called Grimmauld Place and looked around. A simple enough
avenue reeking of Muggles; vacated though, due to the lateness of the hour. Blaise walked slowly
down the sidewalk, gazing at one building after the other. Pausing, Blaise narrowed his eyes on the
space between two buildings. The ones numbered Eleven and Thirteen. Blaise frowned. There was
nothing there.

Suddenly, a figure emerged from nothingness, right between Numbers Eleven and Thirteen. The
figure halted, peering back at him. Then the figure whipped out his wand and, before Blaise could
retrieve his own, the figure shouted: "Accio Wand!"

Blaise's wand flew from his hand and landed neatly in the hand of the man before him. Blaise
scowled. If the man was aggressive, Blaise would be dead already.

"Draco?" Blaise called out.

The figure approached quickly, frowning back at him with all the irratation and distaste Severus
Snape could muster. "Zabini."

Blaise snorted bemusedly, eyeing his former Head of House; though, he was silently relieved. "I'm
looking for Draco," Blaise said evenly. "Pansy sent me; the Parkinson’s are concerned about him."

Severus rolled his eyes. "Are they, now?" he sneered.

Blaise regarded Snape stolidly. "He's not here, then."

Severus was quiet for a moment. "No," he said flatly.

They stared at one another for a few minutes before Blaise sighed, throwing up his hands in an
exaggerated fashion. "I think Maul has possessed Draco, Snape. It's quite essential that we locate him
immediately."

Severus frowned. "Possessed?"

"Yes, possessed," Blaise repeated with an impatient flick of his wrist. "Bellatrix Lestrange warned
me about a Prophecy--"

"What Prophecy?" Snape demanded.

Blaise recited the Prophecy, watching Severus' shoulders slump as he did so. Then, Severus let loose
a string of crude incentives Blaise hadn't known he was capable of. Then Severus shouted for
Draco's eagle-owl, which came immediately, Hedwig trailing behind nervously.

"Pan," Severus said. "I need you to help me find your master." Pan ruffled his feathers and cocked
his head to the side. "Can you do that?" Severus asked patiently, understanding that owls like Pan
weren't used to taking orders from Wizards who were not their Master. Pan cawed indignantlly and
Severus smiled, turning to Hedwig. "And you. I need you to send a message to Ronald Weasley at
the Ministry of Magic."

Blaise stepped forward at that. "Are you sure that's the best idea, to involve the Ministry?"

"It would be suicide not to," Severus replied seriously, handing Blaise his wand.

~*~

The Gatherer gazed back at his Lord, Maul in the flesh...the flesh of Draco Malfoy. Despite his best
efforts to steal Malfoy's magic and kill him, he had fulfilled the Hosting anyway. The Gatherer was
partly disappointed, knowing that if he had succeeded in his gamble in America, he would be the Host and not the Malfoy Heir. Ah well, the Slytherin Prince made a striking form for the Black Tulpa anyway. Tall and pale, his features were cold and handsomely aristocratic, limbs long and slender, hair shining pale silver in the moonlight and large black eyes that never seemed to end. Lord Voldemort must have foreseen this effect. No one could deny Draco Malfoy his unnaturally good looks.

The Gatherer smiled and knelt, pressing his forehead against the dewy grass at Maul's feet. He waited. Finally, Maul smiled. "Rise, Gatherer. You have served me well."

"Thank you, my Lord," the Gatherer murmured, coming to his feet. "It is my life's honor to serve you."

"Hmm," Maul's terrible smile never faltered. "That remains to be seen." Maul raised his cold fingers to stroke the Gatherer's cheek, taking in his sunny eyes and mop of sandy curls. Maul's fingertips curled and he dug his nails into the tender flesh, dragging them down to his jaw line and relishing the sound of his startled gasp and the beauty of red, red blood running in thin rivers between his pale fingertips. "We will see." Maul pulled his hand away, his terrible smile still in place. "I certainly hope that scars."

Looking hurt, the Gatherer bowed his once-handsome head. "As you wish, my Lord."

Maul laughed, the horrible sound cutting through the night air like a knife. "Yes. Yes, indeed."

"My Lord," the Gatherer murmured, head still bowed. "The man that the Ministry assigned to Draco Malfoy will be looking for him."

Ah, yes. The black-haired one. He had struck him in the face a few nights ago, before he was strong enough to fully saturate the body. Maul remembered.

The soul inside the body struggled anew, and Maul was suddenly nauseated by the bright, expanding feeling that exploded from the soul and filled the body. It swelled inside of him like the rising sun, swirling around his heart with unimaginable affection and tenderness. A fierce, protective love. Maul spat, hating the emotion. The very notion of love offended him. Maul spat again, attempting to rid his mouth of the taste of sunlight.

Weakened already by the nauseating feeling, Maul stared hard at his Gatherer, a sudden thought coming to mind. "Servant, when the soul retakes this body, tell him that I will spare his lover if he surrenders to me completely."

"Yes, my Lord," the Gatherer replied immediately. "Who is this lover?"

Maul raised an immaculate, silver brow. "You don't know? The black-haired one. The body-guard. As you said, he would be looking for him."

Anger flashed in his Gatherer's sunny eyes, twisting his features with rage. "They're lovers?!"

Maul smiled slowly. Oh, yes. "And if you serve me well enough, Gatherer, I will let you have him."

The Gatherer nodded, his face still dark with an unexplainable wrath. Well, perhaps not unexplainable; Maul could read his thoughts easily if he wanted to. However, Maul didn't think it was necessary.

Then, leaving the taking of this body to his Gatherer, without whom, it would be difficult and take many weeks, Maul faded, shrinking into the depths of the body, a tiny niche beside the soul of Draco
Malfoy.

The Gatherer watched Maul stiffen in the body of the Malfoy heir and his great, bottomless black eyes faded to frightened grey. Draco Malfoy blinked, trembling so badly he looked like he was seizing. He looked around like a wild animal, his eyes large and terrified. "Where am I?! Who are you?!

The Gatherer tipped his head to one side, regarding Draco silently. His anger was a slow surge and pull inside of him and he had to will his temper in check.

"Why did you bring me here?" Draco demanded, his voice rising to a shout. Draco spotted the gashes in the man's cheek and looked at his hand, his stomach lurching when he saw the bloody flesh engrained in his fingernails.

The Gatherer picked up his violin and placed it beneath his chin. He brought the bow across the strings, playing a few chords in creepy succession. Pain erupted from the Mark on Draco's back and he doubled over, falling to one knee. In clouds of black, Death Eaters began to appear in a standing circle around the crouched form of Draco Malfoy.

Draco looked up, shaken to his very core, and his mouth ran dry.

~*~

Harry nearly fell off his broom when the pain in his spine exploded again. This time, however, he did not faint and righted himself on the broom. Harry increased his speed, shooting through the night air on his broom, knowing he was close. Harry squinted through the darkness, spotting a small fire in a park on the outskirts of London City. Speeding like a bullet, Harry plummeted towards the fire. His heart leapt and he grit his teeth when he sighted a pale figure in the center of a circle of black-robed figures.

Death Eaters.

"Draco!" Harry screamed, wind whipping past him as he sped toward the ground at break-neck speed. Draco's silvery head lifted and his hand shot up. Harry flung out his arm and pulled hard on the broom with his other, grabbing Draco's arm and plucking him from the circle of Death Eaters. Harry swung hard with the arm that Draco clung to and Draco got his legs around the back of the broom, leaning forward and wrapping his arms around the Auror's waist.

"Are they following?!!" Harry shouted.

Draco craned his neck to look, seeing Death Eaters flying towards them, broomless, surging forward like a black cloud. Draco swallowed. "Yes!"

"Hold on," Harry gritted and leaned forward, increasing their speed as he headed straight for the city.

Harry went straight into Quidditch mode as the first red-bolted curse flew over his shoulder. Harry veered sharply left, feeling Draco's arms tighten around his waist as they whipped around a small building. Harry dodged into a tight alley, pulled right at the end of it, and nearly caused a car wreck when he flew into an intersection, hovering dangerously close to the Muggle contraptions. Harry flew lower, still speeding so quickly, their surroundings blurred to smears of color. Harry dodged dangerously between the oncoming automobiles, weaving between them and ducking low when a stray curse cast by a Death Eater struck something near them and exploded. The street widened and the cars became fewer.

"Watch the deck!" Draco shouted over Harry's shoulder when a fiery green curse struck the asphalt a
few feet in front of them, causing sparks and rubble to explode in their faces. Harry pulled up, shooting them skyward as Draco held on for dear life.

"They're catching up!" Draco shouted and Harry leaned forward again, bolting towards the east side of town. "Where are we going?!

"Diagon Alley!" Harry called back, keeping his focus on dodging the deadly curses being shot at them and keeping up his dangerous speed that wasn't quite fast enough. "We'll go faster on separate brooms!"

Draco was incredulous. "We don't exactly have time to stop and shop for brooms right now, Harry!"

Harry didn't respond as he plummeted down into another intersection and cut into another alley. Harry whipped left, and then right. And then right again. Then: "I'm gonna try something, Draco! Hold on!" Harry flung out his right arm, sending them into a spiral, his eyes darting as he searched for the shop he was looking for. "Accio Broom!" Harry shouted suddenly and an explosion of glass covered them. When they emerged from the shower of glittering glass, their flying spiral becoming erratic, a broom hovered near Harry's shaking, outstretched hand, flying alongside them. "Draco! Jump! Now!"

"Are you mad?!"

Harry growled, his magical hold on both brooms slipping, and reached behind him. Grabbing the cuff of Draco's shirt, Harry all but threw Draco onto the stolen broom. Wide-eyed with shock and with no idea which way was up, Draco grabbed the handle of the broom and wrapped his legs tightly around the end. Their dual spiral began to even out and Draco finally leveled his broom. He glanced to his left and saw Harry flying next to him, his face set and determined.

"Draco--" An explosion in front of them ripped the words from Harry's mouth. They jerked in opposite directions to avoid it, becoming parallel again as they gained speed.

"Where--?" Draco began.

"Fly, Draco!" Harry screamed, as another curse flew over his shoulder. "Just fly!"

And they did, heading ever-eastward, trying to get out of the city. They sped around corners, braved dangerous, nearly, suicidal spirals, and wove in and out of narrow streets as they attempted to shake their pursuers. Nearing the edge of the city, Harry began to draw back, shooting counter-curses back at the Death Eaters to try to give Draco a fighting chance of getting away. Draco began to slow, shouting at Harry to hurry.

Harry glared so fiercely, his face was nearly distorted. "Go!!" Harry screamed, sending another counter-curse behind him. Draco turned east again and pressed forward, his heart like a drum in his chest. A shout sounded behind him that made Draco looked back.

And his drumming heart nearly stopped. Harry, struck by a blazing red curse, fell, unconscious, from his broom and began a deadly free-fall towards the ground. Draco rounded immediately and rushed back, retrieving his wand from his pocket and screaming: "Suspendo Momentum!" Draco plummeted down to catch Harry's body as the Auror's descent slowed, mindful of the Death Eaters swarming down on them. Draco caught hold of Harry around his chest and landed in the middle of a baseball field in some residential neighborhood. Before he could Disappear, a masked Death Eater grabbed his arm, while another took Harry's unconscious from and dumped him some few feet away. Draco shook off the hand on his arm and glared around at the masked, hooded figures. "Show yourselves!" Draco commanded. One by one, they unmasked themselves. A dozen faces he
recognized...and so many he didn't.

Crabbe and Goyle were among the betrayals that hurt the most and Draco spat in their faces. "Couldn't leave well enough alone, could you?" Draco sneered.

Goyle grinned. "We wanted to be here to serve you, Malfoy. We thought you would be pleased. Isn't that why you killed Lord Voldemort?"

Draco gaped at his stupid, open face before he exploded. "No!" he shrieked. "You fucking idiot! No! You think this is a fucking game, do you?! I cannot believe you didn't consult me before--"

"You were imprisoned at St. Mungo's," Crabbe interjected. Somewhere behind him, a Death Eater Draco didn't recognize chuckled, and Draco realized that Crabbe and Goyle had been duped for muscle, knowing that these two would follow if they thought Draco wanted this of them and that it was all part of his plan.

"Merlin, you stupid fucks! I wasn't--"

"Draco Malfoy," a rolling voice said, rich with laughter. The Death Eaters parted and bowed their heads to the passage of the Gatherer. A few feet from Draco, Harry stirred and, groaning, sat up. Harry blinked and looked up, taking in the faces around him. His gaze lingered on the Gatherer's the longest and he jumped to his feet, astonished.

"Cruent?!!" Harry exclaimed, his voice hitting a shrill, unhinged note Draco had never heard from him before.

Cruent, the elusive Gatherer, gazed coldly back at him. "Harry," Cruent said, all the laughter gone from his usually merry voice.

"You know him?!" Draco asked, shocked at the exchange.

"I thought I did," Harry responded after a moment, his astonishment slowly turning into a trembling rage rooted with betrayal.

Cruent turned back to Draco with a roll of his eyes. "Congratulations, Draco. You have become the Dark Lord."

Draco surged forward and about twelve hands rushed out to hold him back. "How dare you speak to me, you godforsaken fuck? Unhand me!" he snarled, struggling against the Death Eaters that pressed against him. "I will never be the Dark Lord, you hear me, you prick?! I killed him! He's never coming back!"

Cruent smiled, his sunny eyes crinkling, bright against the dark gouge in his cheek. "He's already inside of you; a permanent part of the great Maul who wishes to inhabit your body."

A tremor streaked through his body and Draco went limp in the hands that held him back, hanging his head because he knew he was right. Cruent smiled. "Release him," the Gatherer commanded.

When Draco stood alone, Cruent approached him and tenderly caressed Draco's cheek.

"Don't touch him!" Harry hissed, but Death Eaters barred his way as he stepped forward.

"Maul has offered you a great gift," Cruent murmured, as if speaking to a lover. "He wishes to relay a message to you."
Draco raised his tormented gaze and stared blandly back at Cruent. He trembled under the Gatherer's touch.

"I will order the death of Harry Potter if you do not succumb to Maul and offer your body up to him as sacrifice," Cruent said in a soft, sweet voice, smiling into Draco's weary face. "But if you do surrender, he will be spared and the connection that ties you two together will be severed."

Draco bowed his head again and Cruent drew away, motioning for his Death Eaters to release Harry. Harry stumbled forward, green eyes darting between Draco's hunched form and Cruent's retreating back.

"Cruent!" Harry shouted, raising his wand and walking towards him, placing Draco at his back. "Turn and face me, you bloody coward."

Cruent paused and turned. A smile split his face nearly in two. "Coward?" Cruent laughed. Then his face fell, surprise sparking in his sunny eyes as they looked past him.

The point of a wand pressed between Harry's shoulder blades and Harry turned quickly, raising his wand at the opponent behind him. Shock went through his body like a gust of wind through an open window. Draco stood before him, wand pointed at Harry's throat, looking sad but determined, eyes dark and shadowy.

"Harry, I'm activating the Unbreakable Vow."

Harry dodged the green bolt of magic as it shot from Draco's wand. In the back of his mind, Harry was certain the curse wouldn't have actually hurt him all that badly and, as he rolled into a crouch and magicked Cruent's broom into his own grasp, Harry knew Draco really was just trying to activate the Vow.

What actually worried Harry and had his mind racing furiously, as he mounted the broom and lit into the air, followed closely behind by Draco and his damned spell-casting, was that Draco's eyes had changed when he first attacked him. Harry knew that when Maul got a hold of Draco, his eyes darkened; and though Draco's eyes had yet to turn that awful, pitless black, this turn of events could easily weaken and distract Draco enough for Maul to push back into his body.

Harry raised the Shield Charm--somehow stronger since he used it to save Draco in Wisconsin--and whirled his broom around, causing Draco to rear up, surprise twisting his sad, pointed features.

"Draco! Enough!"

"Hold still," Draco whispered before casting a spell that made the magic of the Unbreakable Vow twist and burn inside of Harry's mind; but the Shield Charm deflected it and the Vow held its peace.

"Draco, listen to me--"

"No." Another spell. A blast of green against shimmering gold magic. Still, the Shield held.

"Draco--"

Another spell. The Shield held. "Draco, stop!" A bright yellow charm, the golden magic of the Shield dimmed, then brightened. And held.

Frustrated and despairing, Draco took hold of his broom and flew in dizzying circles around Harry, loosing a flurry of spells against the Shield Charm as Harry shouted back at him in vain. The Shield dimmed again; but, again, it continued to hold.
"Are you daft?!" Draco screamed coming to a halt before Harry. "You HAVE to kill me! You know that! Lower your Shield!"

Harry shook his head. "There has to be another way, Draco. I won't--"

"YOU HAVE TO!!!" Draco roared, suddenly clutching at his hair and tucking his chin into his chest. "I see faces, all these faces, Harry. And, I swear, I want to kill every single one of them. I want to hurt people, do horrible things. This demon inside of me is getting stronger! You can't let him out, Harry. You HAVE to kill me before he does terrible things wearing *my* face, with *my* hands!"

"I will, Draco," Harry responded evenly, trying to keep the tremor from his voice. "But it hasn't come to that, not yet. If it does; I have sworn it. But it doesn't have to be now."

Draco screamed in frustration, his silver eyes bulging, and let loose another volley of spells, curses that would actually harm Harry severely if his Shield Charm wasn't protecting him so valiantly. The curses began to ricocheted off of the Shield, flying past the crazed Malfoy in an erratic display. Harry's heart jumped into his throat when a red bolted curse flew dangerously close to Draco's left ear and singed the skin there. Draco didn't even flinch and continued to scream curses at Harry until the young Auror lunged through his own Shield Charm and bodily knocked Draco off of his broom. One, two, three punches to Draco's face and Harry twisted the possessed Slytherin's arms behind his back as Harry managed their descent with his knees. Draco struggled against him the entire way and, even when they landed and Harry shoved him to the ground, Draco attacked. Harry pushed him away angrily.

The rage that bubbled up from Harry's core so suddenly seemed to engulf him entirely and he shook with it. "I cannot believe you would ask this thing of me," Harry growled, his green eyes spitting fire. "After everything, you would rather force me to kill you than work with me to find another way."

The sound of shouting Death Eaters and their Gatherer rumbled in the distance like thunder.

"Harry--"

"No, shut up." Harry grasped Draco's shirt collar and forced him to his feet with it. "I am not just a memory, Malfoy! I am a real person with real feelings and this thing you want of me, this last resort you manipulated me into would tear me to pieces. If you cared about me at all you would know that."

"There are bigger things at work here than you and me, Potter!"

A scream of laughter shot through the gray dawn like lightning. An answering shout. Maul's army was getting closer.

Harry gritted his teeth. "Maybe not."

Draco tossed his head with a roll of his eyes. "This is no time to be romantic--"

A fourth punch to Draco's face silenced him immediately. Harry released Draco's shirt collar, stunned when he realized he may have over done it. Draco crumpled to the ground in a dazed heap, blood pouring from his mouth and nose and nasty bruises blooming along his eye and jaw.

"The connection of the Horcrux scar," Harry whispered as he watched Draco wipe blood from his mouth, "is something we can use against this thing. It's what brought us together and what warned me tonight. We might have a weapon--"
"Harry." One word, said that way, from *him*. Nothing could stop his heart and his train of thought like the way Draco said his name. Harry watched Draco get his feet under him and stand. Harry watched helplessly as Draco walked towards him, that terrible, sad expression on his pale face breaking Harry's heart. And Harry watched as Draco raised his wand and pressed it against his throat. Harry did not raise his wand.

The shouting grew closer. "There they are!" someone shouted. The sound of running footsteps.

"Harry," Draco whispered. "Please. Please raise your wand."

He couldn't. Unbreakable Vow be damned, Harry couldn't do it. Draco would have to kill him first.

Black shrouded Death Eaters could be seen only a few yards away from them, the Gatherer strolling lazily behind them all.

Draco's eyes welled in frustration. "RAISE YOUR WAND!" he screamed.

Harry shook his head and spread his hands wide. "I won't."

"Harry!" The young Auror's name caught in his throat.

"No."

The cold chill of the impending dawn seemed to thicken as the Death Eaters came so close, one could see their evil grins.

"What I'll become if you don't is so much worse than you killing me," Draco all but sobbed. "Please!"

"We'll get through this another way," Harry whispered, his eyes full of that terrible kindness Dumbledore had looked at Draco with when the Headmaster explained that he wasn't a killer. Despite it all, he wasn't a killer. "Narcissa Malfoy, a martyr to your soul. And you, to mine. You know I can't do this thing. There must be another way."

Draco choked on another sob trying to escape his throat as he heard his own words coming back to haunt him. And, like before, Draco was defeated by his own conscience. He felt it as his arm became unbearably heavy and lowered, seemingly of its own accord. Deja vu swamped at him and the only thing that kept him on his feet was the thought of whether or not a person could play martyr twice in one life. Draco didn't think so. He lowered his wand and stepped into Harry's embrace.

The Death Eaters descended upon them like a furious black cloud and Harry held Draco close. But any fel blow that may have come never did. Frightened shouts shook the air and a battle crashed around them. Harry raised his eyes and sucked in a breath at what he saw. Aurors, led by one Severus Snape, engaged the Death Eaters, wizard to wizard, as the brilliance of the rising sun washed them all in a bright orange-yellow glow. Pan and Hedwig circled above the battle, crying out when they spotted their masters among the fray. A blur of ginger and Ron was in front of them, looking flushed and relieved to see the pair alive. Ron grasped Harry's robes and led them away from the battle, expertly ducking curses and counter-curses alike.

"How did you find us?" Harry shouted over the din, using his body to protect the young Malfoy as they moved.

"Snape showed up at the Ministry with Zabini and your owls," Ron shouted back. "After the way you shot off, quite a few of us were willing to believe something was wrong. Stay here." Ron pointed to a nearby Weeping Willow and began heading back into the engagement with the
surrounded Death Eaters.

"Ron--" Harry shouted when Draco exclaimed: "Zabini?"

"I'll tell you all about it when I get back!" Ron shouted over his shoulder before disappearing from sight.

Harry and Draco stared at one another in dumbfounded disbelief before a grin to split Harry's face erupted and was answered by a small smile of Draco's own. A small smile that completely vanished when another figure approached them.

"How perfectly adorable," the Gatherer snarled behind them. "Your little masochistic back up plan didn't work, Malfoy? Undone by your own conscience? Pathetic."

Draco straightened, his grey eyes flashing angry silver, and curled his fingers into fists. Harry pointedly pushed Draco behind him and stood between the young Malfoy and Cruent, his once lover. Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek and was surprised by the thought that this whole scenario seemed to come straight out of one of those awful soap operas his Aunt Petunia used to watch. Harry squared his shoulders; nevertheless, he somehow created this, he usually did, right? And it was his job to fix it.

"Cruent, I'm sorry things didn't work out between--"

A deep, unfettered shout of laughter exploded from Cruent, his sunny eyes looking manic and wild. Doubling over in his crazed mirth, Cruent slapped his thigh and gasped. "You think I sold my soul to Maul because of a broken heart?" Cruent exclaimed incredulously, his grin wide and crooked. "You think I was so besotted with you that I somehow found out you were more than professionally involved with the Malfoy case and wanted Maul to wear the face of that snobby prick so I could have you forever? You think I'm some victim of unrequited love?" Another shout of laughter shook Cruent's body and Harry felt his cheeks redden. Harry glanced back at Draco but he was looking at Cruent with a curious expression...like the way a cat ponders a string before it paws at it.

"Really, Harry, I always knew you were hopeless, but Merlin!" Cruent straightened and withdrew his wand. "I slept with you so I could get closer to Malfoy. Things really can be that simple."

Harry stiffened, his mind going blank. Harry watched Cruent raise his wand and point it at Harry's chest, thoughts, too quick and fleeting to comprehend, rushed through his brain, a strange painful feeling squeezing his heart, and the image of Ginny's smiling face was all he could think of. It never even occurred to him to raise his own wand in defense. Harry watched Cruent's mouth shape words and burst of color exploded from the tip of his wand. Birch and holly, with a hint of mint root. That was what made up Cruent's wand. The only other person Harry knew of that had mint root in the make up of their wand was Ginny. Stupid. Harry felt stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Ginny.

Cruent.

Draco!

Suddenly, Harry found himself sprawled on the ground where Draco had shoved him; out of the way and feeling very, very stupid. And Draco...Draco was engaged in a duel with Cruent, that beautiful wizard dance of battle that made spectators breathless to watch. Harry got to his feet and fumbled for his wand, watching out of the corner of his eye as ragged--but alive--Aurors made their way towards the spectacle to watch, all Death Eaters accounted for, dead or detained.
A gasp rippled throughout the crowd when Draco injured Cruent with a Dark Curse of black magic that had small biting serpents crawling from every orifice of the Gatherer's body. Cruent screamed and writhed, the little green snakes drawing blood with their sharp fangs and spreading venom in tiny, torturous increments. Draco approached Cruent's convulsing body, a pitiless expression in his cold, grey eyes, and kicked away Cruent’s wand. Draco continued to stand over Cruent, watching the Gatherer of Darkness go mad with pain.

Somehow, Ron made it to Harry's shoulder. "What's he doing, mate?" Ron asked breathlessly.

"He's torturing him," Harry whispered, surprised at the sound of his own voice. Shaking himself, Harry stepped forward and raised his voice. "Draco Malfoy! That's enough!"

Draco glanced back at Harry over his shoulder before turning once again to Cruent. "It is my body. And you were going to let him have it." Without warning, Draco raised his wand again and shouted the Killing Curse. "Avada Kedavra!" Then, he tucked his wand back in his sleeve and left in his wake the dead body of Cruent Mantle.

Harry stared open-mouthed at the corpse, seemingly frozen in time. A Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Hufflepuff Graduate, Eve War survivor, friend, lover, and Gatherer of unspeakable Darkness, first ally to Maul the Black Tulpa, traitor, enemy, Cruent Mantle. Smote by Maul's Host. Draco Malfoy.

Black poetry. Bad faith.

"Turn away, Harry," Draco murmured somewhere near his shoulder.

They weren't Hogwarts students anymore, no one was fully innocent. There were no children here fighting a war against darkness. Not like the last time. This was worse.

Harry turned away.

~*~

Severus Snape and Blaise Zabini stood side by side and watched the Aurors Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley Disapparate Draco Malfoy to Ministry of Magic from a distance. Hard at work, the remaining Aurors steadily combed and cleaned the area surrounding them. Zabini and Snape exchanged a long look.

"That was awfully close," Blaise said, unusually somber.

Snape nodded.

"Back to the Ministry, then?"

Snape nodded again, eyes dark and thoughtful. "I don’t think Scrimgeour is going to like what he is about to hear."

Blaise shoved his hands in his pockets. "Neither is Draco, I don’t think."

Severus regarded his godson’s closest friend. “Draco is no fool. I’m sure nothing the Minister will throw at him will surprise him. It’s Potter I’m concerned about.”

“It would be worse if Potter was taken off this case.”

“More than you can imagine.”
Blaise rubbed at his eyes blearily and shook out a yawn. “Well, then. Shall we?”

Severus nodded and Dispparated.

Blaise grinned, and did the same.

~*~
**A Crossroads**

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: Hey all! A reviewer said something about Harry having a Hero Complex. Yes! Yes, he does. At the end of the day, he's got to save it. And so, this chapter was most definitely inspired by that review. You'll see, lol. Thank you and enjoy!

"I still have my soul. It's mine; all mine." ~Bruce Cambell; Bubba Ho-tep

"Parting is such sweet sorrow." ~William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

"You will stand at the crossroads and choose; and choose again." ~Kushiel's Dart

~A Crossroads~

Sunrise...

The Hero Complex. Harry Potter had it in spades.

Draco Malfoy felt his lip curl as he kept his gaze fixed on the back of his secret lover's unruly head. Four Aurors surrounded him as they walked steadily through the maze of the Ministry of Magic, garnering obtrusive and blatant stares from all directions. Harry and his partner Ronald Weasley led the five of them through the winding halls, neither daring to sneak a glance behind them. Draco could tell Harry was tense by the set of his shoulders and the stiffness of his determined march.

A magicked airplane flew directly into Ron Weasley's hand and, after reading its contents, turned his head in to whisper in Harry's ear. Draco's immediate pang of jealousy was muted by his surprise when they abruptly changed direction and headed for the Minister's own office. Draco had assumed he would be held in some sort of interrogation room. The Aurors had already confiscated his wand. Their steps were brisk and purposeful; but, even so, Draco was slightly amazed at how calm he felt. He felt as though he were walking in a dream, that everything was some surreal passage of time that had him fixed at its center even though he imagined he was outside of it all and looking in.

"If I take you straight to the Ministry with this crazy story about you turning into the most evil creature mankind has ever known," Harry had said so precious few hours ago, "you might just
disappear within the Ministry and some story about you breaking your neck in Asia will show up in the Daily Prophet.”

By rights, Draco knew he should be terrified. He had that much sense. Strange, though, that he wasn’t.

Darkness stirred inside of him like a prodded snake.

Perhaps not.

They paused at the Minister’s door before being admitted. Draco stopped himself from rolling his eyes when he spotted Hermione Granger standing beside the Minister's desk, wringing her hands. Of course, the blasted Gryffindor triumvirate that he personally tormented all those years at Hogwarts would all be present at the downfall of Draco Malfoy. His godfather, Severus Snape stood at the other end of the Minister's desk; and behind him was Blaise Zabini. Draco had spotted him before they had Apparated outside of the Ministry but had not been permitted to speak to him. Draco sent a bland glare in his direction and Blaise returned his gaze calmly. Something strange flickered behind Blaise’s golden eyes, but it was gone as quickly as it had come and Draco was unable to name it. The coiled snake inside of him stirred but remained quiet.

The Minister himself was perched comfortably on the corner of his desk, his hands a relaxed pile on his leg. His expression was pleasant and gave nothing away. And Draco knew, he *knew*, his godfather had already told him. He didn't know how, but he knew.

And Harry did too. Even if he tried to conceal his emotions, Harry was terrible at it and wore everything on his sleeve including that damned Hero Complex.

The four Aurors flanked around Draco, creating a human cage of sorts and Harry and Ron went to stand by Hermione, though Harry seemed as though he would like to be elsewhere. Draco almost smiled. It was endearing, to see him so uncomfortable on Draco’s behalf.

Ah, well.

Nearly a full minute passed before anything happened. It seemed everyone was waiting on Minister Scrimgeour to speak.

"I'd like to apologize, on behalf of the Ministry of Magic," Scrimgeour said finally, "for this whole sordid mess. The Aurors assigned to your case were too young and inexperienced to handle this...unforeseeable turn of events and that was my mistake."

"Oh, nonsense, Minister," Draco said with a polite smile and a courtly flick of his wrist. "Potter's been nothing but professional, strong, brave, and true. Weasley as well, I'm sure--"

"Draco," Harry breathed, startled.

"Oh, shut up, Harry," Draco replied with a wry smile. "You know I don't mean a word of it."

A private grin flashed across Harry’s lips and he ducked his head to hide it; but not before Hermione saw it and frowned.

Scrimgeour looked between Draco and Harry and pursed his lips. Then he stood and clasped his hands behind his back. Pacing, Scrimgeour sighed. "And what to do now?"

To that, Draco said nothing.
"Granger and Professor Snape tell me there is a potion they can brew that can keep this...this Tulpa inside of you at bay for a time," Scrimgeour went on to say. The Minister paused and looked hard at Draco. "You do realize you cannot leave our..." Scrimgeour searched for the word. "...'protection' until we've dealt with this thoroughly?"

Protection. Right. The snake inside of him raised its head and hissed; the darkness lurched.

Draco nodded.

"So." Scrimgeour looked around the room, his gaze resting finally on Harry; who was now so tense he could not even look the Minister in the face. "Draco Malfoy, I am very sorry. With all you have done for the Wizarding World, it depresses me that we have to treat you thus in order to take the necessary precautions. However..." Scrimgeour pulled his hands from behind his back and steepled his fingers in front of him, pausing to look Draco squarely in the eyes. He was a brave man, in his own way. Draco had to give him that. "You will be given quarters in Azkaban until we have all this sorted."

Draco almost laughed. He was just there a few hours ago, burning his father's body outside the island in the Dementor's Circle.

"Minister!" Harry shouted. The Aurors surrounding Draco tensed. Draco saw Severus and Blaise exchange a startled glance out of the corner of his eye. Hermione Granger continued to ring her hands. And Ronald Weasley, smarter than Draco ever gave him credit for, eyed Harry warily and unobtrusively prepared to draw his wand.

Hero Complex be damned.

Scrimgeour raised his hand, demanding silence. "I cannot allow such a danger to roam free."

"You can't send him to AZKABAN!" Harry retorted.

"I can and I will." Scrimgeour replied calmly; though, Draco saw sadness in his beady eyes. "Take him away." Scrimgeour turned away. Draco felt obligated to burn holes in the man's back, but he wasn't angry; not really.

Four pairs of hands grabbed Draco roughly.

"Minister!" Harry shouted, his eyes full of fear. It was then that Draco remembered Harry had watched Dementors suck the soul from his father's body in Azkaban. Draco wondered if that would be his fate as well. It would be a sure fire way to rid the world of Maul the Black Tulpa. The Dementor's Kiss. Draco shuddered.

Burning magical chains handcuffed Draco's wrists and shackled his ankles.

"Minister, may I speak to you alone?!" Harry cried, quickly losing his cool.

Four pairs of hands began to drag Draco from the room.

"Minister!" Harry seemed trapped, debating whether to pursue the Minister or the Aurors taking Draco away. "May I speak with you alone?!"

Scrimgeour remained as he was, silent and unmoving.

Three quick strides and Harry was struggling through the four Aurors that surrounded Draco. "Potter!" one said gruffly. "Don't make me hex you!" Draco saw that Weasley had drawn his wand,
but continued to watch carefully. Draco envied that trust. Harry's eyes were wild when Draco met his gaze. Draco smiled gently. "No, Harry."

"I will not let them take you to Azkaban!" Harry hissed, struggling.

"Then don't," Draco replied calmly. "But not this way."


Then the door was shut in Draco's face and he was led away.

~*~

Immediately, Snape, Zabini, and Harry began speaking at once, protesting Draco's imprisonment. Scrimgeour, looking suddenly old and tired, walked slowly behind his desk and sat down, resting his head in his hands.

"He is a Hero of the Wizarding World," Snape said, hiding his panic beneath his surly disposition. "This decision was ill- advised, Minister."

"A Hero who is possessed by a great evil and tortured a man with dark magic before killing him with an Unforgivable--quite illegal--Curse," came Scrimgeour's muffled response.

"That man was Maul's Gatherer," Blaise reminded him.

"Nevertheless."

Whatever Harry was saying--which was much of the same--he stopped and looked towards Hermione and Ron. Ron exchanged a glance with his fiancée and then looked back at Harry. Harry tilted his head to one side and Ron shrugged. The two of them had learned long before how to speak without words.

"I know how to get it out of him."

Everything seemed to stop when the words spilled from Harry's mouth. Harry took a deep breath. "I will tell you if you will reconsider."

Scrimgeour lifted his head. "I'm listening."

Harry glanced at Hermione. "Maximus Cure."

Scrimgeour's eyes drifted to one corner as he tried to place the name. "I'm sorry, I don't..."

Scrimgeour's eyes widened. "Oh."

"The Inversion Echantratem. We know that it won't kill Malfoy because he's survived it already."

"Minister, I wouldn't have a clue how to make it," Hermione interjected with an apologetic glance Harry's way.

"Unfortunately," Snape drawled. "Neither would I."

"So we need Cure." Scrimgeour shook his head. "Magical borders are closed. We would have no way of retrieving this man."
Blaise spoke up at that. "Minister, I can take care of that."

Scrimgeour narrowed his eyes. "How?"

"If you allow that to go unanswered," Blaise replied smoothly, "you can claim plausible deniability."

Minutes passed as Scrimgeour mulled this over and Harry's heart raced in anticipation. Finally, Scrimgeour scribbled a note on a scrap of paper, charmed it into a flying paper plane, and sent it out the door.

"Draco Malfoy will reside in Cell Block C--"

"Minister--"

"--until Granger and Professor Snape have the potion to hold Maul quiet," Scrimgeour finished. The Minister looked up at Harry, a gentle smile in his eyes. "Then he can have my quarters here at the Ministry, provided he does not leave and a guard of no less than four Aurors remain posted."

Harry released a breath he hadn't realized he was holding. "Thank you, Minister."

"You have one month," Scrimgeour continued, his voice hardening. "Thirty days and no more. If you haven't found a way to destroy this thing once you get it out of him by then, I will send him to Azkaban indefinitely. Have I made myself clear?"

Harry swallowed. The Dementor's Kiss. "Transparency, sir."

"Minister," Blaise murmured.

Scrimgeour nodded and Blaise swept from the office, robes billowing and all the self-importance only a Pureblood could muster.

Severus and Hermione spoke briefly to the Minister about the potion—which they called Markaghirelle—and claimed it should be ready within thirty-six hours. Then, they too, were dismissed.

Ron and Harry lingered behind and when the door shut behind their old Potions Master, Scrimgeour let out a dry laugh. "Yes, you are still assigned to the Malfoy Case. Get out of my office."

Relieved, they obliged.

~*~

An Auror afore Draco snatched a paper plane from the air. Again, their party abruptly changed direction; and when Draco realized they were headed back within the Ministry, he wasn't sure if he was relieved or disappointed. Between the bobbing heads of his guards, Draco spotted Blaise Zabini walking briskly past them. Time seemed to freeze when they made eye contact and Draco felt cold all over. Blaise did not slow his pace or give any other sign of acknowledgement but Draco turned in a full circle as Blaise walked by, trying to keep him in sight.

Again, four pairs of hands grabbed him and the chains binding his wrists and feet burned fiercely. Draco did not struggle and soon they arrived at their destination.

It was, quite literally, a cage.

A perfect square of magicked bars, impenetrable from the inside and out; ten feet long, ten feet wide, and ten feet high. Surrounding the cage was an equally square room and Draco jumped slightly
when the large iron door shut behind them and was bolted. The Auror who had received the charmed paper plane waved his wand and one wall of bars sunk noisily into the ground. Then, the Auror removed the chains binding his wrists and ankles. Taking his cue, Draco stepped inside and the wall was replaced.

Draco turned in a circle and watched, mildly interested, as a small cot appeared, then a sink, and finally a urinal. Draco raised his eyes to his four-man guard, who stood on each side of the cell, gazing impersonally back at him. One was fair, with gentle brown eyes and a haunted look about him that suggested he had seen things too ghostly to ever be surprised by anything. Another, the Auror with the charmed paper plane, whom Draco assumed was the leader of sorts, was gruff and heavy-handed, with a head of balding black hair and sunken blue eyes. He, too, looked like a weary veteran. The third was an older man with a salt and pepper beard and a pair of dark brown eyes, eyes that seemed to see too much and was bitter for it. The last was thin and tall, with a beak for a nose and the kindest, hazel eyes Draco had ever seen.

It was when searching his gaze that Draco realized his 'guard' was relieved at their change of destination.

"Welcome to Cell Block C, Mr. Malfoy," the beak-nosed, kind-eyed one said. "My name is Heroth. Breakfast will be served in under an hour and our shift will change out. You are ordered to remain here until further notice with no less than four guard at all times. The Minister asks us to extend his personal apologies for the rough hospitality."

Draco nodded and offered a rueful smile. "Thank you, Heroth. I'm sure this is a holiday compared to Azkaban. I am not complaining."

The gruff, balding, blue-eyed one snorted softly. "You must be nothing like your father, then."

Draco's cold grey eyes swiveled over to him and beheld the man with a withering stare. "One must wonder if that is an entirely good thing, Auror." Draco lifted his sleeve and revealed the mangled, scarred Dark Mark still visible in stark black pieces on his forearm. "I may prove to be worse."

The gentle-eyed, haunted one approached the cell, a strange look on his face.

"Gasse," the gruff, blue-eyed one warned.

Gasse ignored him and regarded Draco quietly. "Young man, no one here wants anymore Hell on Earth. It might behoove you to avoid proving anything at all."

Inside of him, the coiled snake shifted, lifted its horrible head and hissed, loosing a terrible echo of laughter Draco struggled to keep at bay. He sat on the cot and wrapped his arms around himself, rocking as he pressed his lips tightly against the dark, manic laughter that bubbled inside of him. Draco shut his eyes and his head swam. Evil laughter rang off of the walls in his head, drowning out everything else, and Draco saw the burning of Rome. He saw a Persian army pillaging, the assassination of the Romanoff’s, concentration camps under the rule of Adolf Hitler, a ring of Death Eaters surrounding a tortured pregnant woman. He saw rape and murder. He saw blood and gore and hate and rage. He saw unspeakable darkness running crimson red as it drew a gash through the ages. It filled him up, saturated him. He could taste it on his tongue, feel it on his body.

And all he heard was that terrible, terrible laughter.

Draco sunk to his knees and clutched at his head. Your Gatherer is dead, Draco thought fiercely. He is dead. I killed him. He is dead. He is dead. He is dead.
Slowly, the laughter faded to a loud breathing as it listened to Draco's thoughts.

I will fight you, Draco thought. I will. You are weak and your allies are gone. Your Gatherer is dead.

I will leave my handprint on your soul, Maul whispered back. There is enough darkness here to sustain me for a lifetime.

Not my soul.

Yes, your soul. Bitterness of your mother's death. Hatred of your father. Mistrust of your friends. Scorn, apathy, anger. Guilt. Ah, there is much guilt here. And you are alone. Such loneliness. Years of isolation in the wilderness can breed such darkness, such hopelessness. It is all here. All here.

It is mine.

It is darkness nonetheless. And I will devour it like a babe devours milk. It will make me strong. Then I will have you.

No.

Oh, yes.

You will lose.

Even if I do, I will leave my handprint on your soul.

It is my soul, my darkness. You may not have it. You may not have me.

The laughter returned.

It is mine! And Draco pushed with all his might, pushed it down into his depths, burying it with any bright memory he could think of.

Maul laughed harder when Draco tried to throw memories of his mother, of Pansy, of times at Hogwarts at him, feeding on the bitterness that came with it.

Then, with a gasp, Draco thought of Harry. Harry fighting through the storms of his memory to calm him. Harry eating breakfast. Harry with his mouth all over his body. Harry with his surprising smile, a flash of merry white teeth, a wonderful crinkling at the corners of his beryl eyes. Harry and his godamned, Merlin-forsaken Hero Complex.

"I hate this."

"But not me?"

"No, not you."

Draco smothered Maul with every sunny, aching, wonderful thought and feeling he could muster, Harry Potter's name a chant in his thoughts.

And suddenly, he could breathe again.

Gasse was there watching. And so was Heroth. And the other two.

Draco climbed onto the cot and laid his head on its meager pillow, willing air in and out of his lungs in slow, steady breaths.
His guard did not speak; and whatever they thought, Draco really, truly couldn't care less.

Draco stared across his cell and fixed his gaze on the small sink. And thought of Harry.

The only beacon of light his memories seemed to hold true for him.

~*~
The Seven Keys

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Seven Keys~

Harry's steps pattered noisily on the tiled floor as he moved across the main forum of the Ministry of Magic. Whispers followed him as he passed and Harry ignored them like he usually did. They saw him and Ron Weasley lead Draco Malfoy, caged like a wild thing between four highly trained Aurors, through Ministry of Magic and directly to the Minister's Office. Others also witnessed those same four Aurors conduct him back down to the forum and then back into the Ministry after receiving a memo from Scrimgeour himself. What they thought, Harry knew must be crazy. Somehow, Harry knew none of it would be close to the truth.

Ron marched quietly next to him, lifting his head to peer at Harry every once and a while like he was on the verge of saying something. They had been on their way to the mess hall to snag a bite for breakfast before debriefing; but then Harry had winced, turned on his heel, and took off briskly in the opposite direction. Ron followed.

Though, in all sincerity, Ron wondered if Harry realized that he was even there.

For many minutes of following his best mate down three stories and seemingly endless, winding halls, Ron watched Harry march on, his head in some other place. Harry seemed dazed and driven at the same time, his bright green eyes concentrating on something Ron couldn't fathom. However, Ron could see the strain of exhaustion, stress, and worrying all over his dearest friend. His bright beryl gaze was dimmed by shadowy circles lining his eyes, his mouth seemed fixed into a harsh frown, and his very stature seemed rigid and taut, like a bow strung too tight and ready to snap. Ron had seen this before.

Finally realizing that Harry was headed to Cell Block C, Ron reached out a hand and stopped Harry with a firm grasp on the young Auror's shoulder. Harry looked over at him and blinked slowly, like he was seeing Ron for the first time in a long time.

"No," Ron said.

Harry's frown deepened. "No, what?"

"You need rest," Ron stated firmly. "Leave Malfoy be."

"He was fighting Maul," Harry protested softly, swaying slightly on his feet. "I could feel it. And I heard my name. Draco was saying it. Then the struggle faded."
Ron blinked. "Harry, what is it exactly that you think you can do now?"

"He was calling for me," Harry said stubbornly. "I have to see if he's okay."

"You said it faded."

"I have to see if he's okay."

"Merlin, Harry!" Ron exclaimed, turning the heads of a few passerby's. "Look at yourself. You're exhausted. You need sleep and a few hours to relax. You're in no state to help anybody."

Harry turned his face away. "Even so."

Beginning to get frustrated, Ron tightened his grip on Harry's shoulder and shook him. "One visit and then you go straight home and take the rest of the day off. You have to promise me. I don't want to see you back here until tomorrow morning."

Harry turned back to Ron, looking incredulous. "Are you mad? What if the Tulpa comes back? The potion's not ready yet and we still haven't found a way to kill it once we separate it from Draco's body. I can't just take a day off, Ron! This is my job!"

Ron nodded, looking severe. "You've done your job; now let everyone else do theirs. 'Mione and Snape are working on the potion, Malfoy's not going anywhere and we've got four Auror veterans watching him around the clock. Even Blaise is helping us get Cure. I'll be here in case anything bizarre happens. You can take the day off, mate. The world won't end if you get a few hours rest, Harry."

"We need to figure out a way to kill it! We've only thirty days, Ron!"

"Yeah, and we'll start on day two." Ron set his chin, looking unmovable.

Harry sighed. "Fine."

"Promise," Ron demanded, adamant.

"I promise."

Satisfied, Ron bowed, sweeping his arm out in a dramatic fashion. The gesture was so out of character for his best mate that Harry actually smiled.

Soon, they were at the entrance of the Ministry of Magic's isolated Cell Block. They made short time of going through the screenings and wards that barricaded certain personnel and admitted few others. Being the Head Aurors on the Malfoy Case, they were admitted without question. Once inside, Harry seemed to freeze in the doorway of Cell Block C, his gaze fixated on the perfect square of charmed bars that caged Draco Malfoy. Ron gave him a discreet nudge.

Entering, Harry circled the cell at a few paces away, trying to get a better view. Draco appeared to be sleeping.

But, no. Draco's pale grey eyes, that seemed froster against the slate of the iron bars, lifted to meet Harry's when he came into view.

Harry hesitated when he took in Draco's haggard appearance. Never had he seen him look so...worn*, not even in his Pensieve. If Harry had shadows beneath his eyes, Draco's were deeper and darker. He looked paler than usual, unkempt, and tired. And when he finally stirred, rising to
sitting position on the meager cot that Cell Block C afforded him, Harry saw the cut on his lip, the nasty gash above his left eye, and the purpling bruises that stood out so garishly against his pale skin, along his jaw and high on his cheekbone. Harry swallowed guiltily, knowing he had given him those.

"Ice," Harry said, his voice hoarse. Ron and the other Aurors stood umoving, glancing at one another questioningly. Harry turned to them. "Bring me ice!"

Heroth headed for the door. "I'll get it."

Harry turned back to Draco, his eyes roaming over the blemishes he had inflicted on his lover's face and feeling remorseful. He had to hit him. He had to.

Harry let the morning's events replay in his mind, remembering the panic in Draco's face as he roared curses against Harry's valiant Shield Charm; and, more importantly, remembering his eyes growing darker and darker. If there was one thing Harry knew about darkness, it was that it fed on despair like nothing else. His own despair was the deadliest weapon Voldemort had once threatened him with. And despair was what was weakening Draco to Maul in those final moments before Harry knocked him off of his broom.

Then, it had vanished completely when Draco killed Cruent.

Well, executed him was more like it.

Even so, Harry could not gainsay Draco's actions. It was obvious that Draco severely weakened the Black Tulpa by destroying his Gatherer. "It is my body," Draco had said as he stood over the tortured Cruent, venomous snakes pouring out of every orifice in his body. "And you were going to let him have it."

Harry wondered if there was more to this puzzle than he was comprehending.

Heroth returned with the ice and handed it over to Harry wrapped in a cloth. "Thank you," Harry said with a nod. "Now give us the room."

"Harry--" Ron began.

"Give us the room," Harry repeated, a stubborn note to his voice that Ron easily recognized.

"Then give me your wand," Ron replied, holding out his hand.

Immediately, Harry handed it over and Ron gave it to Gasse. Afterward, they all vacated the room and shut the door, leaving Harry and Draco a small amount of privacy.

Only then did Harry approach the bars, handing Draco the ice. "You look terrible."

Draco took the ice and held it to his cheek. "You look like you could use some rest yourself."

Harry smiled ruefully. "So I'm told."

Draco sunk down and sat crosslegged on the cold floor, as if his legs wouldn't hold him upright for very long. Harry sat as well, liking the nearness of it, and leaned his head against the magic bars. "You're not eating," Harry said, noting the untouched breakfast tray.

"I'm not hungry."

"I came because I felt--"
"I know."

Harry's eyes fluttered closed. "Can you hold out until the potion is made?"

"Yes," came Draco's answer.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You called my name."

"No, I didn't."

Harry opened his eyes and turned his face so he could better see Draco's. The Malfoy heir was gazing back at Harry, his eyes soft as he leant his head against the foot of the cot. "I said your name, I didn't call it," Draco said, a secret smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

Harry grunted, too tired to play one of Malfoy's games. "What did it want?"

"The usual."

"Ah."

A moment passed where neither said anything.

"Why was the Gatherer important to Maul?" Harry mused aloud.

"Because only the Gatherer knows how to cast away souls without ridding the Host of the Black Tulpa," Draco answered, as if this knowledge had always been inside his head all along. However, when Harry turned to look at Draco again, the Slytherin seemed surprised at his own words. "The Gatherer seals the Black Tulpa inside of the Host," Draco continued. "Without his Gatherer, Maul would have to work harder to cast out the Host's soul and claim the body."

"The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night..." Harry said, quoting the Prophecy. "So you threw a wrench in his Prophecy when you killed the Gatherer."

Draco was unsure what a wrench was but he nodded anyway. "I suppose so."

"The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night..." Harry quoted again, suddenly feeling sick. "Draco...do you think Cruent was possessed too?"

Draco was quiet for a moment, waiting for an answer to pop into his mind like the last one did. But there was none forthcoming. "I don't know," Draco murmured finally. "Harry, I'm so sorry."

Harry turned away, slumping down further. He squeezed his eyes shut against the sound of Cruent screaming as Draco tortured him. Harry didn't like this bitter cold feeling in his chest.

Harry jumped when Draco wrapped an arm around his torso through the bars, holding him in a loose embrace. Harry turned into it, rising to his knees and reaching out to hold the back of Draco's neck. Harry pressed his forehead against Draco's lightning bolt scar, the cold bars sparking against the magic their connection elicited. "I'll get you out of here," Harry said. "You just hold out until that potion is ready."

"I'm so sorry, Harry," Draco repeated, his grey eyes wide with guilt, searching his lover's gaze for what he felt. "I'm so sorry."
"I'm going to study the Prophecy to see if there is any glitch we can use against this thing."

"Harry, I'm so sorry."

"Ron wants me to take the day off."

"Harry!"

"What?"

Draco waited until Harry met his gaze, trying not to read too much into the pain he saw there. "Merlin, I'm sorry, Harry. I'm so sorry. I don't know why I tortured him like that. I don't know why I played with him and hurt him like I did. But I can't say that it was Maul doing it. I can't say that."

Draco took in a deep breath. "When I looked at him, I saw the man that wanted to rip my soul out of my body and give me over to this thing inside of me. I saw the man that crept into your bed to get closer to that goal. I saw the man that used you to use me and I wanted to hurt him. It was blinding and irrational, but I wanted it and so I did it. And then I killed him. Mercilessly. I swear, Harry, I didn't feel a thing. I'm so, so sorry. I murdered someone you cared about and I didn't think--"

"No, no, shh..." Harry wished he could hold Draco closer, he wished he could do so many things that he couldn't; but there were tears streaming down Draco's pale, haggard face and he didn't know how to comfort him. "I don't know if Cruent was ever worth any of this...or if he was ever more than Maul's tool; but I'll tell you one thing, Draco: I probably would have done the same thing if our roles were swapped."

Draco didn't answer as he dashed at his face with the back of one hand, irrationally wiping away his tears as if they were shameful. "I'm so sorry, Harry."

Harry pressed his lips to Draco's brow before rising to his feet. "I'll get you out of here as soon as I can."

Draco nodded and rose to sit on his cot.

Harry crossed the room but paused at the door. "I know in my gut that Cruent's not worth your tears, Draco," Harry murmured. Draco raised his head, meeting Harry's gaze. "But it makes me feel better," Harry continued, "knowing you think he is. It means you're winning against this bastard Maul."

"Does it?"

Harry offered a faint, encouraging smile. "I think so." Harry knocked three times on the door and Draco's guards were re-admitted.

Harry left Cell Block C and did not look back. This time, he didn't feel he needed to.

This time, Draco almost wished he had.

~*~

Ron walked Harry back to the Main Forum, their steps brisk and full of intention. Harry spoke to him in low tones the entire way.

"Ron, I need you to brief everyone involved in this case; make sure everyone is on the same page. Draco's guard who aren't on shift, the Auror's who aided in Wisconsin, the Minister, Hermione, and Snape."
Ron nodded, his bright red hair falling into his eyes. "Yes, I was thinking that. What about Blaise?"

"To be blunt, mate," Harry said, "I don't entirely trust the man."

"I agree," Ron responded, tossing his hair out of his eyes. "What is he doing here?"

"I don't even think Snape is sure," Harry murmured, glancing over his shoulder. "We might do well to look into that."

Ron nodded again.

"I want a full update on the progress of the Markaghirelle when I return in the morning," Harry said, adjusting his Auror's robes around his shoulders. "Have Hermione get it on my desk first thing."

"Aye aye, your highness."

Harry grinned before turning serious again as he paused before the exit. "During your briefing, make sure to analyze and interpret every possible meaning and crux of Maul's Prophecy. It's imperative that we know how to kill this thing as soon as possible."

Ron reached out and laid a hand on Harry's shoulder, squeezing it slightly. "You got it, mate. Get some rest. I mean it."

"I really hate to break up such affectionate comradery," Snape drawled, approaching in a swirl of black robes. "But, surely, some things are better left for a more private setting."

Harry and Ron turned to scowl at their old Potions Master. "Aren't you supposed to be brewing a potion to save our godson?" Ron replied, his lip curling even though his insides began to knot up. He really, really hated this man.

Snape sneered. "Oh, yes. However, Ms. Granger brought it to my attention that the two witless wonders that are in charge of my godson's case didn't know what the Seven keys were."

Ron felt Harry freeze next to him. "Well, don't leave us in suspense, Snape," Harry grated. "Really, Potter. I had expected more from you," Snape replied lazily, his black eyes sharp and contemptuous. "You had, after all, spent a considerable amount of time hunting them down in order to defeat Lord Voldemort."

Harry sucked in a breath. "Horcruxes!" Harry felt a piece of the expanding puzzle slide into place.

"Yes," Snape said. "I believe Voldemort promised Maul a Host if he relinquished the secret to the Horcruxes."

Harry's eyes widened before he pushed forward, trying to shoulder his way past Ron and Snape and back into the Ministry. Ron shoved him back. "No, Harry! Go home and rest."

"How the hell am I supposed to rest now, Ron--"

"Figure it out," Ron exclaimed, jabbing his finger towards the door, his patience slipping.

"Ron--"

"Go!"

Harry took one last look at Ron's face and realized that his partner was prepared to drag him to his
flat himself if he had to. Harry sighed, turned, and went.

"You," Ron said, gesturing to Snape. "Get back to work. If any more useful tidbits come into your oily head, you send a goddamned memo."

Snape reared up, indignant. "When did you earn the right to order me about, Weasley?"

"When you began wasting precious, invaluable time to start scenes with Harry Potter in the Main Forum of the Ministry of Magic!" Ron hissed, his temper all but lost and giving him a smidge of courage. "Now get back to saving your godson's sanity. I thought that was important to you!"

Snape sent him a withering glare before storming off, leaving Ron to throw up his hands.

Across the forum, Dolores Umbridge--demoted after her behavior during the war, but still very, very capable of starting trouble...and enough malice-laced cause to do so--smiled her pink, plump-faced smile. "Well, well, well; what is going on here?"

If there were three people she had it out for, it was Hermione Granger, her simpering Auror fiancee Ronald Weasley, and his celebrity, no-good partner Harry Potter.

But most especially, Harry Potter.

For he must not tell lies.

~*~
The Sword of Godric Gryffindor

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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“A Pact is made on the Quest for Immortality…
...a God of Darkness relinquishes the Seven Keys…
...a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb…
...a Child born to Heal severed Lines…
...a Marking of the Near-Man…
...when the Dark Lord perishes at the Hands of Love half-remembered…
...The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night…
...a Sacrifice is laid on the Alter of Justice…
...and Purity wears the Face of Maul…
...Darkness reigns over the Land of Men…
...so be quiet Child…
...for the Black Tulpa fears only the Eighth Key.” ~Chapter 31 "A Secret Prophecy"

~The Sword of Godric Gryffindor~

After waving the wards he constructed to safeguard his flat in London, Harry unlocked the front door and stepped inside. Harry closed the door behind him and reconstructed the wards with a flick of his wand. Afterwards, Harry slid his robes off of his shoulders and tossed them over a nearby chair, kicking off his shoes. Unbuttoning his shirt, Harry made his way down the main hall.

It was a simple enough flat with one bedroom, one bathroom that had a small plumbing issue Harry had yet to figure out, a living space and a kitchen. Sparse furniture—a couch, a chest of drawers, and a bed. Oh, and a lamp. The fridge had a variety of condiments in it, but not much else. Harry felt uncomfortable with too many possessions. He’d never really had many, so he opted to get by with just what he needed and not much more. So, that included clothes, of course, his collection of brooms, his things from Hogwarts, a single Gryffindor banner, a framed picture of his parents, a photo album, and many, many books. Harry had only read a few of them, but Hermione kept buying him more.

Harry finished unbuttoning his shirt and took it off, tossing it to one corner. He paused before the bedroom and decided against going in. Harry turned back and headed into the living room, running a hand through his hair and sighing. Cruent had always said he thought Harry lived like a pauper when he didn't need to. Ron and Hermione always had a guest room available for Harry in their flat if he wanted to sleep there; and this he had done on times too numerous to count. As much as Harry
wanted to be alone, he didn't really like it. Harry collapsed onto his couch, moving only to empty his pants pocket of his wand.

And what was more, Harry felt strange, falling asleep alone when he had become so used to sleeping in the cradle of Draco Malfoy's arms.

Harry kept his wand clutched in his hand as he drifted into oblivion.

~*~

When he awoke, the day was shadowy with the impending sunset. Harry sat up and rubbed his eyes, blinking away the remaining drowsiness. He was hungry.

On a whim, Harry called for Slightly and was surprised when she popped in the room. Slightly's large watery eyes looked around the strange room as she approached Harry timidly. "Master's Harry Potter called, sir. Master told Slightly to always answer to Mr. Harry Potter. Whatever Mr. Harry Potter needs, Slightly will get for you, sir."

Something tightened in Harry's chest. "Thank you, Slightly. I didn't know you would come here."

Slightly looked at him strangely. "Then why did Harry Potter call Slightly, if he didn't think Slightly would come, sir?"

Harry smiled a little. "I don't know."

Slightly fidgeted with the hem of the sack she wore. "Did Harry Potter need something in particular?"

Harry nodded. "I am hungry, Slightly."

Slightly bowed and disappeared. Moments later, she returned with a large steaming bowl of stew. Harry accepted it gratefully and Slightly watched him eat. "How did you make this so quickly?"

Slightly shrugged. "I always make the meals for Master and Master's Harry Potter in case they are hungry. It is good that I do. Then Master's Harry Potter will not go hungry. Where is Master? He has not called Slightly for supper."

Harry lowered the bowl. "Draco's at the Ministry of Magic."

Slightly's shoulders slumped. "Oh."

Harry finished what he could of the stew and put the bowl aside. "Thank you, Slightly."

Slightly bobbed her head but did not pop away. "With Harry Potter's permission, can Slightly tidy up here?"

Harry looked around his flat. Dishes were piled high in the sink, clothes were strewn everywhere, and everything had a layer of dust on it. Harry nodded. "Couldn't hurt."

"Slightly thanks Master's Harry Potter."

As Slightly scurried off, Harry took his wand and used it to transfigure a wall in his living room into a chalkboard.

"Alright," Harry murmured, taking a piece of chalk and began to write with it.
At the Ministry of Magic...
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Ron stood before the room full of people he had assembled, feeling somewhat sick but resolved to get this over with anyway.

"Analyze and interpret," Ron said, beginning to write on the board behind him. "The Prophecy may hold the secret to killing the Black Tulpa. Those of you assembled all understand what's at stake here?"

Two dozen heads nodded. Ron met Hermione's gaze, her confidence in him giving him strength. Snape was there too, a surly presence in the room. Hermione assured Ron that the potion was brewing and they could be excused to attend the briefing. Anin and Mackle were there and so were every Auror that had been involved in the Wisconsin accident. Heroth and Gasse were there with Lanel, Bishop, and all the other Veterans that had been re-assigned to guarding Malfoy, minus the four that were watching him at the present time. The Minister was there with his secretary, a sweet face girl by the name of Mary Heart. Two others were present from Muggle Affairs, Trisha Knockwood and Sam Little. Blaise was already gone and no one attempted to locate him. The air in the room was stifling, and Ron pulled at his collar.

"Good," Ron said. "Let's go through this piece by piece..."

~*~

Harry's Flat...
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"'A Pact is made on the Quest for Immortality…a God of Darkness relinquishes the Seven Keys…a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb…'," Harry murmured as he wrote. "Now known to be the agreement between Voldemort and Maul. Voldemort supplies the Host and Maul supplies the Seven Keys. Horcruxes. Voldemort fails and Draco survives, but is unconscious for three years. During which time a warrant is discovered, offering obscene sums of money for the murder of Draco Malfoy..."

~*~

Ministry of Magic...
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"'...a Promise fulfilled in a Pure Womb...a Child born to Heal severed Lines…'," Ron quoted as he scribbled on the board at the front of the room. "Again, seemingly obvious--"

"Narcissa Malfoy married in from the Black blood-line," Severus Snape murmured. "She was considered 'pure' by default. Her union with Lucius Malfoy was supposed to 'purify' the Malfoy line with their heir."

"So, Draco Malfoy is the Promise fulfilled in Narcissa's womb," Anin said.

"And he is the 'child born to heal severed lines', right," Ron agreed, continuing to write quickly on the board.

~*~
"...a Marking of the Near-Man…," Harry murmured. Harry remembered the vision in Draco's Pensieve of the young Slytherin trying to carve the Dark Mark out of his arm in the presence of Moaning Myrtle. And then the cold, stone room where Lucius Malfoy stood by as Voldemort re-marked his son in the center of his spine, Draco's screams crashing against their ears. "The Dark Mark on Draco's spine..."

~*~

Ministry of Magic...

"...when the Dark Lord perishes at the Hands of Love half-remembered…The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night…'," Ron quoted. "This one seems obvious, but I don't think so."

"It kinda insinuates that the Gatherer wasn't 'hosted' until Voldemort was vanquished," Sam Little mused.

"I'm still wondering what the Prophecy meant in terms of 'hosting' the Gatherer," Mackle said, crossing his legs. "Later, when it speaks of 'the Host', its emphasized runically because it pertains directly to Maul; so it's clear that they are two different people. My question is: is it the same kind of possession?"

"It's never really clear that there is a separate entity to possess the Gatherer, or if 'the Gatherer' is that entity and it possesses some chosen mortal," Trisha Knockwood agreed.

"What do we know of Cruent Mantle?" the Minister inquired.

"Graduated our year from Hufflepuff," Hermione said, resting her chin in her hands; and was silently grateful that Harry wasn't here to listen to this. For him, the death of Cruent Mantle must still be too near. "He worked as a Librarian in Diagon Alley. Became Harry's lover a year after the Eve War concluded...and they separated some months later. I'd say about six months before Draco Malfoy woke up in St. Mungo's."

"Cruent attempted to speak to Harry at The Mild Brew before Draco suffered the Inversion Enchantratem in Wisconsin," Ron said abruptly. "Do you remember that?"

Hermione lifted her head. "That's right. That was after...after Harry found the Pensieve and spoke to the Parkinson's."

"Regardless of what you think all of this might mean," Snape said with a roll of his eyes. "That young man was the Gatherer since the end of the Eve War. For three years at least. And now he is dead."

Everyone was silent for a moment. Then Mackle spoke. "So you think that Cruent Mantle was possessed by the spirit of the Gatherer or was the Gatherer?"

"I think it doesn't bloody matter," Snape replied with a sneer.

Mackle sat back. "Perhaps your godson would think differently."

"Do not presume to think you know what my godson would or would not think," Snape said heatedly.
Ron pulled at his collar again. This was going no where. "Alright, alright; listen up. I think the most important thing to analyze here is what the Prophecy meant by 'Hands of Love half-remembered'."

Again, the room fell silent.

Then, for the first time that evening, Mary Heart spoke up, her voice soft and lilting. "I read in the file that when Mr. Potter found Mr. Malfoy's Pensieve, there was a very vivid memory therein of Narcissa's funeral. And then later, when Mr. Malfoy fought You-Know-Who, he made it clear that he was taking revenge for his mother's murder--"

"That's a good point, Ms. Heart," Grasse interjected softly. "However, Malfoy would not have been returned to us if his actions were spurned completely by vengence."

Mary Heart smiled. "Yes, Grasse; that's true. Though I think that revenge was what was in Mr. Malfoy's head but love was what was in Mr. Malfoy's heart. Love for his mother."

"Why would it be 'half-remembered'?" someone asked.

Mary thought for moment but it was Snape who answered. "Draco was bred into a world of conspiring Death Eaters. 'Love' is a natural emotion for humans, Muggles and Wizards alike; however, in the circles Draco was born into, it is something that is smothered--or, rather--it is replaced by other things. Namely: Purpose, duty, and responsibility. In his heart, I believe Draco does love his mother. In his mind, though, I think he may not comprehend it fully as a feeling. Or, at least, may not have at that time. And, therefore, 'Love half-remembered'."

Hermione suddenly looked uncomfortable, but said nothing.

Mary nodded and smiled sweetly, her large eyes misting with the romance of it all. "So, Mr. Malfoy's love for his mother saved him like Lily Potter's love for her infant saved Harry Potter."

~*~

Harry's Flat...

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"...The Gatherer is hosted and calls in the Night..." Harry paused, but the only thing he wrote next to that quote was a few notes on the Song of Summoning.

"...a Sacrifice is laid on the Alter of Justice…and Purity wears the Face of Maul..." Harry rubbed at his face, smearing white chalk along his cheek. The second vese seemed obvious; but the first? A sacrifice.

One could say that Draco sacrificed his freedom to come to the Ministry of Magic and be subjected to its law. But somehow Harry thought it may have more to do with Draco virtually having to sacrifice his soul to be fully possessed by the Black Tulpa. Since that didn't happen--or, at least, hasn't happened 'yet'--the prophetic juxtaposition could be the so-called 'wrench-in-the-engine'.

But 'Alter of Justice'?

How would it make sense that the ridding of Draco's soul could be laid on the 'Alter of Justice'?

~*~

Ministry of Magic...
"Personally, I think 'Justice' could be in reference to Potter," Scrimgeour said aloud.

Surprised, every head turned to the Minister of Magic.

"How?" Snape asked, his nostrils flaring.

"Well, the Prophecy concerning Harry Potter and You-Know-Who made it pretty obvious that it was one that would defeat the other. When it was Malfoy who finally destroyed You-Know-Who, it may be justified to say that the one archnemesis of Maul would--and should--be Harry Potter."

"That's completely ridiculous," Snape muttered.

"But if that were the case, if Malfoy had said surrendered to the Gatherer, Harry would have had to destroy him," Ron said.

Every head turned to him.

Ron looked suddenly embarrassed. "Well, Harry asked me not to mention it if it wasn't necessary...but Malfoy had forced him to swear an Unbreakable Vow to destroy him if he harmed anyone. I think this was when he was starting to realize this Prophecy was dangerous and that it could mean he would be dangerous also."

Scrimgeour sat back in his seat. "So, Potter would have been, literally, forced to battle Malfoy had he been possessed by Maul. I wonder why Potter didn't want us to know that."

Hermione again seemed uncomfortable but it was Ron who offered an answer. "Well, I think it is pretty obvious that, for whatever reason, Harry wants Malfoy to survive this."

"That could definitely be said," Heroth murmured, remembering how Harry had acted that morning in Cell Block C after seeing Malfoy's condition. Murmurs of agreement sounded around the room. They had all seen Harry Potter's strange behaviour with the Malfoy Case. Most assumed it was because Draco Malfoy had once saved his life. Only a few knew that that had only embittered the Boy-Who-Lived, believing the vanquishing of Lord Voldemort had been owed to him.

"Perhaps it has more to do with Potter wanting to avoid being personally responsible for the death of the man who once saved his life," Snape sneered under his breath.

Ron became angry and slammed his fist on the nearest hard surface, which took a considerable amount of time to locate. "Harry Potter is no coward and I will hear no implications that suggest otherwise."

Scrimgeour rubbed his double-chin. "On the contrary, Snape, Potter seems to genuinely care for the welfare of Draco Malfoy, despite his numerous blunders. He damn near committed treason in my office this morning, trying to prevent Malfoy from being sent to Azkaban. You saw. Malfoy had to talk him out of acting rashly."

Snape looked away. Hermione fidgeted. "I think we should take a look at the next verse," Hermione said.

~*~

Harry's Flat...
Harry said it aloud over and over again, pacing in his living room. Nothing was popping into his mind. Hours passed and still Harry could not figure out what the Eighth Key could be.

If the Seven Keys were Horcruxes, then was the Eighth a Horcrux as well?

That seemed impossible. Horcruxes had pieces of Voldemort's soul trapped in them. It was in destroying them that the Dark Lord was destroyed. How could something so evil kill something so evil?

There was a big gaping hole in the puzzle that never seemed piece together.

At some point, Slightly brought him a cup of tea and ushered him to bed. Harry spent hours on end staring at the ceiling, watching the shadows chase one another. Around three in the morning--the witching hour--his ghost-scar tingled and burned and Harry was tempted to go to the Ministry to check on Draco. But Harry knew Ron would have his ass in a sling if he did. So he watched the shadows and tried to ignore the burning on his forehead.

The Eighth Key. The Eighth Key. The Eighth Key.

Finally, the first rays of the sun peaked over the Eastern horizon. The second the night outside began to turn gray, Harry jumped out of his bed and began dressing. Sipping the coffee Slightly made for him, Harry stared at the chalkboard, reviewing all the notes he had scribbled on it.

Suddenly, a thought hit him.

The only House in Hogwarts whose relic Voldemort did not turn into a Horcrux was Gryffindor. In fact, the Sword of Godric Gryffindor had been powerful enough to destroy a Horcrux. So what if...

What if...

~*~

The Ministry of Magic...

***

Harry Potter all but collided into Ronald Weasley in the Auror's Division. Breathless, Harry gripped Ron's arm, green eyes somewhat wild with hope. "The Sword of Godric Gryffindor! If it was powerful and good enough to destroy Horcruxes--the other Seven Keys--what if it isn't that the Eighth Key is the weapon that would kill Maul but that Draco IS the Eighth Key and that the scar is weak to the power of the Sword of Godric Gryffindor? What if Draco IS the Eighth Key, Ron?! What if Maul fears his own Host because we already know how to destroy Horcruxes?! What if we could kill this thing with the sword?!"

Ron nodded, bleary-eyed but smiling. "Or with the venom of a Basilisk. Yes, Harry, we thought so too. I thought you were going to rest."

Harry looked around the room, thinking as quickly as he could. "Is he safe? They haven't--"

"No," Ron said, placing a comforting hand on Harry's shoulder. "We decided to wait for you. Harry, when Draco was under the Inversion Enchantratem, did the scar disappear?"

Harry's entire demeanor fell and he looked crestfallen. "No. Ah, Merlin, no. It was our connection
through the scar that brought him out of it.” Harry began to shake and he sat in the nearest chair, putting his head in his hands.

"Harry," Ron said gently. "That can mean that Maul is not actually connected to the Eighth Key and destroying it wouldn't effect him at all; it would just--"

"It would kill Draco."

"Yes."

"Ron," Harry said, his voice a deathly whisper. "If that gets out, I swear--"

"No one in that room wanted Malfoy dead," Ron said firmly. "But I think we ought to concentrate on why Maul fears the Horcrux Scar."

Harry bit his lip, thinking.

"We decided that we think it's because the Horcrux Scar is connected to you and that you are the Alter of Justice," Ron murmured.

Harry's beryl eyes widened in disbelief. "That's ridiculous."

"Snape said as much," Ron affirmed with a grin. "But here's what Scrimgeour thought..." And Ron made good time explaining the Minister's reasoning. Harry rested his chin in his hand as he listened, his mind growing quiet. He was beginning to really, and truly, hate Prophecies.

"We think," Ron continued, "that if you go into Malfoy's sphere's of magic, like you did before, you could face Maul. Whether or not you beat him would be up to you, but we think that it could be done if we sent you in there."

Harry shook his head. "That still doesn't explain why Maul fears the Eighth Key. Why would he fear our connection through the Horcrux Scar?"

Ron drew in a deep breath. "Hermione has a theory, but she won't tell anyone but you."

"Fine," Harry said, standing. "Where is she?"

"Muggle Affairs. Harry, wait!"

"What?"

"I think you're right about one thing, though," Ron said. "If the Sword of Godric Gryffindor could destroy Voldemort, it could definitely hurt Maul. Horcruxes are a magic that Maul himself lorded over."

"Then I'll go in with the Sword."

"That goblin has it."

Harry paused. "Oh, right. I guess we'll have to go get it from him."

Ron hated that particular goblin almost as much as he hated Severus Snape. "Right."

Harry turned to go find Hermione.

~*~
"You're sleeping with him!" Hermione accused with a hiss between her teeth. She had just pulled Harry into the privacy of the filing room of Muggle Affairs.

"Mione--"

"Don't you lie to me, Harry James Potter. You know I can tell."

Harry sighed. How the bloody hell did she figure that out? "Hermione, it wasn't like I--"

"OH MY GOD!"

"Hermione--"

"MERLIN, ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?"

"Lower your voice--"

"ARE YOU COMPLETELY DAFT?!"

"Hermione!"

"Harry!"

"I didn't plan for it to happen, Hermione," Harry protested. "It just--"

"You know better than that," Hermione interrupted. "He's your client, Harry. Not to mention it's DRACO MALFOY--but that's not the point. If this got out, it would be the end of your career as an Auror. Do you realize that?"

"Yes, actually," Harry retorted, beginning to get angry. "I am completely aware. So would you please--"

"Do you realize how this could effect the case?"

"I've thought about that and--"

"You can't stop, Harry."

Harry froze. "What?"

"Do you love him?"

Flustered, Harry raised his hands. "What?!"

"Do you love him?"

"I don't...I don't know, Hermione. I just--"

"Well, you should think long and hard about that, Harry, because if you do, it's the one that could save Malfoy's ass."

All the air in Harry's lungs seemed to dissipate.

"Which is why I'll keep my mouth shut," Hermione concluded. "The darkest curse the Wizarding World knows is the Killing Curse and if the ancient magic of love can deflect it and cause someone to be brought back to life--which we've seen twice concerning that Horcrux Scar--than it certainly can protect the two of you when you face Maul." Hermione paused. "And it may be the only thing
that will protect you."

~*~
The Markaghirelle

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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"No tears please. It is a waste of good suffering." ~Pinhead in "Hellraiser"

~The Markaghirelle~

"You should tell Ron," Hermione had said. "You should tell him."

Harry laid his head in hands from where he sat behind his desk. Merlin, he was tired. He and Ron had been working out their trip to find Griphook. It would take them into Germany, where the goblin was last sighted, and they would have to travel on foot because of the Apparatal Border Closures. Well, 'on foot' was a relative term. Technically, they would commute as Muggles. They would leave tomorrow after the Markaghirelle was finished.

"He's your partner, Harry. He has a right to know."

Hermione's words kept repeating in his mind, like a broken record that never seemed to stop. It was almost time to go home for the day and still her words chanted in his mind. Harry stifled a yawn and groaned as a sweep of utter exhaustion rattled his bones.

"Do you love him?" "Do you love him?" "Do you love him?"

Harry knew he cared for Draco. But love? He had loved Ginny. He would have done anything for Ginny. Until she had introduced Lenor Remuin at the Auror Graduation. Lenor Remuin would never leave her to fight darkness. Lenor Remuin would never place her in danger. Lenor Remuin would never let her go.

But Harry did.

And Cruent? Harry knew he had never been in love with Cruent Mantle. He had been certain, though, that Cruent had loved him. That's why Harry had left him. Don't love me, Harry had thought. I don't want you to get hurt. Don't love me.

"And it may be the only thing that will protect you."

Don't love me.
Harry laid his head down on a pile of paperwork.

It wasn't fair.

And Harry certainly didn't like to think that he may have to force himself to acknowledge falling for Draco in order to get them both out of this whole thing alive.

Too many people he had loved had been taken away from him. Too many. It wasn't fair. It didn't make sense.

Don't love me.

Even Cruent had met a terrible end for caring for Harry Potter.

He couldn't believe Cruent hadn't cared. He couldn't. It was real, in its own way.

He was damned.

Harry closed his eyes.

Don't love me.

~*~

"Harry."

Harry opened his eyes with a start. Ron was there shaking him awake.

"Harry, what on earth--did you sleep here last night?"

Harry sat up, rubbing a terrible ache in his neck. Apparently. It was morning.

Ron stared at him for a long time as Harry caught his bearings and stood.

"Malfoy's asking for you," Ron said at some length. "The Markaghirelle is ready. Snape and 'Mione are waiting for you in Cell Block C."

Harry's mind was obviously elsewhere, but he nodded and followed Ron to the Cell Block.

They were all indeed waiting for him. Harry stepped into Cell Block C behind Ron, rubbing his neck. Four new Aurors stood surrounding Draco's cage and Draco himself stood calmly by his cot.

He looked even more exhausted than the last time Harry had seen him. Draco nudged into Harry's mind when the young Auror wouldn't meet his gaze, but Harry pushed him back and shook his head.

"Don't," Harry whispered and Draco looked at him quizzically.

Hermione frowned, looking between Harry's reserved figure and Draco's questioning look. Then she took in her fiancée's ignorant expression. Hermione sighed. Harry had obviously not told Ron...and he's probably second guessing the hell out of himself in regards to Draco.

No one scares Harry Potter like Harry Potter scares himself.

Too, too true.

Hermione stepped forward, holding up a small purple bottle with an intricate silver stopper. "Ron, Harry," Hermione turned and nodded to Draco, "Malfoy. We've arranged the dosage so that there
will be no weakening of the amount in Malfoy's system; provided he takes the potion every four hours on the hour."

Draco eyed the bottle, feeling suddenly repulsed by the idea of ingesting it.

Hermione handed the bottle to Harry and Harry approached the cell. "Drink it all, Draco," Harry said, holding it out through the bars.

Draco took the bottle, anger bursting up from somewhere inside of him as he unstopped the bottle and stared at the clear, bubbling elixir that frothed vapor out from the top; and he was visited by a brutal urge to fling it away from himself, to smash the bottle into a million glittering pieces.

You don't need it.

Quiet.

You don't need it, Maul repeated, his voice like honey in his mind. Look how you've suppressed me on your own.

I can't sleep.

I'll let you sleep, Draco. Laughter echoed inside of him. I'll let you sleep forever.

Be quiet.

Why would you let them drug you? Even your lover wants you drugged and out of the way.

No.

Oh, yes. See how distant he is?

Be quiet.

See how he won't meet your eyes? See how he's closed his very thoughts to you?

Be quiet!

He despises you now. Like he always has.

No.

"Take the Markaghirelle, Draco," Snape said from somewhere in the room.

He despises you for murdering Cruent Mantle.

No! He said--

"Drink the potion, Malfoy."

He said that to shut you up. He said it to keep you docile. We both know you are not docile.

Quiet! He would have let them send me to Azkaban if--

The laughter rolled and crashed like thunder. The bushy-haired one knows. I can see it in her eyes.

"Drink it, Malfoy!"
What?

She knows. Do you think you are really worth his job? Do you think he would really let you take that from him? He is casting you away. Look at him.

No.

"Malfoy!"

Look at him!

No! Draco raised the bottle to his lips and tossed his head back, draining the elixir in one draught.

Then everyone jumped nearly out of their skin when Draco let out a blood-curdling scream. Harry's hand shot out and grabbed Draco's shirt collar, keeping the tormented Slytherin upright as his knees buckled and gave out beneath him. "I thought you said it wouldn't hurt him!" Harry shouted over Draco's errant screaming.

"It's not hurting Malfoy!" Hermione protested, her hands tight over her ears.

"It's hurting *it*," Snape said, coming closer to the cage as Draco writhed and veins bulged in his neck.

"Draco!" Harry yelled, shaking him. "Draco! Snap out of it!"

Then, quicker than the eye could follow, Draco's hands wrapped around Harry's throat, squeezing as hard as the fingers could. Harry stared, mesmerized as those long, slender digits attempted to strangle him, into a pair of bottomless black eyes that shifted and swirlèd with malice and hate.

Around them, everyone had drawn their wands and hesitated when Harry gasped: "No! Don't!"

The color drained from Draco's face, giving him a stark grey pallor, blue veins popping out everywhere on his face and neck. Maul squeezed his fingers harder, enjoying the sound of this man struggling for air. "He. Is. Mine." Three words. Then Draco gasped, his color returning and his hands coming abruptly away from Harry's throat. Those bottomless black eyes faded to Draco's cold, cold gray and Harry stumbled back, breath coming in ragged gulps.

Draco pressed against the bars, gripping them with both hands. "Merlin, Harry! Fuck, I'm so sorry--are you okay?!"

Harry sucked in a few ragged breaths and finally straightened, jerking his head in an informal nod. "I'm fine." Harry turned to Hermione and Snape. Snape shrugged.

"So, you see now why we must keep the dosage accurate to the minute," Snape said seriously. "We didn't think Maul would like being subdued."

Ron shifted, watching Draco out of the corner of his eye. "Conduct regular tests on him while we're away. Make sure your estimates are correct."

Hermione nodded and Draco gripped the bars tighter. "Away? Where are you going?"

Ron opened his mouth to answer but Harry shook his head at him. "I don't think you should know."

Harry rubbed his bruised throat gingerly. "At least until we're sure the Tulpa's completely subdued. That was way too close."

Draco looked hard at Harry and tried to push back into his mind using their connection through the
Horcrux Scar. Harry narrowed his eyes and pushed back so hard with his own mind that Draco was physically forced back a few steps. "What you know, he knows, Draco. Stay out of my head." The words were delivered so coldly that everyone in the room felt that they were certain the temperature had dropped a few degrees.

Draco lifted his chin, refusing to look hurt and opted to look dignified and reserved instead. A wall came crashing down between them as Draco's gaze turned icy and his features quite stony. Then he looked away, turning so his back faced Harry until he, Ron, Hermione, and Snape quietly left the room.

"I'm sure there was better way to handle that," Hermione said the second they had emerged from the Cell Block.

Harry whirled on her, his green eyes blazing. "I've had quite enough of your input, Hermione!"

"Hey!" Ron protested, stepping between them. "I'm sure she's only saying that it wasn't really Malfoy who tried to throttle you, mate. It was that thing."

"I know what she's saying," Harry grated, glaring past Ron at Hermione. Abruptly, Harry sighed, running his hands roughly through his hair. Hermione kept her gaze level with his, lifting her chin as she watched Harry's anger melt away, leaving only a weary frustration that burned in his eyes like hot coals in a windstorm.

"You overreacted," Hermione stated simply.

"I overreacted," Harry conceded with a nod, leaning against a nearby wall and letting his head droop. Harry stuffed his hands in his pants pockets. "I want him out of there as soon as the tests are concluded," Harry murmured, his unruly black locks falling into his eyes and casting his features into shadow. "I don't like seeing him in there."

Hermione nodded, her eyes full of understanding. Ron looked strangely between the two of them and scratched at his chin. "I've got the strangest feeling I'm missing something here."

Harry's shoulders began to shake as he started to laugh silently, a quiet black humor swelling inside of him. Harry pushed off of the wall. "Come on, Ron; let's get going. I'll tell you later." Harry paused only to point back at Hermione. "I want him out of there."

Satisfied knowing that Harry would inform Ron of his affair with Malfoy, Hermione only nodded again and watched them disappear down the hall. Snape coughed and Hermione jumped. She had almost forgotten he was there.

"You'll both be traveling as Muggles," Trisha Knockwood informed them, handing Ron and Harry their papers. "Everything's there; you're new identities, travel papers, times and dates." Trisha Knockwood from Muggle Affairs had been appointed to help the two Auror's with planning their mission to finding Griphook and retrieving the Sword of Godric Gryffindor because Hermione had been busy with the Markaghirelle.

"Thank you, Trisha," Ron said, frowning in concentration as he shuffled through the papers of his new identity--a man named John Doe. Clever.

Harry barely glanced at his. He would be traveling under the name James Pieratt. The corner of his
mouth lifted in a half-smile. James had been his father's name. And for the first time since this whole thing began, Harry wondered what his parents would think of his part to play in this madness.

"You're welcome," Trisha said with red-lipsticked smile. "I've put two tickets in there for your train that'll take you to the harbor. From there, you'll take the 'Marie' across the Straights. The..."

Trisha—bless her heart—droned on and Harry listened with half an ear. His mind, as usual, was elsewhere; and concentrated on a certain blond-haired Slytherin who had pointedly turned his back on him only moments before. Harry no longer felt the constant presence in his mind that was inherently *Draco*. He had become used to it. When had that happened? And now he felt his absence like a block of ice in his gut.

Harry couldn't explain why he didn't want Draco to know about his internal struggle with sorting his feelings for him. He just knew that it terrified him to think that if he looked too closely at what Harry felt for Draco, it would leave the young Auror feeling way too vulnerable for comfort. And Harry knew he didn't like feeling vulnerable. He didn't like it one bit.

~*~

The next day found Hermione crouched down beside Draco, fingers pressed against the Slytherin's wrist as she timed his heartbeat through the bars that caged him. She had nearly concluded her first round of tests on the Malfoy heir who bore her impersonal poking and prodding by barely acknowledging she was even there, staring above her bushy head at some fascinating speck on the far wall. After confiscating Hermione's wand, Draco's four-man guard had vacated Cell Block C to give them some semblance of privacy. Severus Snape had returned to Hogwarts, claiming he felt he could better aid his students than his godson now that the Markaghirelle was complete, leaving Hermione to perform the diagnostic on her own.

When Hermione had finished checking his vitals, she wrote a few neat-handed notes in Draco's file and snapped it shut. Draco withdrew from the bars and rolled down the sleeve of his shirt, propping up one foot onto the cot he sat on. Hermione stood, gathering her equipment and Draco's file and propping them under one arm. Hermione gazed down at Draco, whose face was averted, until he had the urge to scratch the back of his neck.

"Is this where you ask what my intentions are?" Draco asked in a bored voice. "Is this when you threaten me to stay away from him, to break it off with him so I'm the bad guy and he can crawl into a dark corner to nurse his wounded heart? Is this where you warn me against causing trouble for your precious Harry Potter?"

Hermione frowned, her gaze morphing into a glare. "You really enjoy fucking with people, don't you Malfoy?"

"I see you haven't lost the knack of poking your nose into other people's business, Granger." Draco let his head rest back against the bars. "No; just one."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"I couldn't be bothered to explain it to you, Granger." Draco sighed. "Really, what do you take me for?"

Hermione balled her hands into fists. "I can't imagine what he sees in you."

Draco laughed softly. "You know something, Granger? I never thought I'd see the day when we would agree on something."
"Why Harry? Of all the people--"

"All of what people, Granger?" Draco interrupted, turning his head to look at her for the first time since she had appeared in Cell Block C. "Who else was there? I can only remember Harry being there when the Inversion Enchantatem sought to rip my magic from my body. I can only remember Harry giving me back my memories. I can only remember Harry being there when I burned my father's body or pulling me away from the window when Maul listened for the Song of Summoning. I can only remember Harry facing down a small army of Death Eaters at my defense and doing everything in his power to keep the Unbreakable Vow I forced him to swear inactive."

Something softened in Hermione's gaze and Draco hated the sight of it.

"I have no sodding clue what he sees--or saw--in me, Granger." Draco laughed again, this time a tad more darkly. "I'm not exactly reformed, you know."

"Harry wouldn't have involved himself with you if you hadn't changed somehow--"

Draco's disbelieving snort cut her short once again. "Are you kidding me? That man was starved for affection when I showed up. It wouldn't have taken much regardless."

"How dare you?" Hermione spat, suddenly angry.

Draco tossed his head infuriatingly. "Who do you think you're talking to? Hello! Slytherin!"

Hermione took a step towards the cage. "I can't believe he would go for the selfish, spoiled slime ball brat from Hogwarts."

"What do you want me to tell you, Granger? That I'm actually all good? That I'm somehow pure sunshine that wore a cloak of darkness to fool everyone? Merlin! I thought you were practical!"

"No, but--"

"Mudblood."

"Godamn you, Malfoy!"

Draco suddenly stood, approaching the bars so quickly that Hermione actually took a step back. "There!" Draco said, pointing at her. "You see? That's how I feel every time someone looks at me and thinks--what was it?--'selfish, spoiled slime ball brat from Hogwarts'? That's how Harry feels every time someone looks at him and whispers, 'Boy-Who-Lived', under his breath! It's not that I'm light smothered in darkness, Granger! It's not that I've changed or reformed. It's just that there's...there's..." Draco searched for the word. "More," he said finally. "Harry's got the stuff of a hero, but there's more to him than that. You know this and I did too. Just like there's more to you than being a Muggle-born witch. It's true, I'm a Pureblood snob...but Harry saw *more*." Draco sat back down the cot. "And I guess I needed that. I just wish I knew what the 'more' was." Harry had never actually said these things to him, but Draco had sensed it in him when the connection through the Horcrux Scar had been wide open between them. It upset him more than he could express that it wasn't now. No wonder he had lost some of his reserve with Hermione just now.

Hermione took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "And your connection through the Horcrux Scar?"

Draco thought of swirling, exploding energy that engulfed them every time they shagged. The corner of his mouth lifted in a private smile. "That's definitely a factor."
Hermione chewed on the inside of her cheek. "Well, I just hope that whatever this 'more' of yours is...that it's worth all this hassle."

Draco thought of the night he had slit his wrist in an attempt to fix the 'mistake' of him returning the night Voldemort died. "I would miss you," Harry had said.

"Me too, Granger," Draco murmured, his voice so soft Hermione barely heard him. Draco wasn't entirely convinced that it was; but she didn't need to know that.

A few moments of silence passed between them before Hermione spoke again. "Well, I'm concluding the analysis with a full statement declaring that the Markaghirelle is working perfectly."

"How nice."

"Which means," Hermione continued, doing her best to ignore his tone, "that you'll be moved to your new quarters."

His interest piqued, Draco turned back around to face her. "What new quarters?"

~*~

Draco turned in full circle, taking in the luxurious accommodations of the Minister of Magic's own suite. A hot bath was being drawn for him in the sinfully large bathroom down the hall and Draco was anticipating the long soak more than words could describe. There was also a well-appointed bedroom with a massive, four-posted bed, a living room with lavish, gilded couches and fluffed, fresh-smelling pillows, a dining room, and a foyer—where his four-man guard restricted themselves to provided Draco remained within the suite at all times. A cage still, but a gilded, most comfortable one nonetheless.

"Who can I thank for this?" Draco asked Grasse, who had been part of the entourage that escorted him here.

Grasse regarded him with a look that said he should already know. "Auror Harry Potter, Mr. Malfoy. He was quite insistent that you be subjected to treatment more befitting your stature."

Draco loosed a laugh of sheer delight, knowing, of course, that Grasse probably didn't mean it as a joke. Ah, well. He was what he was. And he was quite shameless.

Draco concentrated, taking down the wall he had constructed to shield Harry's presence from his mind brick by brick. When he felt he was finished, Draco sent thoughts of gratitude and felt his lightning bolt scar tingle. Draco didn't feel a response, but he knew in his gut that Harry had heard him.

Not quite paradise.

But it would do.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Underground~

Sailing the Atlantic...

***

Blaise Zabini hated going underground. He hated it with all the Pureblood passion he could muster.

He hated forcing himself to mingle and mix in with Muggles on this cursed cruise liner. He hated the groveling Squib for a ship captain that was indebted to him. He even hated the little iced shrimp and cocktail sauce a Muggle waiter was now offering him on a silver tray. Blaise's lip curled in disgust before he could force himself to be gracious. He knew a dozen filthy Muggle hands must've already pawed all over them.

There were three words that separated him from the rest of this Muggle filth. Three words.

Swish. And. Flick.

And no one knew it better than he did.

But true friends were hard to come by in Pureblood Society and Blaise Zabini had only one.

Trust, of course, that his luck bid it be Draco Malfoy.

The Pureblood Pearl, Slytherin Prince, obnoxious, utterly luckless, snob, Draco Malfoy.

Blaise shook his head at the waiting server, dismissing the man, and leant against the railing from where he stood on the starboard deck of the cruise liner taking him swiftly across the Atlantic. Blaise closed his golden eyes and concentrated on how the sea-spray felt on his face. He couldn't remember exactly when they had morphed from shallow alliances into best friends, but...sometime between second and third year, it did. It had been the most relieving point in both of their lives when they had realized they trusted one another implicitly. No lies, no half-truths, no need to prove anything. Even most married couples in Pureblood Society didn't have that luxury.

Blaise trusted Draco with his very soul and vice versa. And nothing less powerful could ever compel him to go 'Underground'.

So here he was, headed west over the Atlantic to collect Maximus Cure and the Inversion
Enchantratem. Blaise opened his eyes. One thing he couldn't puzzle out was why Harry Potter continued to put his ass on the line for Draco. Blaise had an entire childhood of friendship to uphold. But Harry Potter? If nothing else, he had an entire childhood of animosity to do otherwise. But as far as Blaise could tell, Potter's intentions were authentic. Ever-tormented and victimized, but authentic.

Blaise peered across the ocean as the wheels turned in his mind until they creaked noisily from the lack of inspiration.

Secretly, he wished Bellatrix Lestrange had never confided in him.

And if it came to it, Blaise hoped that Harry Potter would be able to kill Draco and destroy the demon growing within him; because, honestly, he didn't think he could ever turn his wand against his best friend.

More than that, he hoped that it would never come to that, and one day, all of this would be just a bad memory. Something to store away and gather dust.

Blaise Zabini really and truly wanted Draco to survive this.

He closed his eyes against the brilliance of the endless sky meeting the endless ocean, thinking maybe he was fools to hope at all.

~*~

"What?" Blaise demanded, leaning against the doorframe of the Captain's Quarters where that blasted Squib had summoned him. Captain Whistle blanched at the sour glare the bronze-skinned, golden-eyed, irritable Wizard regarded him with. He hated--HATED--the idea of any Wizard, let alone this particular one, being aboard his ship. Especially since so many suspected Death Eaters had been reported using Muggle aid to hop away from the island of the UK. Adam Whistle wanted no part of any of it. But he owed Blaise Zabini a boon, and one he surely couldn't ignore.

He wish he could. But he couldn't.

Captain Whistle sucked in a breath, steadying himself, and motioned for him to come inside. Blaise shut the door behind him with a flick of his fingers. Whistle felt the shift in the atmosphere, knowing instantly the Wizard had used magic, and felt a fresh wave of panic wash over him. Wandless magic! Since when had Zabini grown that strong?

"Well?" Blaise's golden gaze sharpened as his irritation grew. Stupid, blabbering, worthless Squib. Well, maybe not completely worthless. The mutt had his usefulness.

"We dock tomorrow morning," Whistle let out in a rushed voice.

"Sorry?" Blaise raised a brow. "Didn't catch that."

Whistle took another breath. "We dock tomorrow."

Blaise rolled his eyes. "I know that, Captain."

"We leave again in three days."

A muscle twitched in Blaise's jaw. "It'll take two just for me to reach Wisconsin. Isn't that what you told me?"

"Well, yes," Whistle said, becoming nervous. "If you travel the Greyhound out of New York."
Blaise blinked.

"The bus," Whistle clarified.

Blaise snapped his fingers, comprehension dawning. "Oh, yes. The large contraption on wheels."

"Indeed," Whistle nodded. "But it would only take you a few hours if you traveled by airplane--"

"Out of the question," Blaise grated. "Muggles were never meant to soar the skies. And to suggest a wizard should travel with them as a passenger? You're mad."

Whistle took in another deep breath. "We will leave the harbor Sunday evening at 5 pm sharp, as scheduled--"

"You will wait."

"And will sail to Florida, as scheduled--"

"You will wait--"

"I will not!" An unseemly vein bulged in Whistle's neck and his hands trembled so badly he had set down his teacup, but he kept his voice firm. "You asked me to take you to America, and because I was sailing for New York anyway, I consented. But these passengers have paid large sums of money for this cruise--many of whom couldn't really afford it in the first place--and I will not squander their vacations or work to lose my JOB on your account!"

"It is a shame I didn't think so selfishly when you begged me to keep you disloyalty to Lord Voldemort a secret in his most trying hour," Blaise murmured, his voice like honey.

Whistle turned red. "You--"

"And when he was defeated, It would have been so easy to turn you in as one of Voldemort's dogs to clear my own name."

"Mr. Zabini--"

"Perhaps I shouldn't have. Perhaps my mistake could be remedied. How much DO you enjoy your life, Whistle?"

"Please don't--"

"You will wait."

"I CAN'T!" Whistle wiped the beading sweat from his balding forehead. "You don't understand how it works with these Muggles. If I refused to sail, they would replace me and then how would you return to England at all?"

Blaise leaned down until he was nose to nose with the trembling Captain. "That, Whistle, is the million pound question."

"I...I...I...know a man with a boat..."

"A boat." Blaise straightened. "I'm listening."

"He'll take you back."
"Who?"

"Simon Heil."

"When?"

"Whenever you'll need him. I'll introduce you to him when we dock. I have his number right here..." Whistle rummaged through his desk drawer and pulled out a small book with numbers and addresses scribbled inside.

"That means nothing to me," Blaise stated, crossing his arms.

"I'll contact him and set up the appointment. He's trustworthy. For enough money, you can trust him to do anything."

"How much money?"

Whistle hesitated. "A bit."

"A bit." Blaise rolled his eyes. "Fine." Abruptly, Blaise snatched Captain Whistle's collar and shook him, his golden eyes blazing dangerously. "If you prove false, and this Muggle does not do as commanded, so help me Merlin, Azkaban will seem like your mother's womb after I get through with you."

Whistle swallowed, knowing the Pureblood meant every word.

~*~

Blaise stared at the slop of food on the plate someone had just handed him and gulped past his gag reflex. Perhaps it would have been better after all to never have befriended Draco Malfoy. This was cruel and unusual torture, it was. Twenty-seven hours on that blasted Greyhound already had cramps worked into his body where muscles he didn't even know existed screamed and burned at the raging injustice of pure discomfort. His stomach growled for food, but he couldn't force himself to eat anything Muggle-worthy. And, Merlin!, he was tired.

And he was only half-way there.

"Personally, I think it's wonderful that the owners here are proud of their faith," a woman said conversationally next to him, pointing at a crucifix hanging on the far wall with her fork. "I was raised Catholic myself and it helps to be reminded to say grace before eating. I forget too often."

"Oh, yes, nothing says 'eat up!' like a bleeding Jew nailed to a piece of wood (1)," Blaise replied grumpily, pushing his plate away and plainly ignoring any further comments from the Muggle woman.

Simon Heil proved to be a grave, sturdy fellow, quiet and intelligent. Blaise liked him instantly, as far as Muggles went. Even so, he secretly spiked the man's water with Veritiserum before they made their arrangements to make sure he was truthful about the whole ordeal. Blaise would take no chances at being stuck in America with a criminal stowaway. Blaise glanced at the slop Muggles called food and couldn't think of anything worse.

One more day and he would arrive in Madison, Wisconsin.

~*~
It was raining lightly when the Greyhound stopped in Madison City. Blaise couldn't get off the bus fast enough. Once free of the stifling Muggles, Blaise began to pull out the map that would show him through maze of building and to the entrance Delphie Avenue, where it would to the Wizarding Town of Madison. Pausing, his hand halfway to his pocket, Blaise felt the prickle of his skin and followed the pressure of collective magic down block after damp block, realizing he needed no map to locate the border of Delphie Avenue. Then circling around one intense brick wall, Blaise finally pulled out the map, finding the key to unlock the entrance.

Once through, Blaise sucked in a deep breath of magical air and headed straight for the nearest pub. He needed untainted food so badly he was dizzy with it. Maximus Cure could wait one more hour.

~*~

U.S. MLED Madison, Wisconsin. Muggle Affairs...

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Salene, their sweet-faced secretary, knocked quietly on the door to Williams and Byrne's joint office. "Come on in, Sal," Williams called, closing a file and pulling his propped feet from the top of his desk.

"You have a visitor," Salene informed them, poking her head in. She hesitated. "He's asking to see Maximus Cure...and he's English."

Byrne straightened and Williams jumped to his feet. They exchanged a long glance as Salene shut the door behind her.

"Great," Williams muttered.

"Yeah."

It had been weeks since discovering that Maximus Cure had been behind the Inversion Enchantratem attack against Draco Malfoy; and after deducing Harry Potter, Death Eaters, and a suspicious character calling himself 'The Gatherer' being involved, the U.S. MLED had decided it prudent to close their Apparatal Borders to prevent anymore of England’s Ministry of Magic’s problems to spill over onto American soil. They had also assigned Maximus Cure to remain under Williams and Byrne’s care indefinitely at the Muggle Affairs Division in Madison, Wisconsin. Transporting him was decided risky until the so-called Gatherer was found and penalized by the Ministry of Magic.

However, since the closure of their borders, the U.S. MLED had heard little to nothing on the Malfoy Case’s progression. It was decided that any news would not be forthcoming until the Ministry had completely neutralized any brewing threat. Sending over important information would be even riskier than moving Cure to their Wizarding Prison.

So, in fewer words, Williams, Byrne, and the rest of the U.S. MLED had been left utterly in the dark.

Williams had thought it was a ridiculous decision to shut down the Apparatal Borders. Not only did it cause unease in the other Wizarding Communities in countries around the world, but it left them uninformed, and therefore, vulnerable.

Byrne understood the decision better, even if he didn’t agree with it. The nearly catastrophic panic that their nation underwent when Voldemort had risen to power so few years ago was a wound the U.S. MLED was still healing from and they were taking no chances. But still…

It really was a tad ridiculous.
Was the Ministry sending someone over to tell them all was well? Byrne thought it extremely unlikely. Not unannounced. They wanted something…and something they probably had no authority to give.

They met with the Englishman in an unused conference room for maximum privacy. He was purebred, and what was worse, he knew it too. Williams curled his lip in distaste before offering him a seat. The man frowned and offered his hand, letting it hang in the air as he waited expectantly for the two detectives to shake his hand politely.

Byrne stepped forward first and shook the man’s hand firmly, Williams following suit shortly after. “My partner, Detective Williams,” Byrne introduced. “And I’m Detective Byrne.”

“Blaise Zabini,” the Englishman replied in a clipped aristocrat’s accent. “A pleasure, I’m sure.”

Williams looked away as he rolled his eyes and sat down. Zabini took a seat and then Byrne followed suit.

“How can we help you, Mr. Zabini?” Byrne inquired.

Zabini gazed at Williams before returning his attention to Byrne. “I am sure there are certain niceties that must be observed before making a request such as I am about to; however, I am unfamiliar with them. So I’ll get right to the point.”

“Please do,” Williams muttered rudely.

Zabini’s gaze sharpened again on Williams, his patience already beginning to slip. “I’m here for Maximus Cure.”

Byrne exchanged a long glance with Williams. “Why?”

“I have learned that he is vital to keeping a dear friend of mine alive and am here to retrieve him.”

Williams snorted. “You’re giving us no reason to do so.”

“I’m not sure how much information I am at liberty to disclose.”

“Without any dignified reason to release this criminal, Cure will stay happily in his cell,” Williams said.

Blaise unmasked a withering glare. “Do you know what the Black Tulpa is, Detective Williams?”

Byrne swore under his breath and Williams looked confused. “What is it, Byrne?”

Byrne glanced at his partner. “The mother womb of all evil,” Byrne replied darkly.

Williams chewed on the inside of his cheek. “Okay,” he said slowly.

“You’ve heard of it then?” Blaise asked Byrne, interested.

“After my father served in the Muggle World War II, he told my mother of an oppressive presence that hovered over the battlefield,” Byrne said quietly. “My mother was a Witch who studied Ancient Mysteries and was convinced it was Maul, the Black Tulpa; feeding on the death and despair those wars brought.”

“Feeding?” Williams asked.
“Yes, a Tulpa is condensed energy and Maul grew fat with everything dark and evil. It was rumored that it grew so strong, it learned how to think.”

“I never knew such a thing was possible,” Williams said.

“It is,” Blaise said, returning to the point, “and it is trying to possess the body of Draco Malfoy.”

Byrne sucked in breath. “No…”

“Yes,” Blaise said sternly. “We’ve weakened him with the Markaghirelle and his Gatherer is dead —“

“Dead?” Williams interrupted. “How? Who was he? Why wasn’t he put on trial?”

Blaise stared at Williams for a moment before answering, a strange expression flickering across his bronze features. “Draco Malfoy apparently didn’t think he needed one. The Gatherer died by Malfoy’s own hands the night he tried to aid Maul in taking over Malfoy’s body.”

Williams whistled. “Didn’t know he had it in him.”

“The Gatherer was a man named Cruent Mantle. Truthfully, his identity is unimportant next to the fact that without him, Maul has to struggle to complete the Hosting of Draco Malfoy.”

Byrne nodded. “So why do you need Maximus Cure?”

“The Inversion Enchantratem. We’re certain it can pull Maul from Draco’s body long enough for us to fight it.”

“How?” Byrne demanded. “With what?”

“Respectively, Detective,” Blaise said, a flash of white teeth revealing a wily grin. “You don’t need to know that.”

“The hell we don’t!” Williams retorted, rising to his feet. “If that thing gets loose—Merlin! It almost did, didn’t it? The Gatherer paid Cure to use the Inversion Enchantratem on that guy once already, Byrne. He was trying to get it out of him.”

“We think it was an attempt to possess Maul himself,” Blaise agreed.

“There is no way we would let you get your hands on a way to set that thing loose,” Williams said.

“It’s not to set him free,” Blaise replied calmly, his golden eyes glittering. “It’s to destroy him without killing Draco Malfoy.”

“You people are out of your mind,” Williams declared. “This man is not worth—“

“Watch your tongue, or I swear, I will hex it out,” Blaise growled dangerously.

Byrne stood and placed a restraining hand on his partner’s arm. “I’m sorry, Mr. Zabini, but I’ll have to agree with my partner on this one. Your mission here was ill-advised and we have no proof that you have any jurisdiction to even be here and making these claims. And now you are threatening my partner. Releasing Maximus Cure to you is out of the question.”

~*~

To Be Continued...
A/N: (1): That line I stole directly from Family Guy. The British, sadistic baby said it. Thought it was hilarious. Had to use it.
The Plagues of Draco Malfoy

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemorte. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

“…Behold, I will smite with the rod that is mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.” Exodus 7:17

~The Plagues of Draco Malfoy~

Draco sat straight up in the four-poster bed that had been allotted him mere days ago, sweat beading his forehead and the remnants of a horrible nightmare hanging around him still. Fleeting memories that were not his own whisked around his brain too quickly to comprehend and Draco shook his head violently to dispel them.

It had been three days since the Markaghirelle had been judged to be working properly and the Minister’s own appointments given to him for housing and isolation within the Ministry of Magic. Three days of good food and much needed rest. Three days of feeling immensely more comfortable in his own skin. Three days of pure relief. And three nights of blissful, deep sleep.

Until now.

Maul was always there.

Draco couldn’t hear him in his head since he began taking the Markaghirelle as a temporary antidote against him, but he could always feel him. His presence was like a dark whispering on his soul. Draco had become accustomed to it, ignoring it with all his might until he all but forgot he was there. But tonight was different.

Tonight, Maul squirmed angrily under the pressure of the Markaghirelle, fighting it with all its terrible might.

Draco swept the covers from him and placed his bare feet on the plush carpet covering the floor. Quickly, he donned a night robe and slipped some shoes on, turning lamp lights on as he went. Then he called for the Aurors standing guard in the foyer for the night shift.

In a flash, all four of them were there in Draco’s bedroom, looking slightly sleepy, but alert nonetheless.

“I need you to get Granger up here immediately,” Draco informed them, tying the sash of his robe into a hasty knot. “Something’s wrong.”

“What is?” a yellow-haired Auror asked, his voice reaching a nervous pitch that made Draco frown. He must be new.

“It’s three in the morning, Mr. Malfoy,” an older Auror named Feerse said. “That may take some time.”
Draco felt the whisper on his soul jerk violently, and sent the four Aurors a glare that could melt steel. “So. Why. Aren’t. You. Moving?”

As his guard went to send his message, Draco went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of water. The Dark Mark on his spine burned as he placed the glass to his lips. Draco winced as he sipped a mouthful of water and immediately spat it out.

Raising shaky fingers to his lips, he wiped at the thick, acrid liquid that dripped from the corner of his mouth.

The water had turned to blood in his mouth.

~*~

A groggy Hermione Granger entered his room a mere half hour later, wearing a look on her face that had the mixture of irritation and worry Draco was sure only she could pull off. “I really hope this is impor—Merlin! Are you hurt?” Hermione stopped dead in her tracks when she saw the few drops of blood that had dried near the corner of Draco’s mouth.

The Pureblood was sitting at the kitchen table, hunched over a glass of water he held in hands that were shaking and red with blood. Draco raised his grey eyes to meet Hermione’s stare and handed her the glass of water. Hermione took it with a questioning glance. “Drink it,” Draco whispered, watching carefully.

Hermione hesitated, before raising the glass and taking a tentative sip. The water felt cool on her tongue and she swallowed it easily. “I’m not following—“

Draco snatched the glass back with a meaningful glower. “Watch,” he said hollowly as he took a drink of the water and spit it back into the glass.

Hermione watched, horrified, as crimson blood poured from Draco’s mouth and swirled in the remaining water of the glass.

“I’ve tried tea, juice, coffee,” Draco said, desperation and a hint of mourning in his voice as he wiped blood from his lips. “The bastard won’t let me drink anything without it turning to blood.”

“Oh dear,” Hermione said, plopping down into the chair next to Draco’s. “That’s….quite…”

“Except the Markaghirelle,” Draco murmured.

“What?”

“The Markaghirelle,” Draco repeated, his voice like dry leaves. “I took a dose to see if it would make it stop. It…didn’t. But the potion didn’t turn to blood.”

“Oh, well, that’s good.” Hermione offered a smile and Draco glared it down.

“This is not funny,” Draco muttered sourly.

“No,” Hermione agreed. “But one day it might be.”

“I hate you.”

“Feeling’s mutual.” Hermione stood. “I’ll add nutrients to the Markaghirelle so that you won’t get dehydrated.”
“That’s it?” Draco demanded, clenching his fingers into fists.

“I’m afraid so,” Hermione replied, her voice turning a tad apologetic. “He may be just throwing a temper tantrum. If potions aren’t affected by this, then we’ll just have to work with that.”

“You can’t just make the Markaghirelle stronger? If it’s working properly, then how can he control —“

“I can make it stronger, Malfoy, but it would probably kill you,” Hermione interrupted. “Maul is a Tulpa. His power is somewhat different than ours. And this one can think, so he’s probably just trying everything he can in his current state to piss you off. You get angry, he gets stronger, and the Markaghirelle isn’t as efficient.”

“You’re telling me I can’t be indignant?”

“Yes, Malfoy. I’m telling you that you can’t be indignant.” Hermione couldn’t hide her smile this time and Draco looked away from her with a sound of mortal disgust.

“Do you have any idea how nearly impossible that is for me?” Draco mumbled.

Hermione grinned. “Actually, I probably do. What would cheer you up?”

“Get out.”

Hermione frowned. “I’m serious, Malfoy. Getting cranky will just feed him.”

“You’re irritating me. Get out.”

“I want to see a smile first.”

“OUT!”

“All right, all right,” Hermione said, throwing up her hands. She made good time leaving the lavish apartment and explained the situation to the Aurors posted outside. She would be back first thing in the morning to check on him.

All joking aside, Snape had anticipated something like this would occur. She would have to owl him immediately for advice.

~*~

Hermione met Snape in the Main Foyer of the Ministry of Magic. They turned instantly into the main hall and their quick steps took them deep into the Ministry. Hermione spoke rapidly to him in low tones and Snape responded only with every jerky nod a few minutes or so. Nearing the Minister’s Suite, Mary Heart nearly crashed into them as she hurried, wide-eyed, down the hall.

“Oh my goodness!” Mary squealed, clutching at Hermione’s hands. “I’m so glad I found you! You must come quickly! The Minister is so angry and the suite is such a mess—“

“What the—“

“Crap.”

“WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?!” The Minister of Magic bellowed at Snape and Hermione as they rounded the corner. The hall floor outside the entrance to the suite was covered—and I mean COVERED—in frogs.
Oh, yes.

Frogs.

Huge ones, small ones, large horned toads, quivering thin ones with beady eyes, all shapes, all sizes, and the sound of them all collectively wasn’t nearly as suffocating as the smell.

Hermione and Snape gaped dumbly.

“WELL DON’T JUST STAND THERE!” Scrimgeour shouted, and only then did they realize there was an entire squad of Aurors rushing around the hall trying to round them up, waving their wands in frantic animation. Snape and Hermione quickly withdrew their wands, aiding where they could. Soon, the hall was nearly frog-free.

Then they entered the Minister’s Suite.

Draco sat cross-legged on the floor near the kitchen, his arms crossed tightly against his chest, and was scowling for all he was worth. Not only was the suite—and Draco—covered in frogs…but there were locusts, flies, and all manner of insects buzzing around the room.

“Merlin,” Hermione breathed, as every Wizard worth their salt began hexing away the mess.

“Malfoy, what did you DO?”

“I tried to make a sandwich,” Draco grated, trying to stay perfectly still as an Auror attempted to pry a toad off of Malfoy’s head. “Just be cheerful, huh? Don’t be indignant, right?”

“You can’t possibly blame me—“

“Oh, I blame you.”

~*~

“We’ve…deduced that Maul has only the power to instigate a plague when you try to nourish yourself.” Snape was eyeing his skulking godson warily as he handed him the new, and improved, Markaghirelle complete with three hours worth of nutrients and labeled ‘BREAKFAST’.

Draco didn’t reply but merely snatched the potion, drank the dosage, and handed it back, keeping his blazing grey eyes fixed on the far wall of the living room. Two Aurors were present and Hermione stood in the kitchen, staying within earshot as she fixed herself a cup of tea, humming a cheerful tune.

It took a solid two hours to finally clear every toad, fly, and locust from the Minister’s Suite. Scrimgeour had been furious and roared at anyone who would listen unabashedly in front of Draco Malfoy. Finally, he had left, muttering to himself about ruined Persian rugs. Two more Aurors were posted outside the Suite, guarding the entrance as a cleaning crew came too and from, scrubbing the rooms of the suite clean.

Draco hadn’t uttered a single word in over an hour and Snape found himself trying to catch his eye every minute or so to make sure they were still grey and not black.

“I regret that we hadn’t thought of this sooner, Draco,” Snape said, trying to be consoling.

Draco snorted but still did not reply.

Snape tried again. “Granger is right about the need for you to keep your spirits up. Stewing like this
will only antagonize—“

“Go to hell.”

“Excuse me?” Snape had never heard his godson address him so rudely.

“You people disgust me,” Draco growled, rising to feet in one smooth motion and storming into the bedroom.

Snape followed after him, raising a hand to halt Hermione and the Aurors when they moved to pursue as well. Snape quietly closed the door behind him and leaned against it, regarding his godson who sat at a desk by the opposing wall of the bedroom.

Draco covered his face in his hands. “This is humiliating,” he said, his voice muffled by his fingers. “Azkaban can’t be worse than this.”

“I don’t ever want you to say that again,” Snape retorted sternly. “Think what you want, but if that statement ever reached the Minister’s ears, you’d be under the Dementor’s Kiss so fast it would make your head spin.”

Draco laughed. And it was despairing one. “Would that be so terrible?”

Snape glared at the back of his godson’s silvery head. “There are dozens of people working to keep you alive, Draco. How dare you?”

“I never asked it of any of you.” That was a lie. ‘So protect me, Potter!’ He had asked one. Right after he had made him swear to kill him if Maul won. Draco clutched at his hair. “I am sick unto death of this whole sordid mess. Doing the right thing has only ever gotten me into one pile of problems and then another. I’m beginning to second guess my reasoning.”

Snape shrugged. His godson was preaching to the choir. “Be a martyr, Draco. Go right ahead. Be a victim. But you’re going to be it alive. All this effort will not go wasted.”

Draco lifted his head and turned so he could see his godfather. “How’d you get through it, Snape? How did you make it through the war when no one believed you?”

After a heavy silence, Snape answered. “The friendship of two women. Lily Evans and your mother.”

Draco blinked, feeling a weird sense of vertigo, like his equilibrium had been kicked in the shins. Draco knew his mother had been close to Snape, but Harry’s mother? A piece of the ever-confusing puzzle slipped into place, but Draco couldn’t fathom what it meant. Suddenly, he felt an odd mourning for his godfather, realizing that the only two women he had cared for in his life had married other men and fostered only sons. Sons that Snape had been sworn to protect.

“Are you bitter?” The words had slipped from Draco’s mouth before he could think twice about keeping them to himself.

“Yes,” Snape answered. “And no.”

“I don’t understand.”

Snape’s lips curved into a small smile. “Neither do I, Draco.” The Potions Master paused. “I drew my lot and I’m working with what I have.”
Draco nodded and felt ashamed. He was not the only one who had suffered. So many had. He had pondered this during his years in Asia and mourned for every person he knew, and many he didn’t. It amazed him how quickly he could forget his revelations from his time spent in the Tien Shen Pass. He really was brilliantly selfish.

Draco sighed.

Are you bitter?

Yes.

Draco thought of Harry.

And no.

Draco did understand, in his own way.

~*~

A/N: Mwahahahahaha! I know it probably sounded all forebodeing with the quote I put up. But I felt that the fic needed some long overdue comic relief. So that was my attempt at crack. Erm, it ended kinda angsty, but I felt that was great place to squeeze a little Snape luv in.
The Plight of Blaise Zabini

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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"Memories fade. They're made that way for a reason." ~Strange Days

~The Plight of Blaise Zabini~

~*~

Martha Lane went into the kitchen to check on the brewing stew she had in the cauldron for dinner and smiled when she heard the front door open, followed by the ritualistic delighted squeals of her two daughters, Tally and Crysta, as they greeted their father at the door. As always, there was the surprised “OOF!” from her husband, Drew Williams when they flung themselves around his neck and the high-pitched giggles that followed after that. Martha made her way into the living and embraced Drew once he had detangled himself from their daughters.

“Hello, dear,” Martha murmured, her gentle eyes the very vision of endearment and love. “How was work?”

Drew Williams kissed her forehead but did not answer, his thoughts straying to the strange visitor he and his partner, Joe Byrne, had denied access to Maximus Cure earlier that afternoon. “What’s for dinner?”

Martha’s eyes narrowed a fraction, the change in subject not lost on her. “Did something happen?”

Williams shook his head, not wanting to discuss it in front of the children, and pulled her into the hall after telling their daughters to go play in their room. Sulking, they obliged, leaving their parents in privacy. “A man came to the office today,” Williams said quietly. “He wanted Cure to be released into his custody.”

Martha's eyes widened a fraction. "Cure? The man who attacked Draco Malfoy all those weeks ago? Who was he?"

True, most Aurors opted to keep their work separate from their home life--and with good reason too--but Martha and Drew had married under the promise that they would tell one another everything...even if it meant Martha waking in the middle of the night, fearing for the safety of her children after being informed of events from a gruesome day of work as an Auror. During these times, Martha hated that her husband did such dangerous work to maintain their lifestyle, but she had
known who she was marrying and would bear the horror with her husband no matter what.

Most times, it wasn't all that terrible, strengthening their trust in one another and keeping their relationship alive. Other times...well.

In sickness and in health. In the good times and the bad. Martha was a strong woman, and an even stronger wife. She held her marriage vows close to her heart and bore it all with a resilient pride.

Even so, Drew Williams wished he didn't have to tell her all of this. He didn't like seeing his wife distressed and knew this would do just that. But he could never lie to her, nor could keep anything from her.

"A Wizard called Blaise Zabini," Drew said, taking her hand and leading her to the kitchen table. Sitting, he ran a hand through his wavy hair. "Joe and I looked up what we could of him after we denied him access to Cure. He's got quite a record himself."

"A record?" Martha asked, taking a seat herself.

"He's a known Death Eater," Drew murmured. "The Ministry of Magic of the United Kingdom used him as a double spy, but after the war, they never granted him clemency. Apparently, they weren't sure of his loyalty to either side. He disappeared after the defeat of You-Know-Who and I haven't heard of him re-appearing until he showed up at our office."

Martha frowned, stress-lines forming at the corners of her petal-soft mouth. "Do you think he works now for the Gatherer...the one who contracted Cure?"

Drew scowled. "That's just it. Zabini claims that the Gatherer is dead, that Draco Malfoy killed him when the Gatherer tried to aid a Tulpa in possessing Malfoy's body."

"A...a Tulpa?" Martha wrung her hands. "What is a Tulpa doing trying to possess a human body? Aren't they condensed spirit energy? Why would they...? I don't understand."

"Zabini claimed that one Tulpa, the Black Tulpa called Maul, grew so powerful on dark energy that it learned to think. He claims that this Maul granted You-Know-Who the secret to the Horcruxes years ago in exchange for a branded Host."

"And that Host is Draco Malfoy?" Martha smiled a little. "That poor boy that defeated You-Know-Who? It's a little poetic, I think."

Drew answered his wife's smile with one of his own before growing serious again. "Yes, well, Joe was able to confirm that a Black Tulpa is rumored to exist."

"Where is Draco Malfoy now?"

Drew shrugged. "I don't know. He didn't say."

"You didn't ask?"

Drew met his wife's eyes a little shamefully. "He was pretentious Pureblood, Martha. You know how much I hate--"

Martha rolled her eyes. "When you jump to conclusions around Purebloods, you're no better than those Wizards who look down on you for being Muggle-born. Anyway; why does Zabini want Cure?"
"He wants him for the Inversion Enchantratem. Zabini thinks that it would be a plausible way to detach Maul from Malfoy's body long enough for them to fight the Black Tulpa and destroy it without killing the Host."

"Them? So...Zabini is working for the Ministry? Surely, even if Zabini lied and the Gatherer is alive, they wouldn't want to kill Maul."

"The Gatherer tried to pry Maul loose once already, Martha," Drew reminded her.

"Wizards are prone to selfishness, Drew," Martha replied logically. "Even Gatherers."

"True, but there is no way to know for sure if Zabini is lying or not," Drew said. "He never claimed to be working for the Ministry and wouldn't give us any credentials. He could be here for any reason, and most look grim. Besides, I'll be damned if I'm going to give them a tool to let that thing loose in the world. Do you realize how dangerous that could be?"

"No, Drew," Martha said softly, knowing that what she was about to hear, she probably wouldn't like. "I don't."

"It'd be like You-Know-Who coming back, only a hundred times worse," Drew whispered intensely. "It's rumored that the Black Tulpa holds power granted him by Ancient Magic. It is said that--along with the condensed energy of a thousand evils--Maul holds the power of the Ten Plagues, the Seven Keys, and the Nine Great Horrors. It is said that Maul is the Angel of Death. And if Zabini is not lying, he is trying to possess a great Wizard's body!" Drew shook his head. "Releasing that demon would be more catastrophic than Voldemort ever was."

Martha was quiet for a long time. "That poor boy," Martha murmured.

Drew's head snapped up. "What?"

"Malfoy," Martha clarified. "It must be a horrible feeling, being a vessel for such great evil...and right after defeating You-Know-Who! Merlin!"

Drew sighed, resting his chin in his hand. "And there's another thing. Zabini claimed to be Draco Malfoy's best friend. According to his file, he is not lying. They've been apart for many years...but it would be one good reason for him to come out of hiding. And, well, if everything he's saying is true, he would never claim that the Ministry sent him because the Ministry wouldn't want to be known for using wanted Death Eaters to do their dirty work."

"During that war, no Government was above using known Death Eaters to do their dirty work," Martha murmured. "If Maul is claiming this as the End of Days, I don't see why the Ministry wouldn't do the same now. Drew, I think this Zabini will do whatever is necessary to take Cure back with him to Britain."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"Why?"

Martha stood and went to stand by her husband. Taking his face in both of her hands, she smiled gently down into Drew's tired gaze. "If it were me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Drew replied hoarsely without a hint of hesitating. "Yes, I would."
Martha nodded, rubbing the pads of her thumbs over his cheek bones. "I think that boy deserves more than the Dementor's Kiss, my heart. For all his troubles, you can have a family and live in relative peace and quiet. As can every other Wizard and Witch in the world, Muggle-Born, Half-Blood, or otherwise. I think he deserves a hero's welcome and not a death sentence. And I think Blaise Zabini believes this too, Death Eater or no."

"You think I should hand over Cure?"

Martha hesitated, dropping her hands from his face. "I think you should do what you feel is right. Just...consider all the angles, love. England is only an ocean away, but...if there is a chance that Draco Malfoy doesn't have to die, wouldn't it be worth it to do the right thing? Then, at least, THIS family could properly say thank you to the man who saved the world from a great evil by saving him from an even greater one."

Drew hung his head, his wife's compassionate, resounding words, filling him with shame.

Martha turned to the kitchen stove and removed the cauldron from the heat, stirring the stew within. "Dinner's ready. Girls! Wash your hands for supper! It's ready!" Martha began setting the table but her hands stilled over the bowls she went to retrieve from cupboard when she didn't hear her daughters scrambling to bathroom. They were oddly silent. Martha exchanged a fearful glance with her husband before they both erupted into a flurry of action.

"Tally!" Martha shrieked as she followed her husband up the stairs. "Crysta! Answer me!"

Martha collided with her husband's back as he halted at the top of the stairway, seeing their daughters' joint bedroom door was closed, but a line of light showing beneath it. Drew opened the door, his wand drawn, and his breath hissed to his lungs at what he saw.

His youngest, Crysta, sat dangling on Blaise Zabini's knee where he appeared to be reading her a fairy tale story. Tally sat near them, looking suspicious, but intrigued enough to listen in on the story. All three of them looked up when the girls' parents barged into the room. Martha gasped and clutched at Drew's arm, eyes wide with fear.

Blaise closed the nursery book and set Crysta down. "Go to your mother," he instructed them and they ran into Martha's waiting arms.

Martha pushed them past her and into the hall, telling them to lock themselves into their parents' room. Then she nudged her way around her husband and backhanded Blaise across the face.

"Martha!" Drew barked, trying to pull her away.

"How dare you break into our home and come near my girls?" Martha hissed, struggling against her husband. "Who are you?"

"I would have not harmed your children, my lady," Blaise murmured softly, rising to his feet and offering her a sweeping bow. "My name is Blaise Zabini. I apologize for startling you. May I speak to your husband?"

"You're--"

"Martha!" Drew growled. "See to the girls."

"Drew--"

"See to the girls!"
Martha went, casting a strange look over her shoulder at Blaise who merely bowed again.

"I'm arresting you," Drew grated in a dangerous voice, pressing the tip of his wand into Blaise's neck. "You've gone too far."

Blaise inclined his head. "As you wish."

Drew paused. "That's what you wanted, isn't it? It would get you closer to Cure."

Blaise did not answer.

Drew sighed and lowered his wand, thinking of what his wife had said minutes ago. "Are you hungry?"

Unable to hide his surprise, Blaise opened his mouth, but no words came out.

"If you have something to say to me, I'm willing to listen." Drew paused. "I don't believe you would have harmed my girls."

Blaise blinked. "Why?"

Drew Williams shrugged. "I don't know. If nothing else, your file suggests it was never your style to hurt children."

Blaise winced, remembering the agony of the Cruciatius Curse Voldemort had subjected him to when he had refused to massacre a group of Muggle-Born Hogwart's students during the war. "Even this Death Eater has his limits," Blaise replied with a hopeful grin.

Drew nodded. "If you promise not to harm my family, you can stay for dinner. Then, we'll talk after the girls go to bed."

"You're an odd man, Detective Williams," Blaise said, not quite trusting the offer. "If it were my family, you'd be dead already."

"I suppose that's the difference between you and me," Drew replied. "Just don't prove me a fool for it."

Blaise smiled, a flash of white teeth bright against his dark skin. "You may be a fool, Detective; but that will have nothing to do with me."

~*~

"Coffee?"

"Please."

Martha handed the Englishman a cup of steaming dark liquid and sat down at the table holding a mug of her own.

Blaise took a sip and sighed contentedly as he swallowed the hot brew. "You're an angel," Blaise said to her. "Thank you."

Martha nodded and took her husband's hand as he sat down at the table across from Blaise.

"So," Drew said. "What now?"
"What now, indeed."

Dinner had been a relatively quiet affair, save for the incessant questions Detective Williams' daughters had assailed Blaise with. The Pureblood had born it with a graciousness pretty much every aristocrat possessed, but also with a genuine fondness few Purebloods could muster. Williams' wife eyed him cautiously throughout the meal and seemed to disapprove of his presence at her dinner table, but handled herself gracefully nonetheless.

Blaise admired her, though he couldn't put a finger on why. She struck him to be a woman of tempered steel, but held the gentlest, kindest demeanor he'd ever witnessed. Detective Williams was a lucky man.

Soon after, the girls had been sent to bed, leaving the three of them alone at the kitchen table. Blaise was a little surprised Detective Williams didn't ask for his wife to leave them as well, but then, if he had a wife of her seeming stature, he might keep her by his side also. This was her home too, after all.

Blaise gazed down at his cup of coffee. "I realize my asking for Cure seems unprecedented and irrational, Detective," Blaise began, "but I assure you, I cannot--and will not--leave this city without him."

"You admitted to being a Death Eater," Drew countered. "How could I possibly trust your motives?"

Blaise was quiet before answering. "I anticipated your scrutiny, Detective, and have already planned to take Cure by force. I have no way to prove the purity of my intentions."

"So, you had planned to force me to arrest you to get you closer to Cure...and then what?"

Blaise smiled mysteriously and looked up. "If this conversation doesn't end in my favor, telling the next step in my plan wouldn't help me very much, would it?"

Drew frowned. "Then are we at an impasse?"

"If I should tell you, would you give me Cure?"

"No."

Blaise sighed. "Then I suppose we are." Blaise made to rise, but a small sound from Martha made him pause.

"Could you tell us something true, Mr. Zabini?" Martha asked softly. "Something that might put you at risk but would prove you trustworthy?"

Blaise leaned back in his chair, regarding her thoughtfully. Silence seemed to stretch for minutes before Blaise responded. "Remember that I spoke to you of a Prophecy warning about Maul?"

"Yes," Drew said with a nod.

"Bellatrix Lestrange told me about the Prophecy before she was sent to guard a Horcrux," Blaise murmured, his golden eyes going hard and distant. "It was the last time I saw her. Harry Potter killed her when he retrieved that very Horcrux." Blaise paused. "I am no fool. I knew, as Bellatrix did, that Maul reigning over the Earth would be more than catastrophic; it would be the End of Days. And Bellatrix knew Draco Malfoy had been chosen as the Host; so I did too. During the war, I was conflicted. There were days I truly fought to keep Voldemort alive...because I knew that his reign would hold the Hosting at bay. If Voldemort died, then the Pact he made with Maul would activate.
But then...Voldemort's reign was one of terror and I could no longer stand working for evil to prevent a greater one. It was driving me insane.

"So, I began working for the Ministry as a spy, doing what I could, where I could, to cause the downfall of Lord Voldemort. And who should defeat him? None other than the chosen Host. My dearest friend who had been missing for months, disappearing after the murder of his mother, Narcissa. Even his godfather hadn't known where he went. Then he disappeared again. I was terrified when the rumors reached me. Draco had died and then was resurrected by Ancient Magic?

"I had a decision to make. I knew what was at stake. I could not find him, I had no way of protecting him against the Gatherer or--for that matter--against himself. So I decided against pleading for clemency from the Ministry of Magic as so many others did after the war. I went to Italy and began running a network of underground information, locating outlaws and Death Eaters alike. Then I sent them all the same message. 'Kill Draco Malfoy'."

Drew sucked in a breath. Another piece of the puzzle slipped into place.

"Soon, I discovered that Draco was in a coma like state and being held in St. Mungo's, but the price on his head had Aurors crawling all over the place," Blaise continued. "I learned that Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley had become Aurors and were personally assigned to ensuring his protection. It was...almost a relief. If Maul tried to host Draco's body, surely Harry Potter would kill him himself. But then I remembered Harry Potter was ever-noble and may try to save him, if nothing else than to make himself look good. So I continued to watch and wait, seeing how things would unfold.

"Then everything spiraled out of control." Blaise clenched his fists. "Draco awoke from his slumber and, soon after, vanished from St. Mungo's. I couldn't understand how the flashiest Pureblood I had ever known could be so damnably elusive! Months and months passed, and still I searched for him in vain. I raised the price on his head, panicking because I could not find him. But it seemed that another force was stealing Death Eaters from my network. My resources slimming down to almost nothing, I despaired, second guessing my decision to exclude myself from the Ministry's protection. If I had begged clemency and been granted it, I may have had a network of informants within the Ministry instead. Then I could have known Potter and Weasley had sent him here, to Madison, to hide as a Muggle. I could have protected him from the Gatherer. I could have...done something!"

"However, I was secluded in Italy until, finally, word reached me." Blaise drew in a shaky breath. "An old friend, worried about the welfare of Draco Malfoy, contacted me. She had seen him, in the company of Harry Potter; they had come to her home! I had found him at last!

"And then I learned he was already showing symptoms of the Hosting. The Gatherer was beginning the Song of Summoning. I went to the old headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix, searching for Draco, knowing that if Potter was trying to hide him in England after the fiasco here, it would be there. I had never seen this place, but had heard of it. Being a spy had its usefulness. There, I met Draco's godfather, who was searching for him too. That was the night the Gatherer nearly succeeded in discarding Draco's soul and aiding Maul to his throne. That was the night the End of Days almost began.

"My network of Death Eaters had been organized into an army for Maul by the Gatherer. I don't know how Potter kept Draco alive long enough for Snape and I to arrive with a squad of Aurors, but somehow, even with an Unbreakable Vow trying to force his hand into killing Draco, he did. We arrived at last and finished rounding up the Death Eaters as Draco defeated the Gatherer. Now, I had no resources to assassinate Draco without soiling my own hands. Now, Maul was weakened, denied the aid of his precious Gatherer and suppressed by the Markaghirelle. Now, I had no plan.

"I watched, dumbstruck, as Harry Potter nearly committed treason to prevent Draco from being sent
to Azkaban. I must confess, I was ashamed beyond all reason. Harry Potter was throwing his neck on the line, repeatedly, to keep Draco Malfoy alive, while I, Blaise Zabini, Draco's closest friend in the world, was plotting his murder. I began to think...perhaps it was possible to save Draco. And even if it wasn't...it would be the right thing to try. I had done the right thing so few times in my life, if there ever was a time to start, it was now. For the sake of my friend, who drew the worst lot of us all.

"You said Draco isn't worth the chance of Maul being victorious over the Inversion Enchantratem this afternoon, Detective," Blaise murmured, his eyes beginning to focus back to where he was and meeting Drew's gaze. "But I have never seen such dignity as Draco Malfoy possessed as a group of people discussed his mortal fate in the Minister of Magic's own office right in front of him like they were reading the Daily Prophet. I thought as you do, once, and I'm his closest friend. I think we are both wrong."

His words echoed into silence and Drew turned to look at his wife.

"I don't know if what I've told you proves me trustworthy," Blaise murmured, looking from one to other as they communicated silently. "But it was something true."

At long last, Drew nodded to his wife, who smiled faintly and took a drink of her coffee. Drew turned back to Blaise. "Alright, Mr. Zabini. I believe you. Finish your coffee; my partner's home is on the other side of town. I won't release Cure without Detective Byrne's consent...but I'm sure that if you can convince me, Byrne'll be a piece of cake."

Blaise offered his irrepressible grin, white teeth flashing. "That's wonderful."

Drew grunted and sipped his coffee. "NOW will you tell me how you were planning to break out Cure?"

Blaise raised a brow. "It was a wait and see sort of thing."

Drew gave him a quizzical look.

"But then I waited and I saw. It's what I do."

"And quite effectively," Martha said, with a gentle grin.

Blaise laughed good-naturedly. "Sometimes, my dear lady. Sometimes." Relief should have suffused him like a flood, his laugh should have been genuine; but a shadow on his golden eyes spoke of a painful rock of guilt that Blaise never thought from which he’d be redeemed.

Retrieving Cure had been his act of redemption. Why did Blaise still feel so awful?

~*~
The Exorcist of Anneliese Michel

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

“Judas said Hitler was nothing but a "big mouth" and had "no real say" in Hell.” ~What in God’s Name? An article on the life and death of Anneliese Michel

"Aurora, watchful in the reddening dawn, threw wide her crimson doors and rose-filled halls; the Stars took flight, in marshaled order set by Lucifer, who left his station last." ~Metamorphoses by Ovid

~The Exorcist of Anneliese Michel~

Bavaria, Germany…

***

“Why are we so far east?” Ron asked, adjusting the backpack on his shoulder. “Trisha said that Griphook was last sighted in Emmendingen. That’s in Baden-Württemburg, one state west of here.”

Harry and Ron stood at a crossroads in rural Southern Germany looking every inch the traveling tourists. Harry’s sloppy black hair hid his eyes as he peered at a map, glancing up at the road signs every few seconds or so and then back down at the map. He had insisted they take the train to Bavaria after the Dover Calais, claiming they could pay a cabbie to take them East when the time came.

Of course, none of this made any sense whatsoever to Ron. Why not go directly to Emmendingen?

“Harry, I’m telling you, we need to go back and hop on that train before it leaves again.” Ron glanced back down the road they had just hiked a bit mournfully.

“Train only comes once a day, Ron,” Harry muttered from behind his map. “It’s left already.”

“Well, this is brilliant.” Ron re-shouldered his backpack irritably. “WHY did you make us get off the train, Harry?”

Harry lowered his map and gazed blandly back at his partner. “We’re here for the Exorcist. Why else would we be in Bavaria?”

Ron gaped at him. “Exorcist? Since when were we collecting a Muggle priest?”

Harry rolled his eyes and peered back at his map. “One day, Ron, I hope you’ll start actually reading your mission assignments.” Harry folded his map and pointed down one road. “Klingenberg am Main is this way.”

Ron fumbled with his backpack in an attempt to retrieve his mission statement as they began walking. Finally grasping the folder, Ron pulled it out and flipped it open. Truthfully, Ron hadn’t
gotten past his alias in the statement, not thinking there was anything else to know. Honestly, since when did the Ministry need exorcists anyway? That was a Muggle thing. It was a way for Muggle religions to do deal with the magical phenomenon they didn’t understand. And, it was ridiculous.

Ron found a red page that read ATTENTION at the top. Ron laughed. How he missed this was a mystery to even him. “They were to locate and retrieve a Muggle-Born by the name of Father Ernst Alt. Ron blinked. “He’s a Wizard?”

Ahead of him, Harry nodded. “Alt was raised under heavy religious influence and burned his invitation to Durmstrang because he thought it was the work of the devil.”

“An untrained Wizard working for the Catholic Church? Wow, that’s really somethin’.”

Harry paused and waited for Ron to catch up. “More specifically, an untrained Wizard who worked as an exorcist.”

“Worked?”

“After being persecuted for the death of Anneliese Michel, Alt sort of drifted off the map,” Harry said, pointing at Ron’s file and tapping it with his finger. “It’s all there, Ron.”

Ron was silent as he read, their brisk steps the only mundane sound over the chirp of nearby birds and the humming of insects. “Harry, do you think he caused the death of this Muggle?”

Harry didn’t answer right away. “I think the terms of the ritual imposed by the Muggle Church were too extreme for the conditioning of the Muggle Michel.” Harry glanced at his partner, who was studiously reading the file on Alt. “The Muggles persecuted Father Alt, Father Josef Stangl, and Michel’s parents for negligence to dissuade further incidences like that one. I don’t believe it was wholly irrational of the Muggle court system…but it must have torn Alt apart to be blamed for her death.”

“Says here that he really believed Michel to be possessed by demons,” Ron said, pointing.

Harry shrugged. “He also believed that Durmstrang was of the devil. Faith does strange things to people.”

“Maybe he’s right,” Ron joked, thinking of Viktor Krum. “So, why are getting this guy if he’s a total crapshute?”

Harry frowned at Ron. “He’s not a crapshute, Ron. He’s depressed. Besides, what we want to do with Draco is a roundabout exorcism. The Ministry thought it might be prudent to have a professional on board.”

Ron wrinkled his nose. “A professional who was found guilty of negligent homicide?”

Harry’s green eyes took on a distant look. “Draco’s not crazy, nor is he epileptic. Michel was psychologically unstable.” Harry’s eyes darkened. “And we won’t starve him to death. There would be no reason to.”

“What if this guy goes all religious on us?”

Harry shrugged. “Our job is to bring him back to the Ministry with the Sword of Godric Gryffindor. After that…I don’t know.”

“You don’t like the idea of him tagging along either, do you, mate?”
A muscle in Harry’s jaw twitched. “No, I don’t. I don’t think a convicted negligent exorcist should be tampering with Draco’s case.”

Ron laid a hand on Harry’s arm, stopping him. “We could just say we couldn’t find him, Harry.”

Harry gave his partner a pained look. “But, then, I’d be lying.”

“It’s not like you haven’t lied before.”

“I can’t lie in this case.”

“Why the hell not?”

Harry opened his mouth to speak, looking a bit like an islanded fish, and seemed to freeze.

Ron gave him a curious look. “What?”

Harry closed his mouth and shook his head. “It’s nothing,” he muttered as he began walking again.

“Harry—”

“Save your breath,” Harry said tightly. “It’s a long hike into town.”

~*~

They couldn’t locate him in Klingenberg, but found him in a small church right outside of town. He was an old man, nearing seventy—if he wasn’t already—and sat in a pew a couple rows back from the alter. He wasn’t quite praying; simply staring at the crucifix that hung at the far end of the church in all its gory glory.

Harry held up a hand to Ron and motioned for him to wait. Harry approached the priest quietly. One broken man recognizes another.

Father Alt did not look at him when Harry stopped to stand beside him.

“Father Ernst Alt?” Harry inquired softly.

“Who are you?” Alt demanded, his voice barely above a whisper.

“I’m a Wizard,” Harry said quietly, “an Auror for the Ministry of Magic. I’m here to collect you.”

Father Alt’s mouth curved slightly, the ghost of a smile. “Have your people finally come to charge me with the murder of a Muggle?”

“If that were the case,” Harry murmured, sitting, uninvited, next to the priest, “you would have been arrested thirty years ago when it happened. The Ministry wants your expert opinion on a certain matter.”

“I do not perform exorcisms anymore.”

“We won’t ask you to perform anything, Father.”

Alt looked at him then. “What do you want me for?”

“Just to talk,” Harry said, spreading his hands. “Words, no more, no less.”

The ghost of a smile was back. Many things can amuse broken men. “I do not talk much either,”
Father Alt said in halting English.

“It is enough,” Harry replied.

“Hmm.” Father Alt turned back to the gaze-worthy crucifix. “He died for our sins, you know. Even yours.”

“There is a man who died for all our sins again, only a few years ago,” Harry said, glancing up at the bleeding man fixed to the cross. “He, too, was resurrected. He, too, needs your help.”

“Ahh,” Father Alt rubbed at his beard. “The boy who defeated the Dark One. I have heard of him.”

“Will you go peacefully?”

“This one is not holy,” Father Alt said, frowning into his beard.

“He is to me,” Harry retorted, a little bite to his words. “Will I have to force you?”

“No, young magician,” Father Alt replied, looking the Auror up and down with tired eyes. “I will go.”

“Good.”

Father Alt stood. “God’s love is cruel and just.”

Harry regarded the priest, the words hitting a strange part of him as familiar. “Tell me, Harry. Is he cruel? Perhaps.”

“No.” Father Alt turned to face Harry as the young man stood as well. “It is.”

Harry nodded when their gazes met. They had a strange sense of understanding pass between them. “Isn’t love always cruel and just?”

Father Alt smiled his ghostly, tired smile. “Yes, young magician. It is. You begin to understand.”

~*~

They made good time returning to town to find a cabbie. Father Alt insisted on keeping his face hidden under a hood, claiming that some of the townsfolk could still recognize him. Harry and Ron didn’t argue with him, glad enough that their side trip was easier than it could have been. Religious Muggles were the worst kind.

It took them an hour to find someone willing to take them into Baden-Württemburg. Lucky for them, the old woman they would be traveling with said she could take them all the way to the Elz River that would lead into the town of Emmendingen. From the river, they would hike.

Well and so, Trisha said Griphook would most likely be hiding in the woods of outside of Hochburg, the neighboring castle the old woman claimed to be riddled with ghosts. The Black Forest was where they would search for Griphook, the elusive Goblin.

Eight hours later, the triumvirate was dropped off at the river and was forced to make camp immediately. The sun had all but set and soon it would be too dark to see. The two Aurors were careful about how they used their magic to light the campfire and set up the tents. Whatever Father Alt may have seen was nothing compared to what he would definitely see when they returned to the Ministry. They were more concerned with nearby Muggles who could be spying on the ‘tourists’ and exercised a great deal of caution on that account.
Father Alt retired early and curled up in his meager tent on the outskirts of the campsite, leaving the two Aurors alone by the fire.

“Quiet fellow,” Ron murmured, huddled in his Muggle jacket. “I feel bad for calling him a crapshute.”

Harry smiled, gazing at the flames. His thoughts were ever on Draco, worried at why the area where his scar used to be prickled so often these days and why his spine had hurt so badly a few days prior. It had ached so terribly that Harry had even considered turning back.

“Earth to Harry Potter!” Ron exclaimed, snapping his fingers in front of Harry’s face. “Hello?”

“I’m sorry, Ron,” Harry murmured, turning to look at his partner. “I was thinking.”

“Yeah, you do that,” Ron replied. “Freaks me out sometimes when you get all spacey.”

Harry looked apologetic but couldn’t find any words to say.

“This case is really wearing on you, isn’t it?”

Harry nodded, not being able to trust his voice.

“Maybe…maybe it wouldn’t be so awful that you and I were switched to minor Aurors on this case and gave someone else the head position,” Ron said hesitantly.

“No,” Harry said flatly, looking back into the fire.

Ron frowned. “It just…It seems too much for you sometimes. I mean, you’ve always been a bit…I don’t know, tortured? I know that sounds bad, but you got to admit—“

“Ron.”

“Okay, okay, what I’m trying to say is that after those weeks alone with Malfoy, you seem more…obsessed with this case. It doesn’t seem healthy. You don’t eat, you barely sleep—“

“Ron—“

“No, I don’t want to hear it,” Ron snapped abruptly. “This case is not healthy for you. And now you’re keeping things from me.”

Harry glanced quickly up at Ron.

“Don’t think I forgot that you were supposed to tell me something,” Ron said glumly. “A certain something ‘Mione apparently already knows, I might add.”

Harry chewed on the inside of his cheek before answering. “You’re right; I do need to tell you something. You might not like it.”

Ron narrowed his eyes. “Well, out with it then.”

“There’s no good way to say this—“

“Out with it,” Ron repeated, beginning to get grumpy.

“I…” Harry hesitated. “I slept with Draco.”
Ron’s jaw fell open and the silence that ensued with thick and heavy.

“You, WHAT?”

“I—“

“I heard you the first time!” Ron stood, crossing his arms and glaring into the fire. “Merlin, Harry…”

“I think I’ve fallen for him.”

Ron hissed through his teeth, his eyes blazing. “All those blokes is one thing…but how can you go from my SISTER to Draco Malfoy?!”

“Your sister didn’t want anything to do with me—“

“You broke her heart!”

“Did you want me to place her in the line of fire?”

“That’s beside the point!”

“What is your point, Ron?”

“It’s disgusting!” Ron shrieked. “Malfoy??! Are you kidding me?!!”

Disgruntled, Harry looked defensive as he gazed up at his furious partner. “It’s not disgusting.”

“Anything with Malfoy is disgusting.”

“He’s worth protecting, isn’t he?”

“Only because he saved your life,” Ron grated, jabbing a finger into Harry’s chest. “That’s the only reason I have ever gone along with helping him out. Because he saved your life! And now you’re shagging him?! What the fuck, Harry?!”

Harry scowled up into his partner’s enraged face. “He’s not so terrible as we once thought.”

“Bullshit.”

“It is not bullshit—“

“It is! Merlin, I should have seen this coming! Harry, I can’t believe—do you realize the magnitude—first I get punished for Wisconsin and now—Harry, we’re both GOING TO LOSE OUR JOBS FOR THIS!” Ron’s face was positively distorted with the ferocity of his temper.

“WE won’t,” Harry retorted. “I might, but not you.”

“We’re partners, Harry! We fly together, we die together, AND,” Ron exclaimed, jabbing his finger again, “we get FIRED together!”

“Ron—“

“I cannot—“

“I’M SORRY!”

Ron stopped his charade at Harry’s outburst.
“I’m sorry, Ron. I am. I’m sorry I pulled you into my mistakes. I’m sorry I’m such a fucking burden. But, Ron, I am not sorry for having feelings for Draco. I can’t be sorry. I just…I just can’t be. Just like how you won’t apologize for how you feel about Hermione.”

Ron ran his hands through his hair, trying to reign in his temper. “Hermione Granger is my fiancée, Harry. Draco Malfoy is the snobby git that bullied not only you, but myself and said fiancée for years! And, more than that, he’s our case, Harry! We’re sworn to protect this asshole! You have no business shagging him! It’s…its inappropriate!”

“It is inappropriate,” Harry agreed. “But I make no apologies for how I feel about him.”

Ron shook his head disparagingly. “I don’t know you,” he said, disgusted. “You are not the Harry Potter I know.”

“Ron—“

Ron raised a hand to silence his partner. “Don’t. I need…I need to mull this over. You’re really killing me, you know that?” Then Ron retired to his tent, leaving Harry to stare grievously into the dancing, mocking flames of the fire.

~*~

In the morning, Harry was shaken awake by Ron. He had dozed off where he sat, staring into the campfire. Harry blinked away his sleepiness and looked questioningly at Ron.

Ron shrugged, holding out his hand and helping Harry to his feet. “We fly together, we die together,” Ron said.

Harry gripped Ron’s hand tighter. “Thank you, Ron.” Harry knew that Ron disapproved, but his partner would still support him. It was more than he could hope for.

Nothing was lost on their priest, who looked between them with his world-weary gaze. “Love is cruel and just,” Father Alt whispered under his breath.

Yes. It was.

And always would be.

They packed up their campsite, shouldered their backpacks, and headed into the forest.

~*~
Shackled to a Death Eater

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Shackled to a Death Eater~

Madison, Wisconsin...

***

Joe Byrne wasn’t as easily convinced as Drew Williams thought he would be. He wouldn’t even allow Blaise Zabini inside his house and forced the Englishman to wait outside until they had finished discussing the new events.

Joe pointed out that this Wizard was the reason Draco Malfoy had become a case for the Ministry of Magic in the first place and, by rights, they should detain him to strengthen diplomatic relations with the Ministry. Williams argued that Blaise’s confession was given in confidence to help them believe his integrity and Byrne argued further that said confession only caused him to mistrust Zabini even more. If the confession was given to them only to aid in their handing over Cure, then what solace did they have in whether or not Blaise would ever be brought to justice for his crimes? Especially after giving Cure to Blaise without the MLED’s permission would most assuredly result in their suspension from the force.

Finally, after much debate, Williams had his partner’s consent to give over Cure and went outside—where a forceful breeze had kicked up—to inform Blaise. Annoyed, but hale, the windswept Pureblood nodded and followed Williams back to the Muggle Affairs Head Quarters. Williams took the Englishman down one corridor after the next, each seeming as endless as the one prior, until they arrived at the Cell Block. Williams undid the charms warding the Cell from unauthorized outsiders and entered, Blaise following closely behind.

Maximus Cure, handsome and disheveled, lounged lazily on his cot, not bothering to rise and greet his visitors. “Wherfore art thou here, Auror?” Cure inquired in a dreamy voice.

Zabini glanced at Williams, who rolled his eyes.

“Get up, Cure, you useless lump of shit,” Williams commanded in a surly voice. Blaise recognized that tone, the Auror had used it on him only this afternoon. Blaise smiled a little to himself. “You are going to England.”

That got Cure’s attention. “England, you say?” Cure said, sitting up and eyeing Blaise Zabini. “And
“Who’s this?”

“This is Blaise Za—“

Blaise cut off the Auror with a jerky flick of his fingers. “Blaise, only.”

Cure smiled. “How do you do, Blaise Only?”

Blaise regarded the punished Wizard thoughtfully before retrieving his wand. “Guillomassus,” Blaise murmured, casting an invisible spell.

Williams raised his brows at the young Death Eater. ‘Guillomassus’ was a spell only Witches and Wizards under the direct protection and enforceability of Wizarding government leaders could cast. It shackled the wrists and ankles of a person to his or herself, forbidding any attempt of escape and diluting any hope to use magic in the Caster’s presence. Cure was now connected to Blaise Zabini permanently by a maximum of ten feet in any direction until Blaise decided to lift the spell. Perhaps the young Death Eater was telling the truth after all.

Cure knew what it meant and his face fell when he tried to pull his wrists back, the magical shackles burning into his skin and spiking violently around his hands and feet. “Ahh, crap.”

"Make sure he tells you everything you need to know about the Inversion Enchantratem before you leave the city,” Williams said as he handed Maximus Cure’s file over to Blaise Zabini. Cure, who trailed behind them silently, moved his head to one side to hide his grin. "I would hate for you to travel all the way back to England just to have left some vital ingredient back here in Wisconsin," Williams continued. "It would be something he would find funny.”

"Duly noted,” Blaise replied, making the file disappear with a graceful turn of his fingers. Blaise glanced over his shoulder at the olive-skinned, hazel eyed young man that was connected to him by the Guillomassus. Cure met his gaze unflinching, the mirth in his hazel eyes unmistakable. Blaise turned back to Williams, their quick steps taking them swiftly towards the edge of the magical city inside Madison, Wisconsin, where the Auror had insisted on escorting them to.

Williams glanced over his shoulder at Cure as well, and then met Blaise’s gaze. "I also feel I should warn you: we don’t know much about Cure save from the events leading up to his expulsion from Sequoia’s School for American Witchcraft and Wizardry and his confession concerning poisoning Malfoy with the Inversion Enchantratem. He’s claimed he was hired by the Gatherer, but wouldn’t give us a definitive answer on whether or not he was supposed to assassinate him as well. He could be very dangerous, even if he seems harmless.”

Blaise made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat. "Or, he could be harmless, even if he seems dangerous.”

"Even so," Williams said, coming to a halt in front of a brick wall and tapping random bricks with his wand. "We know for certain he’s a genius...and also quite clever. Be careful.”

"I will, Detective," Blaise murmured as the brick wall pulled back and allowed a Muggle alley to come into view, a grateful smile gracing his lips. "I am indebted to you. Thank you.”

Williams shrugged. "It was nothing.”

"Nonsense. The MLED might suspend you."
"Naw. There's no 'might'. They'll suspend me for sure." Williams offered an easy smile. "Don't worry about me. I just hope my part in this tale is over."

"Likewise," Blaise replied, holding out his hand. "Tell Martha I send my undying gratitude."

"If we're ever in London, I'll look you up," Drew Williams answered, shaking the former Death Eater's hand firmly.

Blaise snorted. "I'm not THAT indebted to you, Detective. I do have a reputation to uphold."

Williams grinned. "Sure you do."

Behind them, Cure watched the exchange with a smile that was decidedly wry, but with eyes that were also thoughtful.

~*~

"So where is this vile?"

Blaise stood in the doorway of Cure's studio apartment on Waldemere Way where Cure had claimed a vile of the nearly complete Inversion Enchantratem was hidden.

Cure went over to a book shelf and selected a thick hard cover from the shelf. He opened it and retrieved a small vile from its shallow pages. Cure tossed the vile to Blaise who made the small bottle disappear with a twirl of his fingers. Cure watched Blaise's hands as they relaxed at the Death Eater's sides, realizing, suddenly, that this Wizard had the capability to use wandless magic.

"One would think the MLED would have searched this place," Blaise mused as he gazed around the small, sparse apartment.

"They did," Cure replied as he took off the clothes that had been given him in the Cell Block and changing into faded jeans and a casual button-down.

"Then how did they miss that?" Blaise asked, pointing to the hard cover book that had a thick, hollow square cut into its pages.

"Because they are stupid," Cure said, pulling a hooded sweater over his head.

Blaise chuckled. "Are you ready?"

Cure peered at Blaise as he finished tying the laces on his sneakers. "You seem like a different person when you smile, Blaise Only."

Blaise frowned. "Let's go," he said shortly, turning into the hall and beginning the descent down the stairs.

Cure had barely enough time to stand before the Guillomassus jerked on his hand and feet, burning his flesh painfully, and forcing him to follow.

~*~

The return trip to New York on the Greyhound was an interesting and quiet affair.

Maximus Cure soon discovered that his Death Eater captor was a rabid cigarette smoker, which gave him something to ponder. Muggles make fortunes out of the tobacco industry and the Wizarding Community usually stuck to pipe weed. A Pureblood smoking a Muggle product AND seeming
well-versed in Muggle means of transportation was...

Odd.

And a former Death Eater, no less.

Very odd.

Especially when everything the Muggles around them said or did seemed to disgust this Blaise Only.

"Why does the Ministry send a Death Eater to acquire means to the Inversion Enchantratem?" Cure had once asked, breaking the usual silence between them on their journey to New York.

"What makes you think that the Ministry sent me?" Blaise replied without looking away from the window he was gazing out of.

Cure gave him an incredulous look, as if the question was the dumbest thing he had ever heard, and held up his wrists.

Blaise glanced at him once before looking back out of the window. "Because I can."

"What does the Ministry need it for?"

"You do not need to know that."

Cure stared at the former Death Eater for a moment longer before returning to his musings.

~*~

Blaise watched Cure through the pluming spiral of smoke his cigarette was exuding as they waited for Simon Heil at the harbor in New York City. They had arrived a few hours ahead of schedule and were forced to wait until the pre-arranged meeting time. Blaise certainly hoped Simon wouldn't be late. New York was beginning to turn chilly this time of year.

Cure stood some few feet away from the Pureblood, staring out over the water and watching the sun sink into the horizon. Blaise noticed that the young criminal seemed to observe random things and gaze at it for minutes at a time with a child's fascination.

Blaise had decided it would be better to maintain a certain amount of psychological distance between himself and this man, thinking it would be better than to give Cure a window to get under his skin. Blaise had a temper, and if antagonized, would cause the former Death Eater to act rashly.

However, Blaise had become intrigued by Cure's aptitude for silence and the easy, casual grace with which he conducted himself. And while a flying ladybug, or a crawling ant, or a setting sun could fascinate Maximus Cure, anything Blaise did seemed to elicit a blaze of humor in Cure's hazel eyes, as if his mere presence amused him to no end. Blaise wondered if it was a contemptuous humor or if Cure knew something he didn't and Cure thought it was funny. But then, Blaise thought it might be something else.

Certainly, though, Maximus Cure did not strike one as a dangerous assassin.

"Have you ever killed anyone?" Blaise asked suddenly, taking a drag off of his smoke. "Other than Michael Deans?"

"Have you?" Cure replied, turning to look at the Pureblood with laughing, hazel eyes.
Blaise didn't answer as he exhaled the smoke from his lungs. Cure turned back to gaze at the fiery sun.

"Do you grieve for the life you take?" Blaise asked, his voice becoming softer and less pretentious.

"Every day." Cure continued to look out over the water. "Do you?"

Blaise tossed his fag onto the ground and crushed it with his boot. "Yes."

Cure wrapped his arms around himself. "John Smith wasn't his name, was it?"

"No."

"What is it?"

Blaise hesitated, wondering if he should say. "Draco Malfoy."

Cure was quiet for a moment. "Malfoy," he said slowly, rolling the syllables around in his mouth. "Bad faith. Suits him, the poor bastard."

"You have no idea."

Cure did turn around then, the orange and magenta of the changing sky silhouetting Cure and casting his features into shadow. "You're right; I probably don't."

Blaise met his eyes and was surprised to find no humor in the usually laughing hazel gaze.

"I would not have killed him," Cure said quietly.

Blaise nodded, believing him for some reason.

Cure turned back to the sunset.

"I had wondered what he was like in St. Mary's," Blaise said at random, lighting another cigarette.

Cure laughed. It was a clear free sound. "Pranced around like he owned the place. Had everyone worked up in a knot over him."

Blaise smiled. Sounded like the Draco he knew.

"He hit on me, you know," Cure said, glancing over his shoulder. "I think he liked seeing people uncomfortable because of him."

Blaise's grin grew wider. "He does. He's best at cornering that which is most vulnerable in a person."

"Like a child who jabs at a red button reading 'DON'T TOUCH' until it no longer works," Cure mused aloud.

"Indeed."

Cure was silent for many minutes before he spoke again. "The Inversion Enchantratem is for Draco Malfoy, isn't it? What is inside him that the Ministry wants out? It must be terrible, to frighten Detectives Williams and Byrne into giving me into a Death Eater's care."

Blaise blinked. How on Earth did he figure that out? "Cure..."

"Don't deny it, Blaise Only," Cure said, tiring of watching the sun set and coming over to sit by
Blaise. "It was a simple matter of deducing facts from what I already knew. And being the biggest hint myself, it was fairly easy."

Blaise regarded his so-called 'prisoner' and watched the young man's lips curve into a smile. The man positively shone when he smiled.

As clever as he is intelligent. Williams had said as much.

"You never meant to kill Michael Deans, did you?"

Cure's smile vanished and his eyes hardened. "Michael was my closest friend. No one grieved him more than I did."

"Then why did you continue to experiment with the Inversion Enchantratem?"

Cure's gaze turned mournful. "It was Michael's obsession, to find out how to create the Inversion Enchantratem. I felt that quitting our research would have been an insult to his memory." Cure looked at Blaise. "I'm just glad I might be able to do something good with the potion before I'm locked up forever. Michael never wanted to harm anyone with it."

"Then why did you accept the job to use it on Draco?"

Cure looked away. "Man's gotta pay rent."

Finally, Blaise caught a glimpse of the renegade Cure was rumored to be. Cure seemed rigid, his casual grace slipping, his gaze hard and mutinous, the laughing hazel being replaced by a dark green, and his fists were clenched. Blaise realized that Cure didn't like what he had become, but Wizards were never meant to live as Muggles. Maximus Cure had been blamed for the death of his best friend during a potions accident. He had been expelled, his wand broken, and forbidden to do magic. He had been exiled. And Maximus Cure was bitter for it. Blaise understood this more than most...except, perhaps, Draco himself, who would understand better than all of them.

He wondered what else he had in common with Maximus Cure.

But before his thoughts could take him into another dimension of musing, Simon Heil made his appearance. Quiet, steady, slightly swaying, and right on time.

Cure instantly transformed back into the silent, laughing-eyed, casual graced criminal that Blaise had traveled with these past two days and he couldn't help but wonder which side of him was most true.

Simon and Blaise made short work of finalizing their venture as Cure stood idly by, distractedly rubbing at the burns on his wrists. At one point, Simon glanced up at Cure and asked Blaise a question. Blaise responded immediately, seeming confident, and Simon nodded.

They shook hands. The deal was complete.

They would set sail in the morning.

~*~
The Black Forest was large and thick, stretching for acre upon acre, kilometer upon kilometer, and the two Aurors--their exorcist in tow--were beginning to lose hope as they searched the woods that surrounded the Hochberg Castle.

Griphook the Goblin was ever elusive.

Harry, especially, was becoming more and more frustrated as the days slipped by. Even if they left for England that morning, once they returned to the Ministry of Magic, Draco would have only a week and a half before the deadline the Minister allotted to them.

They were running out of time.

Harry had insisted that they continued their search long into the night the night prior, stopping only in the small hours of the morning to build a campfire that would warm their hands and feet before pressing on. Morning stretched into midday, and midday stretched into the cooling evening hours.

Ron, who had whined under his breath about needing a break for the past three hours, finally put his foot down and sat on a large boulder, refusing to budge until they had had supper.

"Ron--"

"Harry." Ron looked mutinous.

Harry sighed. "Fine. But let's make it quick."

Father Ernst Alt had been an ever silent and uncomplaining comrade during their travels, though the two Aurors often discussed sending one of them back early to escort Alt straight to the Ministry. The priest was uncomplaining, but he was elderly. This constant hiking through the rugged terrain of the Black Forest was wearing on him. They could tell.

Ron handed a bowl of stew to the priest, who thanked him, and then he went back to sit by Harry. Ron offered him a bowl of stew, but Harry shook his head.
For some peculiar reason, Harry had been feeling a strange sense of repulsion every time he tried to drink water or eat a morsel of food. Every time he tried to nourish himself, no matter how hungry or thirsty he was, a voice in his head—sounding oddly like Draco—whispered "...don't...don't..." And though he was dizzy with hunger and his tongue felt like a parched thing in his mouth, Harry complied with the urging in his mind; and he felt wiser for it.

"I think one of us should take him back in the morning if we can't find Griphook by then," Ron murmured to his partner, taking a spoon and eating the stew himself.

"I'm beginning to agree with you," Harry conceded. "I'll stay and look for the Goblin. You take him back."

"If you insist," Ron replied instantly. Hiking in the woods was never really his thing.

Harry gave his partner a sour look. "Git."

"Wanker."

Harry grinned and glanced over at Father Alt, chewing on his lip as he did so. It felt strange to have this man in their company...but at the same time, Harry couldn't deny the queer sense of relief he felt when he noticed the man's presence at his elbow, or the comfort that accompanied the priest's shadow.

It almost felt as if it was a good idea to have him along. Harry remembered the sensation that coursed through his body the first time he ever held the Sword of Godric Gryffindor. He remembered how strong he had felt and how it was almost like everything that was good and right in the world protected him as he held it.

That was how he felt around Father Alt; and he wondered if perhaps—just perhaps—this priest, this failed exorcist, was a holy man after all.

Harry turned back to Ron. "How are we going to get the Sword from the Goblin? Remember last time?"

Ron recollected the dragon and the heat of LeStrange's vault, and he shuddered. "Yeah, mate. I remember."

"Do you think we'll have to steal it?"

"I hope not."

~*~

Soon after, the trio re-packed their things and moved on, heading in the direction of the Hochberg Castle; hoping they would reach it before it became too dark. The castle itself was the one place they had yet to search. They didn't particularly want to go into the ruins at night, heeding the old woman's warnings about ghosts and strange phenomena; but if Griphook wasn't in the forest surrounding the castle, the Goblin may very well be IN the castle.

It truly was a ruin. Most of the ceiling structures had crumbled off and much of it was overgrown with the greenery from the forest surrounding it. The walls were drafty and the cellars were muddy. Still, even in the dark, Hochberg Castle held a contending majesty.

"Wow," Ron said, turning in a circle.
"Yeah," Harry agreed. "Keep a weather eye out."

They searched the ruin for the better part of two hours, finding nothing. Suddenly, Ron, who stood on an unsteady part of the battlements, let out a sharp cry. Harry and Father Alt came at a run, nearly falling to their death when a large block of stone collapsed beneath their feet, and finally reached the red-headed Auror.

Harry peered into the darkness, following the direction Ron was pointing in. Soon, he spotted it.

A hut. Small, sturdy, and with an unmistakable gilded door, with that unmistakable Goblin design. "Hot damn," Ron breathed. "We found him."

"Let's go," Harry ordered, his pulse racing in anticipation. "And watch your step."

Abruptly, Harry felt like he had been dowsed with a bucket of ice water. Gasping, he watched a uniformed ghost pull out of his chest and fly away from him. Pausing, he held out his hand to stop Ron and Father Alt.

"Ron," Harry whispered. "Have you ever seen a ghost like that?"

The spirit was not the usual pale blue-white. The ghost...almost looked like he was on fire. Reds and oranges licked off of his transparent skin like flames, casting an eerie glow over the triumvirate.

"Harry...look, there's more."

Ron was right. A dozen more spirits began to materialize. And they all looked as if they were aflame.

They wore dour expressions and Harry began to feel nervous. Save for one or two, the ghosts of Hogwarts that he was used to were generally kind, never feeling it necessary to wreak out their wrath on the living. These ghosts were different. These spirits were angry.

"Hell fire," Father Alt murmured behind him. "Beware, young magician."

Harry gritted his teeth. "Let us pass," he commanded. "We are leaving this place. We will not come back."

A spiral of flame erupted from one of the spirits and hit Harry squarely in the chest. Harry gasped, pain blossoming in his body, as his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Ron caught him as the young Auror passed out. "Fuck," Ron swore.

"I warned him," Father Alt muttered in halting English, retrieving a golden cross from his robes. "Go. I will hold them."

"You're sure?" Ron clarified as he hoisted Harry's arm around his neck and prepared to drag him away.

The priest nodded, chanting under his breath in German and glaring across the space dividing them from the spirits. The ghosts' attention seemed to be solely on Father Alt now and Ron made good time in carefully picking his way down from the battlements.

Ron carried Harry all the way to the edge of the forest before laying him down and preparing to go back for the priest. He set off at a sprint when he heard a shout and saw a blaze of white erupt over the Hochberg Castle, retrieving his wand quickly from his sleeve.

Suddenly, Ron stopped dead in his tracks when he spotted a figure approaching him from the
shadows covering the entrance to Hochberg. "Name yourself."

"Father Ernst Alt," the figure said. "Exorcist for the Vatican. Stationed in Bavaria, Germany."

Ron sighed with relief, lowering his wand. "What happened?!"

The priest stuffed his cross back into his robes. "I sent them back."

"To where?"

Father Alt met Ron's eyes. "Hell," he said simply.

"Oh." Ron chewed on is lip as he led them back to where he had laid Harry down. "What were they?"

"Spirits of Thule Mystics." Father Alt looked incredibly sad for a moment. "When one experiments with hell's fire, it consumes...everything."

The Thule Society, an underground elitist movement of aristocrats led by mystics who began financing the Nazi Party in the early 1930’s, were rumored to conduct all sorts of strange experiments. Discovering the secret to Hell’s Fire—whatever it was—and being burned up by it, didn’t seem too farfetched a thing to Ron.

Ron nodded. "I see. What are we going to do with Harry?"

"Young magicians are resilient. He will wake."

Suddenly he froze. "Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"That."

Alt looked up and listened with Ron as a brush nearby rustled again.

"Harry Potter," a surly voice whispered from behind the brush.

"Who's there?" Ron demanded.

"It is I," the voice said as a small creature emerged from the shifting shadows. "Griphook."

"What the devil is that?" Father Alt hissed, reaching for his cross. "Demon."

Griphook glared at the exorcist. "Insolent human. I am no demon."

"He's the one we've been looking for," Ron said, placing a restraining hand on Alt's arm. "He's a Goblin."

Griphook peered down at Harry's sleeping form. "You have met with the ghosts of Hochberg."

"Yes," Ron said.

"Bring him," Griphook demanded before turning and shuffling back into the darkness.

~*~

In and out.
There and back again.
Almost...
But not quite.
Too much and never, ever enough.

Through the haze, he saw Draco reach out and push his unruly black bangs away from his eyes, a strange, fleeting look in the Slytherin’s smirking gaze.

Wake up, Harry.

No. I don’t want to.

Draco pulled away, a smile in his silver, flashing eyes.

I’m running out of time. Wake up.

I want to stay.

Not here.

Why not?

Those flashing gray eyes turned hard. Because I am evermore than memory.

You could never be just a memory.

I will be if you do not wake.

"When has he eaten last?"

"Two days ago; maybe three. He’s been odd about when he’ll eat or sleep."

Almost, but not quite.

He peered through the haze, wondering why it was becoming more and more difficult to see the Malfoy heir.

Protect me, Potter.

I will. I swore it.

As you swore to kill me.

Only if I run out of time. I owe you a life debt.

Silver piercing eyes. How can a color so cold look so sad? Harry, you must wake. You must return.

"I see. So that is why his magic was weak against the hell fire."

"I think he’s waking up."

Don’t leave. He began to panic. He could barely see him anymore.

"Harry?"
Harry’s emerald eyes snapped open and he sat straight up with a start. Father Ernst Alt was there beside Ron. Griphook sat on a stool to his left. They were all staring hard at him.

"You okay, mate?" Ron asked.

Harry blinked at him. Ron was holding the Sword of Godric Gryffindor. Harry whirled to his left, gaping at the surly Goblin. "You'll let us have it?"

Griphook shrugged. "Provided you'll give it back when you're through. Your partner has already sworn it."

Harry turned back to Ron, who was grinning ear to ear. "How...?"

"I asked for it," Ron said simply. "Griphook was surprised at my respectful appeal."

Harry’s green eyes widened with shock. "You asked for it...politely?"

Ron rolled his eyes. "Really, Harry, sometimes I think you forget who I’m engaged to."

~*~

Rita Skeeter glanced up and grinned her red lipsticked smile as Dolores Umbridge walked into her office at the Daily Prophet’s Headquarters.

"Have you found anything?" Umbridge asked in her sugar-coated, malice-laced voice.

"Some things, but nothing to really--shall we say?--exploit."

Umbridge's nostrils flared in a most unseemly way. "Something is going on with that Malfoy. I know it."

"Yes, well, everything concerning his case has been very 'hush hush’," Skeeter replied. "If we can't get at least one interview from the inside..." Rita Skeeter let her voice trail off for the added effect.

Umbridge sat uninvited and poured herself a cup of tea, adding a ridiculous number of sugar cubes to the steaming brew. "And if I could provide an interview with, say, and interesting dose of Veritiserum...?"

Rita Skeeter laughed delightedly. "Then, my dear Dolores, we would have a paper, you and I. Who did you have in mind?"

"The one that was left behind."

Rita smiled slowly. "How juicy..."

~*~
Me, Myself, and I

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Me, Myself, and I~

Hermione blinked.

Looking around her, she saw that she was sitting at a table in the Ministry of Magic's Mess Hall. Hermione checked her watch, seeing it was almost three in the afternoon.

Hermione frowned. She must have dosed off after eating lunch.

Strange that she couldn't remember coming down to the Mess Hall in the first place, or even what she had eaten.

Hermione rose to her feet and headed quickly back into the Ministry. She hated being late. Hermione was supposed to have supervised Draco's 2:30 dosage intake.

She hurried through the maze of the Ministry and up to the Minister's Suite. The four-Auror guard were oddly huddled over today's edition of the Daily Prophet and Rita Skeeter's unmistakable voice was heard coming from the "Me, Myself, and I" column.

Hermione paused on her way in. "Honestly, I can't believe you all would read such nonsense."

Anin lifted his head and handed her the column with heavy eyes. "I think you should read it yourself, Miss Granger."

Hermione took the paper and glanced at the headline. Instantly, she felt her stomach drop.

It read: "Is Harry Potter Courting the Devil in Our Most Trying Hour?"

Hermione pushed past Anin and into the Suite. Draco Malfoy, sitting at the kitchen table with his own copy of the Daily Prophet, raised his shocked, gray eyes to Hermione.

"Fuck," they said at the same time.

~*~

The Sword of Godric Gryffindor slung across his back, his partner, Ron Weasley, at his side, and Father Ernst Alt trailing behind, Harry Potter made his way inside the Ministry of Magic, the long journey to reclaim the sword finally over. Whispers, louder than usual, sounded all around them.
Like he usual did, Harry ignored them to the best of his ability. Beside him, Ron smiled when he spotted his fiancée hurrying towards them.

"Ron, Harry!" Hermione exclaimed, grabbing Ron's wrist. "It's best if you get out of sight. C'mon! Hurry!"

"What is going on, Hermione?" Harry asked as they followed her through a maze of hallways. Hermione didn't answer and finally stopped in front of a conference room. Quickly, she unlocked the door and ushered the three of them inside. Blaise was there, along with an olive-skinned, hazel-eyed young man Harry recognized as Michael Deans—or, rather, Maximus Cure. Anin and his partner, Mackle, were present; and so was Mary Heart, who shuffled from the room upon seeing Harry, Ron, and Father Alt to tell the Minister they had arrived.

Immediately, Harry approached Cure and grabbed his shirt collar, glaring for all he was worth. "You two-faced son of a bitch," Harry grated.

Cure regarded Harry with laughing eyes. "That may be true, Auror; however, at the moment, you have bigger problems."

"Harry," Hermione said behind him. "You need to take a look at this."

Letting Cure go, Harry turned to Hermione and took the Daily Prophet she offered him, already opened to the "Me, Myself, and I" column.

The blood drained from his face as he read the header.

"Is Harry Potter Courting the Devil in Our Most Trying Hour?" Rita Skeeter's magicked voice read aloud. "Me, myself, and I would like to know. Inside sources tell us that Draco Malfoy, our hero who vanquished the Dark Lord over three years ago, awoke from his coma this past winter. In a stroke of brash, some would call, selfishness, Harry Potter, the Head Auror on Draco Malfoy's case at the Ministry of Magic along with Ronald Weasley, and bitter for being unable to defeat You-Know-Who, Obliviated the Malfoy heir and sent him to a mental institution for the criminally insane in United States of America. One should ponder if this was an attempt to keep Draco Malfoy silent during Harry Potter's ever-fruitless investigation of so-called Death Eaters trying to assassinate the Wizarding Hero.

"When investigating further, I found that there is an old Pureblood Prophecy claiming that Maul, a Tulpa so powerful and dangerous, its destructive nature could rival that of Lord Voldemort's, would posses a host and come into this world at the End of Days. Tom Riddle--Lord Voldemort before he became the Dark Lord--was given the task of choosing a host for Maul in exchange for the secret to immortal life. And who should You-Know-Who choose other than our savior, Draco Malfoy?"

"If that doesn't come as a first class shocker, then listen to this."

"Instead of working on a solution to this brewing threat, Harry Potter leaves an Obliviated and helpless Draco Malfoy in the hands of American Muggles and goes off to China to paw through Malfoy's last will and testament; as if there would be anything in there for him. Harry Potter only returns to aid his sworn ward when the gathering army of renegade Death Eaters, led by Harry Potter's own lover, Cruent Mantle, attacks Draco Malfoy with the Inversion Enchantratem, an illegal potion meant to rob a Wizard of his magic.

"Swooping in to save the day--as he is wont to do in the most precarious, seemingly self-designed situations--Harry Potter rescues the Malfoy heir and disappears with him for two solid weeks."
"Where did they go? And what, pray tell, happened while they were away?

"My inside informant gave me the very information that will have you thinking twice about the integrity of our Auror's Division at the Ministry of Magic.

"Our insider claims that Harry Potter took Draco Malfoy to the Order of the Phoenix's former headquarters--the exact location still remains elusive--and gave the Malfoy heir a memory draught that aided our demon-possessed savior in regaining his memories. However, the plot ever-thickens. During their stay together, our informant claims that they became lovers.

"No! Say it isn't so! The two Boys-Who-Lived sleeping in the same bed?!

"Then, the army of Maul attacks Draco Malfoy again by hypnotizing him away from the safety of the Order of the Phoenix’s former Headquarters. Cruent Mantle nearly succeeds in casting out Draco Malfoy's soul and bringing forth Maul into the Malfoy heir's body. However, after an epic battle between the two, Draco manages to slay Cruent Mantle and escape within the confines and safety of the Ministry of Magic.

"The Markaghirelle is being used to keep the sleeping Maul at bay while the Ministry frantically searches for a way to destroy the Black Tulpa.

"Meanwhile, Me, Myself, and I are left wondering whether having a besotted, pathologically attention-seeking Harry Potter remaining on Draco Malfoy's case is for the best. It seems that since day one, things have been getting worse and worse for the Malfoy heir because of Harry Potter. Did Harry Potter actually drug Draco Malfoy into giving his heart away? One has to wonder. They had never shown a measure of affection towards one another before their isolated two weeks within the Order of the Phoenix’s former Headquarters.

"After all things considered, it is bewildering to think that the Ministry would allow such inappropriate conflict of interest and philandering to take place when the End of Days is still so near. The Ghost of Lord Voldemort hangs like a shadow over Draco Malfoy and all Harry Potter can think about is how to get the man into bed?

"It is, in short, a glorious scandal.

"Can we afford for such a scandal to take place during the Wizarding World's most trying hour?

"Me, Myself, and I would like to know.

"This column was written by Rita Skeeter. Until next time, dearies."

Harry's knuckles turned white as he gripped the Daily Prophet, an incomprehensible rage burning inside of him.

The bitch could have at least gotten her facts straight. Unless...

Suddenly Harry whirled around and marched out the way he had come, slamming the door behind him. His angry steps took him quickly to the Minister's Suite and he barged in, past the guard, past the foyer, and finally, into the living room.

Draco stood, doing his best to look calm; but then Harry had him by both arms and was violently shoving him against the nearest wall. Draco's wandless magic charged up against Harry's, but he made no move to strike back as he stared down into Harry's furious green eyes.
"You glory-seeking, goddamn wanker," Harry spat. "You sold us out to the Daily Prophet, didn't you?!"

"Harry, no!" Hermione shrieked from behind them. She and Ron had followed him here. "I...I think I did."

Harry met Draco's angry, flashing eyes once before the Slytherin's magic spiked once and sent Harry hurling bodily across the room. As Harry slowly gathered himself, Draco walked into his bedroom. "If this is your idea of trust, Potter," Draco muttered before closing the door, "it's pathetic."

Harry finally got his feet under him and stood, feeling exasperation replace the ferocity of his rage. "What on Earth do you mean, you think it was you?" Harry asked, rubbing his neck as he turned to Hermione.

Hermione took in a deep breath. "Before I found out about the Daily Prophet, I found myself in the Mess Hall with about five hours of my life missing. No one knew where I had gone and I couldn't remember anything. I think they got to me, drugged me with Veritiserum, and Obliviated the whole ordeal from my memory."

"If you were anyone else, Hermione, I'd say you were full of shit."

Hermione shrugged. "It's all irrelevant at this point, Harry. The Minister wants to see you."

Harry's face fell. Oh, great.

~*~

"You know this isn't something I can ignore, Potter," Scrimgeour said, pacing his office.

It was only the two of them and Harry liked the Minister the better for it. "I do, sir."

"Did you or did you not have an illicit affair with Draco Malfoy during your stay at the Phoenix's old HQ?" Scrimgeour asked directly.

Harry hesitated, clenching his fists so tightly the words 'I must not tell lies' showed white among the scars of his left hand. "I did, sir."

Scrimgeour quit his pacing and sat heavily in a chair. "Merlin, Harry...what is wrong with you?" It wasn't often that the Minister of Magic called him by his first name.

"I've wondered as much, sir."

Scrimgeour rubbed at the bridge of his nose. "There have been inquiries. Officials want a hearing."

Harry stiffened. "A hearing, sir?"

"A hearing to judge whether or not you are fit for this case, Harry."

Harry took in a deep breath.

"We can avoid the embarrassment if you willfully resigned from the case."

Harry hung his head. "I can't do that, Minister. I'm a part of this. I never wanted to be but I am. And now...now I...Draco...I can't quit on him now, sir. It would be wrong."

Scrimgeour gazed at his young Auror as he stood before him, his gaze hard and unforgiving. "I
should fire you altogether."

"I understand, sir."

"But I won't."

Harry lifted his head. "Sir?"

"I disapprove of your affair, and believe me, if it weren't for the obstacles to come, the repercussions I would hand you would be severe. However..." Scrimgeour stood and faced the window behind his desk, his hands clasped neatly behind his back. "I believe your intentions are good ones, despite Skeeter's interpretations. If you can convince the jury, you will have convinced me. You may go."

"With respect, Minister," Harry said, taking a step forward. "Could the hearing wait until after the Inversion Enchantratem?"

"No," Scrimgeour said flatly. "Father Alt needs time to diagnose Malfoy and Cure needs a few days to complete the Inversion Enchantratem. The hearing will be during this time. Afterwards...well, I suppose that is up to you. Also," Scrimgeour glanced over his shoulder at Harry, "I'd advise you to stay away from Malfoy for the time being; at least until the hearing is over."

Harry closed his eyes, feeling sick. "Yes, sir," Harry whispered, hating himself and not understanding why. "Would it be possible avoid allowing Ron or Hermione to feel the heat for any of this?"

We fly together, we die together.

Scrimgeour shook his head. "I don't know, son."

We get fired together.

With a heavy heart, Harry Potter took his leave.

~*~
Is It Worth It?

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Is It Worth It?~

Man was made of social earth,
Child and brother from his birth,
Tethered by a liquid cord
Of Blood through veins of kindred poured.

Next his heart the fireside band
Of mother, father sister, stand;
Names from awful childhood heard
Throbs of wild religion stirred; --

Virtue, to love, to hate them, stirred;
Till dangerous Beauty cam, at last,
Till Beauty came to snatch all ties;
The maid, abolishing the past,

With lotus wine obliterates
Dear memory's stone carved traits,
And, by herself, supplants alone
Friends year by year more inly known…

…It was ever the self-same tale,
The first experience will not fail;
Only two in the garden walked,
And with Snake and Seraph talked…

The Minister's Suite...

***

Draco Malfoy had had a lot of time to sit on his own and think these past couple of months.

Most of his weeks at St. Mary's Hospital had been spent wracking his brain for his long-lost memories. Hours he had spent grasping at the frayed strings of his dreams and scribbling down anything that stood out into notebook that had been provided him Dr. Laeverton. Soon, one element of his dreams became synonymous with every seeming flashback. The black-haired, green-eyed
male that was Harry Potter.

He was in every dream, every hazy memory. Most, he wasn't supposed to be. Draco realized later it was because Harry had been watching his memories in his Pensieve and he, Draco, had been an invisible witness through the Horcrux Scar.

When Harry Potter had rescued him from his bubble of imploding magic in Wisconsin and brought him back to Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, Draco had spent much of his time balancing his thoughts between why he had been granted a second chance at life and the best possible way to annoy his protector and former Hogwarts rival.

The former seemed endlessly fruitless. His plan to destroy Voldemort had been precise and was executed thusly. The Dark Lord was dead and so too, then should Draco have been. And the coma that he had slept under for one thousand, two hundred and seventy-six days was something to occupy is thoughts as well. Oddly, the same number of days he was in Asia brewing the VCE Elixir. One, two, seven six. Draco still wondered if that number had any merit.

Draco had had no desire to be alive. He had spent so many years preparing and resolving himself to his death. Draco thought that, perhaps, he had once remembered what he had seen after he hexed himself with the Killing Curse. A flash of white, the cold, pale smile of his mother, like an early spring dawn still shivering from the last snow of winter...a twinkling, blue eye behind half-moon spectacles...and then a pushing sensation, pushing him back into the vast expanse of whiteness. However, Draco couldn't be sure if it was his memory...or if it was his over-active imagination, a product of too many lonely hours searching the barracks of his dusty and tired mind.

The latter, however, proved to be much more interesting, scattering any serious thought to the wind. Harry Potter, his very own certified Auror.

Merlin.

Draco felt his lips curve into a smile.

Originally, Draco had pestered Harry for the mere familiarity of it. It almost felt like the good old days whenever he managed to merit a brilliant green-eyed glare from the former Gryffindor Golden Boy. But those eyes were too green and that frown was shaped by lips that are made for smiling; and, soon, Draco found himself falling headfirst into a pit of tag and chase flirtation. A dangerous game at best. A self-destructive ploy at worst.

It started with the blasted butter pasta.

Draco noticed that Harry had an issue with eating healthy meals, but if one was set in front of him, he usually consumed everything with a ferocious appetite. So, Draco had made them lunch and brought Harry's portion up to his study for him. True, it had been rude when Harry had gaped at him in disbelief; as if the mere notion of Draco having the ability to cook was an impossibility too profound to believe. But then he had settled in to eat it and Draco hid behind a book, finding himself mesmerized by how Harry's mouth worked around the pasta.

Which led to an argument. How could it not?

Then there was the day the Weasel came to visit. That was the day they exchanged blows. That was the day Draco had revealed the most intriguing truth about Purebloods.

That was the day Draco kissed him. That was the day Harry kissed him back.

Later, startled by his own actions, Harry Potter had threatened to transfer his case. Draco had slit the
vein in his wrist to prove that they were indeed in this together and that nothing—NOTHING—could change that.

Draco snorted, remembering. If anyone believed that load of bollocks, he'd personally give them the Order of Merlin.

If Draco was honest with himself—which he was seldom—he would admit it was because he had surrendered to a brutal urge to rectify the mistake of him still being among the living.

To this day, he wished that Harry had let him bleed. Then, there would be no Maul. Then, there would be no column in the newspaper slandering Harry Potter's name. Then, there would be no reason for anyone to fear the rumored End of Days.

Draco could never pull another stunt like that again. Now, he was invested in another person. He was invested in Harry Potter.

Strange, that caring for only one person in the world could stay his hand like it did.

After the incident, they had become lovers. The friction between them giving way to an exhilarating spark of passion and sleepy smiles. It was as if they had snatched a few moments of heaven before a dark and terrible storm came crashing down around them.

The Gatherer was behind the attack of the Inversion Enchantratem, an army of organized, renegade Death Eaters were forming, Walburga Black spoke of a dire Prophecy, countries around the world closed their Apparatal Borders, and Cruent Mantle sang the Song of Summoning.

Draco sighed, putting his head in his hands from where he sat at the desk in the bedroom.

Draco remembered the flesh of Cruent Mantle's cheek embedded in his fingernails and the swell of nausea that accompanied it. That terrible wave of darkness that shuddered through him, again and again. The impulse to kill, to destroy, to hate and burn and annihilate until the world was nothing but ash.

Then the panic. The trembling that washed over him every time Maul receded back into his being, settling into a shadowy niche beside his soul, wracked his body. Death Eaters surrounded him. Harry shouted his name.

Draco drew in a shuddering breath. True, the broom chase that ensued was an extraordinary testament to Harry Potter's flying skills...but it was something Draco would sooner forget. Draco couldn't count on two hands how many times he nearly died in those moments of dashing around street corners, dodging exploding rubble, and daring insane spirals that even Viktor Krum would think twice about.

But the sudden ending of it all from neither being the recipient of the Killing Curse nor slitting his own veins to slowly bleed to death could compare with how his heart painfully clenched or the agony in the pit of his stomach as he watched Harry topple from his broom and plummet headfirst to the ground. Another thing he would like to forget.

Draco was beginning to truly hate how he was endangering this Auror by just being alive.

And then the realization that Cruent Mantle, Maul's handsome Gatherer, had crept into Harry's bed to get closer to him had enraged him so much, he could barely think. The feelings that swamped him as he slowly tortured the man that would have cast out his soul like a used plaything and replace it with the Tulpa that was Maul went beyond cruelty, it went beyond anger. It was that slow-burning hate that he felt as he brewed the VCE Elixir and thought of Voldemort, it was that wrathful vengeance
that had poisoned his core when the Dark Lord had murdered his mother and then defiled her funeral.

Draco shuddered again, wondering if he was really worth saving.

But then there were those few, precious moments of heaven at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Beyond the electricity of their cat-and-mouse game, beyond the magic of their lovemaking, their was the warmth and rightness of Harry's embrace, the startling revelation of Harry still lying next to him in the morning, and the smell of slightly burned eggs for breakfast.

Who was he kidding? They couldn't possibly make a lifetime of those stolen moments of bliss. Their small affair alone had spread unrest and panic throughout the Wizarding World due to an impromptu, scandalous column in the Daily Prophet. Not to mention the hearing that was scheduled on the morrow to decide whether or not Harry should even remain on the case.

But...

But if it could...

It just might be worth fighting for.

It just might be worth it.

Harry had gone off with the Weasel some place and had just returned yesterday. How long had it been? The days had seemed never-ending. Weeks. Maybe two; two and a half, perhaps.

After frogs and flies and blood, the dull, boring aftertaste of the Markaghirelle, the few books this Suite contained having been read over and over again, Draco was quite restless. But then the column was written and the day of Harry's arrival spoiled.

It hurt, a little, that the first person Harry blamed for the horrible column was him. But then, really, Draco might have possibly thought the same if their roles had been swapped. Draco thought that he was probably in a sour mood mostly because their reunion hadn't gone...quite...as he had hoped.

And Draco didn't think he would be able to see Harry until the hearing...if at all.

A knock sounded on the door down the hall. The front door opened, Draco could hear whispering, and then the door was closed. Draco rose to go and greet his visitor, hoping it wasn't Granger. Draco hoped he wouldn't have to see her face for a very long time. Forced or no, her confessions to Rita Skeeter had him so angry he was beside himself. Glaring darkly, Draco went into the hall and froze.

Harry took a timid step forward, reaching out his hand before it fell limply by his side. Draco frowned. "You're not supposed to be here."

Harry shifted his shoulders minutely. Draco supposed it was Harry Potter's version of a shrug. "Ron and I have hand picked the Aurors on your case from day one," Harry murmured, his expression unreadable. "While many of them often disapprove of our decisions, they are all fiercely loyal. It helps to be of the few surviving members of the Order of the Phoenix."

Draco gazed back at him, his cold, gray eyes unimpressed.

Harry looked away, his wild hair shading the brilliance of his green eyes. "I wanted to see you."

Draco was silent for a moment before stepping to one side. "Come in."
They went into the living room and reclined onto comfortable chairs. It was some time before Draco cleared his throat. "How's...everything on the outside?"

Harry ran a hand through his hair. "Widespread panic. People are stupid."

Draco thought of the burning hate that Maul positively breathed. "Perhaps they are smarter than you think."

Harry lifted his eyes to Draco and immediately looked away. "The Minister has publicly diluted any truth concerning Maul. He doesn't think it's a good idea that the public should know how bad it could really be."

"Some will not believe him."

"True."

Silence again.

Too much and not enough. Almost, but not quite.

"Where did you go?" The question was barely a request for an answer. It was a demand for the truth.

"Germany. We were sent there to retrieve the Sword of Godric Gryffindor and collect an exorcist."

"The Sword," Draco mused. "I had thought as much. The exorcist was unexpected, though."

"The Ministry wants his expert opinion."

"The expert opinion of a Muggle?" Harry could hear the sneer in Draco's voice.

"This one is an untrained Wizard. He'll be in here soon to diagnose you."

Draco laughed. It began as a soft noise but ended as a hard-hearted chuckle. "Brilliant."

Harry looked up again. "Hermione tells me Maul won't let you eat or drink."

Draco peered at Harry. "Have you been eating?"

"I had a sandwich today." Harry frowned. "Nothing happened. I felt a bit sick, but 'Mione had insisted that no plague could effect me."

"I didn't think it would."

"Then why did you urge me not to eat while I was away?" Harry asked.

"I didn't," Draco said with a frown of his own. "It must have been my own psychological repulsion. You should have seen it."

Harry smiled a little. "I heard it was quite the scene."

"It was humiliating," Draco clarified shortly.

Harry sighed, inspecting his hands. "Listen, Draco...I think I blamed you for the column because, underneath it all, I feel like you might possibly resent being this...this hero...and not getting any of your due for it."

Draco snorted. "Personally, I've never had much time for heroes."
Harry blinked. Dumbledore had once said that. "So, you don't resent...you don't resent being holed up here?"

Draco smiled his cold smile. "Of course I do, Potter. I just don't want Hero Worship spoiling my Slytherin reputation."

Harry startled himself with a laugh. "I see."

"Though, of course, being respected wouldn’t be entirely unwelcome," Draco said softly, his gray eyes averted, thinking of what Voldemort had once said to him. Run away, Draco. It is, after all, what you are best at.

Harry nodded. Strange that this thing was something else they had in common. "How did you know about the Sword?" Harry asked, changing the subject again.

“I spent three years brewing the Verve Channel Electron Elixir, Harry,” Draco retorted darkly. “Give me some goddamn credit.”

Harry winced. “You’re still sore because I didn’t tell you where I was going.” It wasn’t a question and they both knew it.

Draco stood, feeling restless again. “I understand your reasoning,” Draco muttered, facing away from him.

“Do you? ‘Cause I don’t.”

“What you know, he knows,” Draco quoted. “Stay out of my head.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t,” Draco spat, turning back to him. “Don’t start apologizing. I can deal with a lot of this, but I can’t deal with you and your depressing, self-pitying bouts of regret.”

Harry’s black brows raised a fraction. “That’s not really fair, Malfoy.”

Draco’s silver eyes flashed angrily. “Don’t preach to me about what is fair, Harry Potter.”

Harry rose to his feet, his patience beginning to slip. “I didn’t ask for this.”

“You chose.”

Harry jabbed his forefinger at Draco incredulously. “YOU sucker-punched me into kissing you! Where was choice—“

“Oh, don’t start, Potter,” Draco interrupted. “You chose to head my case when the warrant for my assassination surfaced, you chose to destroy the Transfer Case scroll, and you CHOSE to fuck me!”

“Are we seriously arguing about this?” Harry demanded.

Draco clenched and unclenched his fingers. “Is it worth it?”


“No, Harry,” Draco corrected, his pointed face shuttered. “Placing your friends in danger, losing your job, embarrassing yourself tomorrow at the hearing…is it worth it? Are we worth it?”
Do you love him? Do you love him? Do you love him?

“No.” Harry drew in a shaky breath as Draco’s gray eyes looked away; hiding the pain that his silvery gaze betrayed him to. “But you are.”

Draco looked back. “What?”

“Our affair…the scandal…” Harry shrugged. “No, it’s not worth putting my friends in danger, or embarrassing myself, or losing my job. But you are. You are worth it; and I feel like a traitor for it.”

Draco’s shielded resolve slipped a little and he looked suddenly vulnerable. “Why?” Draco asked, his voice cracking.

Harry reached out and traced the curve of Draco’s ear before cupping his cheek, feeling the Slytherin shiver beneath his touch. “Because you saved my life. Because you proved us all wrong and never asked for anything. Because you’ve shown a semblance of dignity these past months that would put the entirety of Pureblood Society to shame. Because you’re fighting this thing when it would just be easier to succumb to it and that is a courage few possess. Because…because…”

Do you love him? Do you love him? Do you love him?

“Because you saw through my pain and gave me something special,” Harry finished, pressing his forehead against Draco’s, the electricity of their connection spiking around them in all its glorious brilliance.

“What?” Draco whispered, closing his eyes. “What did I give you?”

“You.”

Draco made a sound in the back of his throat that was somewhere between a sob and growl before pressing his lips fiercely against Harry’s. This kiss was desperate as they fought to plunder the other’s mouth, drowning in each other as if it would be the last thing they ever did.

They almost didn’t hear the knock on the door.

“Harry!” an Auror whispered. “Someone’s coming!”

“I have to go,” Harry said softly, every fiber of his being screaming denial as he pulled away. “I’ll make this right tomorrow. A scandal we can deal with, not being there to battle Maul isn’t.”

Draco nodded, understanding what was at stake and his heart burning for it. “Just don’t get yourself fired, Potter.”

Harry grinned. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Because you saw through my pain and gave me something special.

What did I give you?

You.

…For this fortune wanted root
In the core of God’s abysm, --
Was a weed of self and schism;
And ever the Daemonic Love
Is the ancestor of wars
And the parent of remorse.

~*~

~ Excerpts from the poem The Daemonic Love by Emerson
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

~Of Ploys and Holy Water~

"But God said.
'I will have a purer gift;
There is smoke in the flame;
New flowerets bring, new prayers uplift,
And love without a name.
Fond children, ye desire
To please each other well;
Another round, a higher,
Ye shall climb on the heavenly stair,
And selfish preference forbear;
And in right deserving,
And without swerving
Each from your proper state,
Weave roses for your mate..."* A Celestial Love, Emerson

Later that afternoon...

***

After Harry's visit, Snape had come to chaperone Draco's lunch dosage, and Harry, narrowly escaping undetected, disappeared within the bowels of the Ministry; most likely to make himself scarce until the following day. Snape hadn't bothered asking Draco about the column, fearing that there would be some truth to the scandal, and had let it be for the time being.

Scowling as usual, Snape watched carefully as Draco drank the Markaghirelle, nodding to himself when the platinum blonde handed back the empty vile. Then, Snape handed Draco a small envelope.

"What's this?" Draco inquired, taking the envelope and inspecting it.

"Potter asked me to give this to you this morning. He asked me not to open it."

Draco looked up at his godfather, plainly expecting him to leave.

"I said I'd give it to you," Snape said shortly, "provided I would bare witness to what it was upon arrival."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Fine." Draco opened the envelope and pulled out a scrap of paper folded in two, something small and glittering escaping from the parchment and falling onto the floor. Draco stooped to retrieve it, discovering that it was a silver chain with a small, Chinese silver dragon pendant hanging from it. His fair, white brows shot skywards in surprise as he unfolded the scrap of paper.
Scribbled on the parchment in Harry's scrawling hand read:

"I know it's two months late, 
But I didn't want you to think I forgot. 

Happy Be-lated Birthday. 

~H"

Chicken shit, Draco thought, understanding that through all Harry's bravado, it still must have terrified the young Auror senseless to give the Slytherin Pureblood a birthday present himself.

A soft smile ghosted Draco's pale mouth as he refolded the scrap of paper and slid the chain over his neck; and said smile vanished immediately when he turned to face his scowling godfather. "It's only a necklace. You may go."

Snape stopped himself from rolling his eyes and left the Suite, muttering to himself indiscernibly under his breath.

After his godfather departed, Draco resumed his seat behind the desk in his bedroom, resolving himself into finding a solution that would aid Harry on the morrow and fingering the pendant at his throat.

Without help, Harry's chances at the hearing looked grim. True, the young Auror had made a few bad decisions, but the one thing that could merit his suspension was the affair. If asked directly, Harry would have to admit to it. All witnesses were instructed to take a dosage of Veritiserum to make sure their claims were honest and direct.

Harry would have to prove his place in this case as a necessity. It was, of course; but Harry had to prove it. Draco didn't think it would be too difficult. However, Draco suspected that they would fire back at him with his inability to bring the source of the warrant to justice, which was his first, and primary, objective before the Prophecy exploded in their faces.

Draco smirked, a sudden thought beginning to formulate in his mind as he continued to finger the pendant. The thought then formulated into a plan. Draco rose and sauntered into the foyer, commanding one of his guard to go and retrieve Blaise Zabini.

~*~

"Anin tells me you caused quite a fuss when Michael was being interrogated."

It took Blaise a full minute to decipher that Draco Malfoy had meant Maximus Cure. The pale Slytherin, who stood facing a charmed window and had his back to Blaise when the golden-eyed Wizard had entered the Suite, had first met Maximus Cure when he was using the name Michael Deans.

True, Blaise had had enough when the interrogation of Maximus Cure had turned physical, frustrated Aurors at their wits end with this entire case and the wily Cure plucking at their nerves. The possibility of Harry Potter being removed indefinitely from Malfoy's case had everyone high-strung. Many believed that if the Ministry removed the rock and foundation of the Malfoy Case, everything would go to shite in a heartbeat. It still bewildered Blaise how much utter and immoveable faith so many had in Harry Potter, despite his precarious and numerous blunders.

In any case, suffice it to say that when Blaise heard Cure's body hit the ground from outside the interrogation room, followed by an angry shout and a collection of thuds that were unmistakably kicks in the gut, Blaise had burst in the room and bodily thrown off both interrogators. If Ronald Weasley hadn't intervened, pushing himself between the Aurors and Blaise, jerking the front of his
shirt down to reveal the Order of the Phoenix tattoo etched into his pale, freckled chest as a blatant warning to the two Aurors, Blaise would probably have done something he'd have regretted.

"They were being a bit rough," Blaise replied, being deliberately ambiguous.

Draco continued to gaze out of the charmed window, watching the simulation of a vast and deep valley, shadows darkening with the late evening sun. "Frankly, I'm a little surprised that you would give a damn."

Behind him, Blaise smiled, though Draco couldn't see it. "No, you're not," Blaise admonished softly. "Nothing anyone does ever surprises you."

Draco watched a pair of blue birds flitter past the window. "Hm." The birds disappeared into the deep, deep valley. "Some things do. The shock never lingers, though."

Blaise felt something squirm in his gut. "You've always been too clever for your own good."

The myriad of greens of the valley were all colors Draco sometimes saw in Harry's eyes. "Michael is a good man. I wish I had known him better." The pale Slytherin's shoulders shifted and Blaise recognized the silent chuckle. "You should have him make you dinner one day. Call him a Betty. That should do the trick."

Blaise frowned. "What's this all about, Draco?"

Draco's gray eyes flashed silver as he reached up to finger the pendant at his throat. "I'm calling in a boon, Blaise."

Blaise's golden eyes burned dangerously as his eyes narrowed. "What boon?"

"I know what you've done, Blaise," Draco murmured, still facing the window. "You were so quick to point out that few things escape me. You really think I didn't know?"

"I can explain--"

"I don't need you to."

"But I think you should know why--"

"I don't want to know why, Blaise. That does not interest me. I want to know what you'll do for me now."

Blaise took in a deep breath, held it, steadied himself, and then let it out slowly. Redemption. "What do you need?"

So deep. So green. So vast. Draco fingered the pendant. "Two things. First, I want you to find out who forced Hermione Granger into confessing to the Daily Prophet. I've a few hunches. I don't care how you find out, just do it before the hearing tomorrow."

Blaise raise a dark brow. "And the second?"

Draco finally turned away from the window and squarely faced Blaise Zabini.

And Blaise flinched as he watched the tell-tale cruel smile slowly curve Draco Malfoy's lips.

~*~
That night, Father Ernst Alt came to visit Draco Malfoy.

Draco hadn’t bothered rising from his seat at the kitchen table, his mind working frantically with the ploys he had set in motion earlier that day. Father Alt took a seat across from him and waited to be acknowledged by the pale young man.

Seconds stretched into minutes and minutes stretched into a full half hour. Finally, Draco glanced up, his eyes sharp and questioning. "So what's your diagnostic, priest?"

Father Alt leaned back in his chair. "That you are quite rude."

Draco smirked. "That goes without saying. Now, about your professional opinion...?"

The chair screeched as Father Alt pushed it back and stood, reaching into the folds of his black habit. Then, before Draco could blink, the priest unstopped a small vile and splashed holy water into Draco's face. "Maul," Alt murmured, staring deep into Draco's piercing eyes. The cold gray flashed to unfathomable black before returning to the slate color of Draco's eyes.

Draco blinked and began to tremble fiercely, jerking away from the priest and standing to his feet with a shout.

"Why the bloody hell did you do that?!" Draco demanded as he attempted to reign in his shivering limbs. Father Alt moved past him and into the living room, taking a seat on the plush sofa and pulling a small black book from his habit.

Draco wiped his sleeve over his face before following the priest into the living room. Glowering, he stood over the priest and watched him open the small book to a certain page with an ink drawing of a pale woman sitting astride a dragon with seven heads.

"Take a seat, junger zauberer," Alt murmured, his dark, steady eyes gazing up at the pale Slytherin. "I had to make sure our conversation would remain private. Maul does not like his secrets told so much that even he forgets them. It would not due for him to remember."

Draco's pale brows shot skywards as he favored the old priest with a surprised look that rarely twisted his features. "You know something about Maul."

"Sit," Alt repeated, gesturing to the cushions beside him.

Draco sat, feeling once again like a rapt student.

"I read your file," Alt murmured, flipping the page and watching the pale, pointed young man lean closer and squint as he tried to read the fine-printed script.

"I don't know this language well," Draco said, pointing at the script. "I've studied Gaelic to better understand the Runic language, but this...this is the old Roman dialect, isn't it? Latin? But this...and this...I don't recognize this at all."

"Your father's name," Alt continued, ignoring the young man's interruption, "caused me to look twice at the Prophezeiung and this Tulpa that inhabits your body."

"What is this language?" Draco demanded, pointing again at the strange marks on the old document.

"Aramaic," Alt muttered distractedly. "Now listen, please."

"I've seen it before." Draco frowned, trying to remember. "No. No, I haven't. But I feel like I
remember something about it. It's pulling at some obscure memory..."

"Junger mann," Alt said sharply, finally getting Draco's attention. "Lucius, your father's name."

Draco scowled darkly. "What of it?"

"Look here," Alt flipped the page again, revealing another inked drawing, this time with a frightening, fiery demon prowling in the foreground and with more odd marks, different from the pages before. "This is der Morgenstern and this...this is the Morning Star. Luzifer."

Startled, Draco looked into the priest's gnarled and worn face. "The Morning Star? Doesn't sound like the name of a demon to me."

"He used to be an angel."

"Really?" Intrigued, Draco peered back down at the book. "What happened?"

"Luzifer challenged God for the Throne of Heaven. After the Great War of Heaven, God cast Luzifer down to Hell and gave Him lordship over those burning lands."

Disappointed, Draco sat back and crossed his arms. He had heard hundreds of stories like that from a dozen different religions. It was nothing new.

All it did was give clarification on the origins of his father's name. Neither of which was all that profound to him.

"Originally," Alt continued, "I came here thinking this was just another ridiculous, ungodly, Wizarding blunder. But then I was told of your Prophezeiung and that it was rumored Maul resided within you."

"And He does," Draco muttered irritably. "Tell me something I do not already know, or get the hell out."

Alt pursed his lips and looked steadily at Draco, ever the patient one. "Maul is the son of the Morning Star. My faith has a Prophezeiung too. We call him the Anti-Christus."

Draco opened his mouth to reply and then shut it.

Alt went on. "It is said that a woman mates with the Dragon—in this case, Luzifer—and begets a powerful, pure-bred son that arises with such political power as to be feared and respected. From this throne of power, the Anti-Christus takes control of the world and the End of Days marks the beginning of the end."

As Draco tried to digest this, Alt continued. "Your father's name translates to 'Morning Star of Foul Faith'. What do you think your name translates to?"

"I was named after a constellation," Draco said stiffly. "And if you knew my father, you would know how ridiculous you sound. Lucius Malfoy was a slimy, power-hungry git who marked his son for a demon, followed an illegitimate Half-Blood of a Dark Lord whimpering out of fear, and stood idly by as Voldemort murdered his wife! He was a simpering, ponce of a man and if this is what you want me to believe Lucifer is like, than I'll take my chances with his son, Priest."

"You're misunderstanding me," Alt murmured, shaking his head sadly. "Your father is not Luzifer like you are not Maul."
Draco looked away.

"You cannot deny the similar context--"

"Fine," Draco grated, continuing to avert his gaze. "So what now?"

"The Sword of Godric Gryffindor cannot kill Maul," Alt stated. "Nothing can; save for the might of Christus himself."

Draco snorted. "So what's the bad news?" he asked nastily.

Alt sighed. "But it can weaken it."

Draco looked up.

"And if Zauberer Potter can force Maul out of your sphere of energy after the Inversion Enchantratem takes effect, Maul can be cast back to Hell."

Draco's gray eyes looked suspicious. "How can you be sure?"

"Because it's happened before." Alt turned the pages of the small book, pointing out small scripts here and there. "For thousands of years," Alt murmured softly, "Maul has hungered for human form and fought to set fore-told prophecies into motion. This is why Exorzists exist, young magician. It is our job to cast Him back to the depths of the Underworld."

Draco was no longer looking at the little black book, he was studying the old priest, watching the sadness and guilt seep and engulf his dark, brooding eyes. "You failed once?"

Alt looked up, the burning guilt bright in his dark eyes. "No, Dragon of Foul Faith. I lost a little girl who chose to suffer for the sins of others. I mourn her."

"You were blamed for her death?"

"Yes."

Draco thought for a moment. "Is there a chance I can survive this?"

Alt nodded. "Annaliese chose to suffer the torment of her demons. You fight yours. There is a chance you could survive." Alt paused. "However, Maul will leave His handprint on your soul."

Draco closed his eyes. "He's told me as much."

"Has He?"

Draco nodded. Minutes passed before Draco spoke again. "Will you perform the exorcism?"

"I was asked here only to give my opinion," Alt said, looking away. "I was told I would not be asked to do anything. I am no longer an Exorzist."

Draco regarded the elder man, his eyes soft and thoughtful despite the coldness of his gaze. "Yes, you are."

Alt bent his head but did not return Draco's gaze.

"You can atone for the guilt of her death, Priest, by saving my life," Draco said softly. "If you walk away, you would never be able to forgive yourself. You are an Exorcist, this is what you do. Choose
"Jungmenn, you do not know what you ask of me."

"Choose in, Priest." Draco's gaze never wavered.

"I was not strong enough to save Annaliese, Zauberer. I may not be able to save you."

"I have faith in you, Priest." Draco smiled sardonically. Bad faith. Foul faith. So be it. "Choose in."

"My soul is too heavy."

Compassion. It was a strange feeling for the Slytherin Pureblood, but if filled him up until he was dizzy with it.

"Then lighten it, Priest." Draco's smile turned kind. "Choose in."

Alt finally looked into Draco's cold, gray eyes, strangely finding a warmth there he hadn't felt in a long, long time. Alt wondered if that world-weary, young, black-haired Auror was drawn to that same warmth beneath the icy exterior of this pale, pointed man. Alt wondered if this was why he protected him so fiercely.

God's love is cruel and just.

Redemption.

So be it.

~*~
The Hearing Part I

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Hearing~
Part One
"Witnesses"
***

There was some speculation that Harry Potter had disappeared the day before the Ministry's hearing to avoid punishment for his actions because no one voiced seeing him since he left the Minister's Office the day prior. However, when Harry Potter—unusually impeccably dressed with finely pressed Auror's robes, the Order of the Phoenix emblem embroidered on the front, and his normally wild black locks tamed with some sort of charm to lay just-so around his face and neck—showed at the door of the Ministry’s Court Hall an hour before the hearing, a breeze of murmurs whispering in his wake, no one was sure if they were relieved or disappointed.

Harry spoke to no one, even Hermione Granger or his partner, Ronald Weasley, and kept to himself in one corner as officials, Department Heads, Aurors of the Malfoy Case, and witnesses began crowding the space in front of the large double doors, everyone waiting semi-patiently for the doors to open. Rita Skeeter was allowed to come as a witness, but she was forbidden her notorious notebook and magicked quill. In fact, she was the only member of the press allowed into the hearing, would be called first to the stand, and then would be asked to leave immediately thereafter. The column she had written had already caused seemingly irreparable damage and she would not be privy to anymore confidential information regarding Draco Malfoy, nor those involved in his case.

Eventually, the large oak doors opened and they were admitted inside.

Someone Harry didn't recognize touched his elbow discreetly and ushered him to a seat behind and to the left of where Minister Scrimgeour already sat. Harry became immediately confused, even though he refused to show it in his face. Normally, the accused would either sit isolated in one corner on a high stand as witnesses were called to a lone chair in the middle of the circular room. If they were deemed dangerous, the accused would be remanded to a small, barred cell with long, steel thorns pointed inward to keep the accused docile before, during, and after questioning. For Harry to be seated so near the Minister of Magic during his own hearing was odd. Harry wondered if it was Scrimgeour's way of sending a silent message to the Department Heads and officials that made up the Jury.

Said Jury made little to no noise as they began filing to their seats around the room, their chairs
stacked high along the walls of the circular room. The gathered witnesses were directed to a row towards the back, all but obscured by shadow once the lights dimmed, illuminating only the Jury and the lonely chair at the center of the room. Harry wanted to speak to the Minister as everyone finally took their seats and settled into silence, but he knew better.

Harry watched as Hermione Granger took a seat near Arthur Weasley, interested in the fact that, though she claimed to be the voice behind Rita's column, she was permitted--as was her right as the Prime Secretary and Head of the Muggle Affairs Division--to sit alongside the other Department Heads and not with the shadow-cloaked witnesses. Aurors stood standing near where the witnesses were seated and Harry could just barely make out Ron's shock of red hair, the shine of Anin's bald head, and the glimmer of Severus Snape's oily locks.

Draco was not there. Neither was Blaise Zabini, Father Ernst Alt, or Maximus Cure. Understandably, Cure would be remanded to his cell as he continued to brew the final stages of the Inversion Enchantratem and called to the witness chair only if the Jury deemed it necessary. And Draco...well, the Ministry may wish to keep him safely inside the Suite until absolutely necessary. Harry couldn't imagine the Jury dismissing Draco Malfoy's testimony altogether. The Slytherin would be here eventually; Harry was sure of it.

But then Harry spotted Dolores Umbridge smiling smugly in his direction...and he was not so sure.

However, when all was said and done, Blaise Zabini should definitely be here, for the prosecution's sake as well as his defense's. Father Ernst Alt had as much right to be here as Anin or Mackle, and especially Dolores Umbridge, whose status was smeared by her actions at Hogwarts during the war. Only her loyalty to the Ministry kept her a job within these walls; and Harry gritted his teeth against the sudden bile that rose in his throat.

He was uncomfortable with so many people missing when Dolores Umbridge, with no clear reason for being here, was present. Harry didn't like it. Something was...off.

In fact...many things were 'off'.

The woman who had ushered Harry to his seat made her way to the center of the Hall. Harry tried to place her, thinking he had seen her before, but couldn't remember her name. She was close to her sixties, if not already well into them, fine-boned, fair but not pretty, and seemed to carry an air of quiet dignity and intelligence. Her face held the self-same shrewdness of Minerva McGonagall, the Hogwarts newest Headmistress, and had graying auburn hair that fell straight and just past her ears. The woman wore dark judiciary robes and a square hat. She opened her mouth to speak.

"The Ministry has decided to conduct this requested hearing as an Auror's Annual Review," the woman said, her clear voice cutting through the silence like a knife; and, suddenly, Harry realized where he knew her from. He still couldn't remember her name, but when he was fifteen, this woman had been at Harry's hearing after he had been charged for Illegal Use of Magic for Underage Wizards. Harry remembered that she had been something of an advocate for him and had voted to drop all charges after Dumbledore had proffered a Squib to testify that there were, indeed, Dementors attacking Harry and his Muggle cousin Dudley at the time of the crime. Harry's green eyes wandered back over to where Dolores Umbridge perched in her bubblegum pink robes and watched her smug smile tighten into something that more resembled a grimace.

"Forgive me," Umbridge interjected in her sugar-sweet voice. "However, I was under the impression that one Harry Potter would be charged with--"

"With what?" the woman said, her clear voice never wavering; as if she had expected this comment from Umbridge. "Dolores, the Ministry fails to see any distinct crime committed by Auror Potter.
And while his actions may be proved to be inappropriate and unfitting for duty, as far as we can tell, he has done nothing illegal and his behavior can be dealt with by the customary review board."

"Madame Comfrey." Umbridge smiled sweetly, but Harry could read the contempt in the curve of her pink lips. "If there was a proper investigation, I'm sure SOMETHING could be found to clarify the necessity of a formal hearing. The people have requested one, after all."

Madame Comfrey--the woman's apparent name--returned Umbridge's smile icily. "While your impromptu request for a 'proper investigation' is duly noted, the Malfoy Case calls for more haste and less...meddling. Today, we will publicly investigate and ascertain whether or not we, as the Ministry of Magic's Judiciary System, can responsibly continue to allow this particular Auror to remain Head Auror on this case. If he proves worthy, we will drop this matter soundly and continue as planned. If not, he will be removed completely from this case and his full punishment will be assessed at a later time. I should add, this decision is not up for debate." Madame Comfrey gave Umbridge a pointed look before turning to Scrimgeour and offering a small bow from her tiny waist. "Let us begin."

Harry saw Umbridge stiffen before relaxing back into her seat. Harry frowned. True, it had always been obvious that this horrible, horrible woman had it out for him...but it seemed that even though Harry wasn't going to be charged with any actual crime, and therefore, wasn't going to be humiliated with a formal trial, Umbridge seemed pleased that the 'Annual Review' would be public. It almost seemed as if Umbridge had a plan.

Despite Madame Comfrey claiming that Harry would be subjected to a 'Review' rather than a 'Hearing', everyone with two wits to rub together knew that what was about to unfold was in fact a 'Hearing', even though they weren't going to call it one. Harry glanced at the Minister of Magic and realized this was Scrimgeour's way of saving face and not necessarily an act of kindness. Yes, Harry Potter had a better chance of keeping his job because he wasn't being charged with an actual crime and so therefore, yes, it was highly unlikely the Ministry of Magic's most famous Auror would be sent to Azkaban, but, no, this was not a favor to Harry Potter. This was a way for Scrimgeour to neutralize all bad publicity to the Ministry and, specifically, the Auror's Division, and dump it right on Harry. It was all the same to Harry. In fact, he preferred it that way because it would take the heat off of his partner and his partner’s fiancée.

However, there would still be witnesses presented and their testimony to consider. There would still be judges discussing presented evidence and a jury delivering a final vote at the end of the day. And Harry still had to prove the need for him to remain on the Malfoy Case.

They weren't going to call it a 'Hearing', but that was what it was nonetheless.

The first witness, Rita Skeeter, was led to the lone chair at the center of the Hall. She spoke enigmatically, and her words mirrored that of her column. Rita refused to reveal the identity of her source and no one could force her to. After much deliberation, Rita Skeeter was dismissed. Everyone knew her damage had already been inflicted; there was no real reason to draw it out further.

Harry Potter didn't miss the wink Rita Skeeter sent Dolores Umbridge before she left the hall and narrowed his green eyes.

Madame Comfrey had sat next to Harry during Skeeter's testimony but had barely acknowledged his existence beyond that. Harry leaned in and whispered: "When will I be called?"

"At the end," Comfrey whispered back, her thin mouth barely moving.

Every Auror involved in the Malfoy Case were then called, one by one, to the lone chair. Each explained their involvement and each denied any suspicion of a scandal. A few were forced to admit
to disapproving of some action on Harry Potter's part, mostly concerning the oddity of the Wisconsin Incident. However, every single one of them deduced that, had it not been for Harry Potter's actions during the event at Willow Station, Draco Malfoy would have surely lost his magic--killing countless Muggles as he did so--and quite possibly lost his own life as well.

During every Auror's testimony, Umbridge asked the same question: "Be that as it may, would Draco Malfoy have been in that position at all if Harry Potter hadn't abandoned him in America?"

And the answer was always a variation of: "I don't know."

But more than a few made a point of describing countless occasions where someone had been charged with the safety of another and made mistakes, inevitably resulting in some sort of mishap. Namely, Albus Dumbledore, Barty Crouch, and, specifically, Cornelius Fudge, who, as Minister, had been charged with the safety of the Wizarding World and ignored the testimony of a fifteen year old boy and slandered the name of the most prestigious Wizard of the age, Hogwarts Headmaster Dumbledore, resulting in the only defense against Voldemort and his band of Death Eaters infiltrating the Ministry to steal the former Prophecy was a band of misfit teenagers calling themselves Dumbledore’s Army. There were deaths and injuries and everything thereafter spiraled downward from catastrophe to catastrophe until, finally, the Eve Battle--and Draco Malfoy--ended it all for good two years later.

Each Auror was careful not incriminate Minister Scrimgeour himself in recollections such as these; however, the allusion was there and lost only on the dimwitted few.

Then, finally, Harry Potter's partner Ronald Weasley was called.

Harry watched with bated breath as Ron made his way to the chair, knowing, that if asked directly, Ron would have to admit to Harry confessing his affair with Malfoy to him. Harry could have kicked himself. He should never, ever have done that.

It seemed, however, that the interrogating judiciaries had become more interested in the actual case since the revealing testimony of the previously-called Aurors. As Ron droned on, answering the rapidly asked questions, Harry could have eaten his shoes out of frustration as everything--EVERYTHING--about the Malfoy Case was revealed in full. The warrant for Draco's death, the reasoning behind the St. Mary's venture, the Inversion Enchanttemt, the Prophecy, the suspension, the few days after Harry came back from Number Twelve Grimmauld Place and the battle with The Gatherer and his army of Death Eaters, the willing incarceration of Draco Malfoy, the threat of the Dementor's Kiss, the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, and the untrained Wizard that they had brought back to England to give his professional opinion on the impending exorcism of Maul, the Black Tulpa.

Soon, Ron's voice was drowned out as the murmuring between the judiciaries and the officials around the room rose to shouts and high-pitched exclamations of fear and discontent.

Harry squirmed in his seat as Scrimgeour stood to his feet, pounding a hammer against the rail and shouting for order. Harry saw Dolores Umbridge smiling and felt sick as she turned her beady little eyes in his direction. He saw her arsenic-glossed, maliciously-sweet smile widen and her thin lips part. Harry jumped to his feet to try and drown out whatever she was about to say but was pulled violently back down by Madame Comfrey. As Harry's butt slammed into the seat of his chair she hissed: "Don't push it, Potter!"

Something very akin to panic began to boil in his chest, and Harry looked wildly at Comfrey as the elderly, surprisingly strong, judiciary stared expectantly across the hall at Umbridge.
Umbridge rose slowly to her feet, her beady eyes bright and slightly feverish, and let out a sharp little giggle. Harry wasn't sure how she did it, but that small sound, like so many years before at Hogwarts, slowly quieted the large, circular Court Hall filled with unsettled Wizards and Witches. Every head turned towards her and Umbridge sat delicately back into her seat.

"I am sure there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for all of this being kept quiet," Umbridge said in her deceivingly sweet voice, sending a meaningful glance in Madame Comfrey's direction. "However, all the incredible revelations Auror Weasley has been testifying here today only proves the utmost necessity to make sure that only the most capable Wizards and Witches are involved in this...this..." Umbridge paused, trying to think of the perfect phrase. "Potentially problematic situation," she finished finally. Hermione rolled her eyes. Umbridge gazed icily down at Ron. "Auror, were you aware of Harry Potter's scandalous actions with his sworn ward, Draco Malfoy?"


Dolores Umbridge should have re-worded her question.

"No," Ron said firmly. The Veritiserum he had taken before being called to the Witness Stand forced the truth from him; and Ronald Weasley, blessedly oblivious, had not, indeed, been aware of any scandal.

At the time of the scandal.

Umbridge frowned. "Are you certain?"

"Yes," Ron replied, visibly forcing himself to relax. "I am perfectly certain I was unaware."

Hermione smiled and Harry caught it out of the corner of his eye. Harry knew that look and wanted to pull at his hair.

What was going on?!

Scrimgeour took a deep breath and looked over his shoulder to exchange a glance with Madame Comfrey. Comfrey nodded slightly.

"Are you satisfied, Dolores?" Scrimgeour required mildly, looking tired.

Umbridge looked flustered. "Hardly. However..." Umbridge shrugged and lifted her chin. "Call the next witness, if it pleases you, Minister."

A sigh of relief swept through Ron's body as he stood to his feet, a sheen of sweat on his forehead. Severus Snape replaced him in the lone chair. Harry swallowed nervously.

By some stroke of random luck, Harry had won one battle. If Ron had been forced to admit to Harry's confession in Germany, Harry would certainly have been discredited. Especially after the unraveling of the finer, more disturbing, points of the Malfoy Case.

However, Ron managed to escape that interrogation, giving Harry some time.

Harry managed to figure out that Scrimgeour, Comfrey, Ron, and--quite possibly--Hermione, as well, had devised a plan to use the imminent danger of the case as a way to divert attention away from Harry's misconduct and, thereby, causing the Jury to desire Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived, to remain as their default hope against this new threat. So far, it had worked.
But then...

Umbridge seemed dead set against this plan; plainly using all her power to keep the interrogation pointed towards Harry's 'supposed' philandering. Umbridge would realize her mistake soon, and would definitely not make the same one again.

All the same, Harry was confused, thinking that it was all prolonging the inevitable.

Harry would eventually be called to the stand. And he would then be forced to admit to his affair with Draco as he had to the Minister two days prior.

Were they waiting for something? What were they waiting for?

Severus Snape managed to look utterly bored as he lounged in the lonely, uncomfortable chair. "First question...?"

The Jury still seemed to be dazzled and confused by the fearful news of an enraged and powerful Tulpa trapped inside of Draco Malfoy's body. Someone finally managed: "What is your involvement in the Malfoy Case?"

Snape's thin lips twisted and he rolled his eyes, one black brow lifting slightly. "Draco Malfoy is my godson..." Snape stated slowly.

He was in on it too, Harry decided. They were stalling for something. What was it?

Umbridge was looking suspicious as well. "We know and understand you relativity to the ward, Professor," she snapped. "How HAVE you been involved in the Malfoy CASE?"

"Would you like the whole of it, Dolores," Snape asked in his bored, slow drawl, "or would you like a summarized version?"

"I'm losing my patience," Umbridge replied in a sing-song voice.

Snape tilted his head to the side. "While wondering why, of all people, you would lose your patience at a time like this would be more amusing than it would be relevant, I assume that what you really want to know is my less amusing and rather more relevant opinion on the Auror in question?"

Umbridge made a show of attempting to look disinterested while being obviously disgruntled. "Among other things, yes; why don't you start with that?"

"I have always been of the opinion that Harry Potter is an arrogant, incompetent buffoon," Snape said mildly, sneering in Harry's direction. "However," Snape said abruptly, "the 'Auror in question' owed my godson a life debt and had dedicated his first years as an Auror to protecting Draco Malfoy. Therefore..." Snape paused. "Therefore, it is probably my duty to acknowledge said Auror's most sincere motivations for this case and, furthermore, I should point out that the column that caused this trial was incorrect. At least, on one account. It was my and Headmistress McGonagall’s collaboration that originally sent Draco Malfoy to America. Ronald Weasley was informed first and it was us three who eventually convinced Potter." Snape's lips twisted again as he handed a nearby Auror a letter from the Headmistress of Hogwarts confirming Snape’s statement. "I also know for a fact that Potter was not aware of Maul's Prophecy until Draco himself had told him; only hours before the attack by Cruent Mantle and his band of misfit Death Eaters."

Umbridge's face turned stony. Harry wanted to cheer. The murmurs began to rise around the room again.
"Don't you think that Potter should have unveiled this Prophecy long before it became such a threat, Professor?" Umbridge asked through clenched teeth.

Snape smirked at her. "I was privy to Voldemort's most inner circle, Dolores, and not even I knew of the Prophecy. Though, there were quite a few accounts where Potter made some extraordinarily insulting inquiries on the House of Slytherin..."

Harry winced.

"Insulting inquiries?" Dolores inquired, interested.

The answer lies within Slytherin. Harry closed his eyes.

"Potter asked me to study a list of suspects before whisking off to investigate elsewhere. All the names were Slytherin students of mine. A personal disagreement between the two of us, nothing more."

"Hmm." Dolores thought for a moment, but whatever she was going to ask was interrupted by another judiciary, asking their own question. This inquiry, and the many that followed it, directly concerned the case and, while most of Snape's views on Harry's actions therein seemed sour at best, none of them were discriminatory. Snape's answers dripped like molasses from his thin, twisting lips and the Jury soon tired of his bored voice and slow, grating answers. He was dismissed and as Harry watched his retreating form, he thought he felt something close to appreciation for the oily sadist that used to instruct his Potions classes in the surliest fashion.

Mary Heart was called to the stand; her answers mirrored much of the same.

Trisha Knockwood had nothing negative to say.

Umbridge was developing a twitch in her jaw.

To appease the disgruntled Jury, Maximus Cure[1] was sent for and interrogated; his wily, eccentric answers belying the handsome, airy figure he cut. Harry was struck by how different Maximus Cure seemed from the Michael Deans he met in Wisconsin. Harry supposed that was the trick of being a con.

Harry grimaced as Cure made light of how Draco had seemed to disappear from under both their noses and ended up nearly imploding himself at Willow Station. Harry noticed how Cure averted his eyes when he tried to joke about that, seeing that it pained him to think he nearly killed the Malfoy heir. Harry couldn't tell if it was for show or not.

Cure claimed he didn't know how, exactly, Blaise Zabini managed to have him released, but asserted that it was more than probable that Draco Malfoy could survive a second "session" with the Inversion Enchantratem in a controlled environment, given that the exorcism is successful. At that, many eyes turned towards Harry, who forced himself to lift his chin and look as bold as possible.

Before Cure was sent away, their eyes met, and Harry felt a sense of regret and sadness peek out from behind the wildness of those clever, hazel eyes. Something pulled in Harry's chest. He knew Cure's file, but it had been Blaise who had explained that Michael Deans had been his friend, not some hapless classmate. It had been Deans' idea to experiment with the Inversion Enchantratem and Cure had gone along.

Harry understood the swell of guilt that never, ever went away, that thing that stays lodged in your throat no matter what you do, preventing you from expressing the full extent of your remorse. Being responsible for the death of a friend was something Harry Potter knew too well and Harry looked
Umbridge, whose twitch was becoming even more prominent as her frustration grew, finally demanded that they call Harry Potter. Harry tensed.

Comfrey stated that there were more witnesses to call.

"With much of the same testimony," Umbridge countered. "We are here to ascertain Potter's misconduct! I think it's time to hear HIS testimony."

Harry bit his lip, feeling incredibly nervous all over again. Dolores Umbridge was going to tear him to pieces.

"I do not think that will be necessary," cut a voice from the very end of the hall. "For the grounds of this trial can be proven to be delivered illegally," Draco Malfoy finished as he emerged from the shadows of the entryway, an entourage of four Aurors, Blaise Zabini, an uncomfortable, hunched-over Wizard Harry had never seen before, Percival Weasley, and the pale blond head of the dreamy-eyed Luna Lovegood in tow.

“I can prove the illegality of the column written by one Rita Skeeter and the involvement of former Secretary Dolores Umbridge,” Draco Malfoy stated clearly, his voice carrying across the Court Hall, his grey eyes flashing and his mouth curving into that infamous sneer.

~*~

[1]: I accidently wrote "Cruent Mantle"'s name here and just recently fixed it due to Mangacat and Queen Bodicea's watchful eyes. Thanx guys. When I read your reviews, I said, "No way!" but I sure did. Yes, Cruent Mantle is dead and it was Maximus Cure they sent for and interrogated. Just an embarrassing typo on my part. Thanx again for the help!
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~The Hearing~
Part Two

“Did we create a modern myth
Did we imagine half of it
Would happen in a thought from now

Save yourself
Save yourself
The secret is out
The secret is out

To buy the truth
And sell a lie
The last mistake before you die
So don't forget to breathe tonight
Tonight's the last, so say good-bye

The secret is out…

Good-bye…” ~30 Seconds To Midnight; ‘A Modern Myth’

"Scientific Deduction"
***

Draco Malfoy offered a lazy smile as he faced the Jury.

Harry Potter's mind seemed to freeze.

Hermione smiled in relief and sunk bonelessly in her chair. Comfrey took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. Scrimgeour leaned back in his seat, twisting a tendril of his lion's-mane hair in his fingers.

"Draco Malfoy," Scrimgeour greeted. "You have evidence of such an accusation?"

"I do, Minister." Draco turned to the hunched-over Wizard on his left. "This is Hogarth Rivers. He's a Healer from St. Mungo's and works here at the Ministry. He has found traces of ethanol, scopolamine, temazepam, and various barbiturates including the anesthetic induction agent sodium..."
thiopental in the blood of Rita Skeeter's source. These chemicals are the main components of the potion 'Veritiserum'."

"Rita Skeeter's source?" someone shouted. "What is this madness?"

"Who is this source?" another exclaimed.

Fair, silvery brows arched as Draco Malfoy tsked tsked and crossed his arms. "You have yet to ascertain Skeeter's source?" Draco inquired, his voice heavy with mock disappointment. "I thought this was supposed to be an investigation."

Dolores Umbridge looked as if she were going to explode.

"Indulge us," Madame Comfrey called, a pleased look on her face.

Draco pointed into the stands. "Hermione Granger, of course." Astonishment swept through the Jury like a brisk wind. Hermione smiled weakly.

"I also have a witness," Draco continued, his clear voice carrying over the loud murmurs with ease. "Placing a dazed Hermione Granger in the custody of Rita Skeeter and..." Draco paused for dramatic effect. "...Dolores Umbridge at the time of the alleged 'interview'."

"Objection!" Dolores shrieked, jumping to her pudgy, pink-clad feet. "Draco Malfoy, you have no grounds to be here! Your incarceration demands that you remain within the Minister's Quarters at all times. It is illegal for you to be here at all!"

"Illegal?" Draco's eyes turned thoughtful--in the most demeaning way. "Huh." Draco leaned against the arm of the lonely chair in the middle of the hall, looking incredibly comfortable. "Unless things have changed so drastically during the time I slept in St. Mungo's, I do believe that drugging a Department Head without authorization--in which you had none--and abducting said Department Head against her will is unlawful. Therefore, not only is YOUR presence here inappropriate, but the very grounds for this proceeding is also unlawful. I move for this mock-hearing--or whatever your Honors would like to call it--to be stricken completely from the record and the Auror's Division to resume control of..." Draco made a face. "...the Malfoy Case."

The twitch in Umbridge's jaw was becoming sporadic. "Mr. Malfoy, you cannot--"

"Oh," Draco smiled at her, his eyes as cold as the morning mist. "Yes, I can."

"Minister!" Umbridge whirled towards Scrimgeour, imploring. "Please command reason! We must have order here!"

Draco's smile vanished. "Madame Dolores Umbridge!" Draco shouted suddenly, his voice commanding and abrupt. Umbridge turned back to him as Harry felt time slow and then stop. Harry watched Draco's face turn stony and his eyes become bright and contemptuous; and, for a split second, Harry was convinced he was looking at Albus Dumbledore.

Harry blinked. No.

No. It was Lucius.


And Harry's heart broke, knowing, in reality, it was more like the worst of both men.
For the first time, Harry found himself wondering what Draco Malfoy could have become if there had been no warrant for his death; if there had been no Prophecy or Black Tulpa. Draco Malfoy was intelligent, powerful, and clever. He was also manipulative, always having the ability to see right into a person's weakness and exploit it. It was no small wonder that, with the vanquishing of the Dark Lord adding to his prestige, the Department Heads and officials that made up the Jury paid close attention to what he had to say.

"You cry for order, Madame Umbridge, but you create chaos," the Malfoy heir spat coldly. "You screech for justice, yet you break the law. I have witnessed this in you, again and again. I was once privy to your inner most circle, Madame Umbridge; I know who you are."

Umbridge hissed as she sucked in a breath, her face turning red with rage.

Draco approached the stands, glaring up at her with icy eyes. "I am astounded that you are still even permitted inside the Ministry's walls," Draco declared in a quiet voice that still seemed to carry throughout the Hall.

Umbridge reared herself up. "You speak these words to me while carrying the most evil entity known to man inside of you?"

Draco tipped his head to one side. "Yes," Draco replied calmly. "Are they resonating?"

Umbridge's sharp retort was interrupted by Madame Comfrey. "Sit DOWN, Dolores!" Comfrey turned her attention to Draco. "Mr. Malfoy, you claimed you have a witness to testify to your claims of illegitimate grounds. Can you produce this witness?"

"I can, Madame," Draco stated. He jerked his chin a bit and Percy Weasley stepped forward.

Percy then gave his testimony and Umbridge began to look utterly defeated. When he finished, Percy glanced towards Umbridge. "I warned you to stay away from my family, Umbridge," he said. "Hermione Granger will soon become my sister."

"How wondrously sentimental, you traitorous weasel," Umbridge snarled back.

Percy glowered at her as he was dismissed and Minister Scrimgeour motioned for two Aurors to come forward. "Take her away," Scrimgeour said evenly.

Dolores Umbridge stiffened but did not retaliate. Before they led her from the Hall, she paused before the Minister, glancing once at Harry--who still was too bewildered to think. "Remember that it was not a false confession, Minister. Though the extraction was illegal, Granger spoke the truth. Harry Potter is not fit for this case."

Her words resounded throughout the Hall and Harry began to wonder if it was really over now or not. He narrowed his eyes on Blaise Zabini and Luna Lovegood, both standing inconspicuously behind Draco and didn't think so.

Scrimgeour sighed heavily. "While your admission to me was one in confidence, Harry," he murmured, quietly so only Harry could hear. "There is some merit to what she said."

Harry swallowed. "I understand."

"The proceeding will continue," Scrimgeour announced. "Your efforts were valiant, Mr. Malfoy. However, since this is not a formal hearing, the grounds for the review are irrelevant. The Annual Auror's Review will be seen out to its conclusion."
Oddly, Draco hardly looked surprised. "Very well. May I ask that we forgo any more unnecessary testimony and get right down to it, Minister?"

"That would be more than pleasing," Scrimgeour replied. "Auror Harry Potter. Please approach the Witness Chair."

Draco and his 'entourage' fell back as Harry made his way down. Harry tried to catch Draco's eye but the blond Slytherin wouldn't look at him. Harry sat down in the chair, his stomach doing somersaults as he did so.

Madame Comfrey cleared her throat to quiet the steady thrum of murmurs from those gathered. "Auror, explain to us, in detail, your involvement in the Malfoy Case."

From start to finish, Harry gave his testimony; omitting, of course, anything about his personal relationship with Draco Malfoy. However, he wasn't going to get off as easily as Ron did.

When he had concluded, Madame Comfrey asked the dreaded question. "Auror, did you, or did you not, involve yourself in an affair with your ward, Draco Malfoy."

Harry closed his eyes as he answered: "Yes."

"Did you attempt to file a Case Transfer?"

"Yes."

"But you failed to complete one?"

"Yes."

"So, you knowingly and willingly made no attempt to distance yourself from your ward?"

Harry laughed softly. "Oh, there were attempts aplenty."

"But you chose to continue your philanderous affair, understanding that it not only put your ward in danger, but your misconduct also put the reputation and livelihood of your partner, Ronald Weasley, and the entirety of the Auror's Division in jeopardy?"

Harry hesitated. "Yes, ma'am."

Draco stepped forward, his face the very persona of severity. "I have proof, Madame, that the Horcrux Scar the he and I share is responsible for his 'misconduct'."

This shocked every soul in the room. Even Hermione Granger gasped.

It took Madame Comfrey several moments to recover. "I beg your pardon?"

"I have scientifically deduced that the magic of the Horcrux Scar is responsible for Harry Potter's actions and, without the presence of this anomaly, this Auror would never have acted as he did."

As Draco's words sunk in, Harry's surprise swiftly turned into anger. "Dra-"

"Will you hear my deductions, Minister?" Draco said quickly, drowning out the sound of Harry's voice. "It would be a shame, after all, for the Wizarding World's most prized Auror to be missing on the eve of the most gloriously dangerous exorcism...ever. Especially given that only he can move through my sphere of magic because of our Horcrux connection."
Another wave of murmurs. The anger began to turn to rage, smoldering beneath Harry's brilliant green eyes.

"Forgive me for saying this, Mr. Malfoy, for I know it must sound quite callous," a judiciary called. "However, do we not have a fall back plan if Harry Potter is removed from your case?"

Draco smiled pleasantly, belying the seriousness of the matter. The judiciary did just, in fact, refer to his execution should anything go wrong. The blond Slytherin lifted his chin and played his last card. "Are you really so quick to send Harry Potter, The Boy Who Lived, to his death for a momentary weakness against the driving magic of the Horcrux Scar?"

Gasp sounded across the room.

"Oh yes," Draco continued. "You must know; if I die, he dies."

Harry remembered the night Draco slit his wrists. Harry remembered the realization that he would have to die in order for Voldemort to be vanquished before Draco had flown in to save him from that fate.

Quickly, Draco, walking in slow circles around the Witness Chair Harry was seated in, explained why he had needed to brew the Verve Channel Electron Elixir in order to save Harry Potter's life and destroy the Dark Lord simultaneously. He then explained that when the Horcrux Scar was transferred into himself, his fate became intertwined with that of Harry Potter because of the inversion of the transmitted Horcrux. Harry Potter, when he owned the Scar, had to die in order to destroy the last remaining Horcrux that kept Voldemort intact. However, when Draco used the VCE Elixir to transmute the Horcrux into himself, not only did he take the part of Voldemort's soul that was stored into Harry's body, but he also took a portion of Harry's soul as well, in exchange for a portion of his own.

Draco explained that when he used the Killing Curse on himself, the intention to destroy Voldemort's last portioned soul was so clear that the Curse targeted it, allowing the excess parts of Harry's and his own soul to revitalize his body. Draco deduced the years he spent in his coma was his body's way of adjusting to the affects of the thwarted Killing Curse and the new parts of Harry's soul inside of him. Even so, when he awoke, his body was still traumatized enough that it blocked his memory in a last ditch attempt to recuperate.

These "side affects" were also definitive blockades for the two of them to contend with when they were isolated--by Minister Scrimgeour's own order, Draco reminded them--at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. This, Draco concluded, was what was responsible for Harry's irresponsible, and provoked, actions. Without it, Draco was certain Harry Potter would have been nothing more than professional.

"And," Draco said, smiling as he finished, "if you are still doubtful, I must remind you that, before the VCE Elixir, I despised Harry Potter with every fiber of my being. It would have had to take more than a little flirting to get us in bed together."

Someone laughed, many smiled, and Harry Potter looked as though he could throttle one Draco Malfoy.

Minister Scrimgeour still looked dubious.

"Mr. Malfoy," Madame Comfrey called. "You said you had proof? It is a dazzling hypothesis; however, without--"
"Other than the obvious evidence, Madame," Draco said, his eyes glinting, "I also have Luna Lovegood's scientific research." Luna stepped forward, and Harry spotted a dozen scrolls peeking out of a satchel she was carrying over one shoulder. "Luna came to me after carefully comparing her work with Hermione Granger's, who, apparently, took it upon herself to study the phenomena of the Horcrux Scar during my coma."

Hermione grinned at Harry, but his blazing green eyes were fixed only on the blond Slytherin who paced before him.

The Minister exchanged a long look with Madame Comfrey before finally standing to his feet. "In light of this new evidence, I am calling a three hour recess so the Jury can consider it in detail. Ms. Lovegood, Ms. Granger, and Mr. Rivers, please come with us. Aurors, please escort the witnesses to room C94 where they can rest during the recess. Auror Harry Potter, please return to your cubicle until the recess is over. Mr. Malfoy, you will be escorted back to your chambers. Thank you."

Scrimgeour slammed down his hammer, marking the beginning of the recess.

Harry jumped to his feet and made to approach Draco, but the blond Slytherin nimbly slipped passed him as the Hall became crowded with people making their way to the door and disappeared with his four-Auror guard.

Harry's anger began to simmer and boil in his blood. He had never, ever been so humiliated in his life.

~*~

Draco calmly requested for his guard and Blaise Zabini to remain in the foyer of the Suite, claiming that he needed to be alone with his thoughts. The Malfoy heir made his way steadily through the Suite and into the bedroom, closing the door gently behind him.

He turned and leant against the closed door. Then he sunk bonelessly to the floor and put his head in his hands.

Cruelty takes a toll on even those born into it.

Harry Potter's rage thrummed through Draco's body with a vengeance.

~*~

Harry Potter threw himself into the chair behind his desk in the Auror's Division, ignoring the speculative stares from those around him. Gritting his teeth, Harry snatched Malfoy's file and threw it across the room, watching passively as the scrolls and documents scattered in the air. Then he turned back to his cubicle, dragged his fingers painfully through his hair, and planted his elbows on the desk.

Ron tentatively approached his partner after he had collected the loose documents of Malfoy's file and put them neatly back into its folder. Ron placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and Harry jerked away from it.

Ron sighed. "I'm not Malfoy's biggest fan, Harry, but I know he's just trying to save your arse."

Harry snorted and buried his fingers deeper into his hair.

"We're all just trying to help. Zabini had informed us Malfoy said he had a plan so we went along with it," Ron explained softly. "I know you don't like it, but it IS working--"
"Ron--"

"And maybe...maybe Malfoy has a point. Maybe this whole affair wasn't your fault and when this is all over you can go back to--"

Suddenly, Harry was on his feet and jerking Ron violently by his collar. "You haven't the foggiest fucking clue of what you're talking about," Harry hissed, his breath hot on Ron's cheek. "You weren't there. You don't know. I told you once I would never apologize for how I feel about Malfoy and I fucking meant it. But he just did." Harry abruptly let Ron go and sat back down behind his desk. "He just boiled everything between us down to a fucking equation. How the sodding hell would you feel?"

To that, Ron had no answer.

~*~

Luna smiled indulgently at the faces staring back at her. She and Hermione had just completed their explanation of their joint research and the duo were waiting expectantly for questions. Hogarth Rivers' prognosis had been reviewed and the nervous Wizard had been dismissed.

Comfrey opened her mouth to speak, but then sighed and looked over at Scrimgeour. Scrimgeour shrugged.

Hermione and Luna exchanged a glance.

"It all seems a bit ridiculous," Comfrey murmured in a resigned sort of way.

"Yes, but what doesn't?" Scrimgeour replied softly. The Minister shifted in his chair. "Ms. Lovegood, I have to ask, why did you put so much work into this compilation of research in the first place?"

Luna regarded him with her misty eyes. "I thought it was interesting," she answered simply, in her dreamy voice. "I was going to write a paper on it, but when I saw the column in the Prophet, I thought my research could be put to better use."

Hermione looked strangely at her, but bit her tongue. Luna Lovegood was, by far, the strangest person she had ever met. However, Hermione had learned long ago that when one listened closely to what the seemingly nutty Witch had to say, she often made quite a bit of sense. When figuring that it was Luna Lovegood who had proffered detailed research of the phenomena of the Horcrux Scar, it was almost unsurprising.

Comfrey picked a few documents from Hermione's research. "Ms. Granger, you have a some side notes here ascertaining that, quote: 'Love can be the strongest weapon against Maul during the extraction. Harry must decide whether or not he loves Malfoy...' etc. etc, and then: '...it was love that saved Harry when he was an infant and love for his mother that protected Malfoy during the Eve Battle.' Draco Malfoy is claiming that it was a scientific byproduct of the Horcrux Scar that blinded Harry into participating in sexual relations with him. Yet, here you mention love. Forgive me, but, isn't it a stretch to say that this powerful emotion can be explained away by a strange anomaly?"

Hermione hesitated. "Yes," she answered. "But Malfoy never claimed anything about powerful emotions being part of the equation. He was simply stating, and I think, rightly so, that Harry Potter's 'actions' and his own 'actions' were influenced by this anomaly that no one had foreseen. Without its presence, Harry would never have--"

"Can you be so sure?" someone asked. "Are you certain that without their connection through the
Scar, Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy would never have become lovers? The events leading up to their isolation were extreme and, personally, I know for a fact that guilt and grief can do very drastic things to a person."

Hermione lifted her chin. "Malfoy tormented Harry Potter during their childhood. They had always had nothing but animosity for one another. I can admit that they may have come to an understanding, and maybe even forgiven one another, eventually, but it was shock to even those closest to him when their affair became public. And remember, while some Purebloods have been known to take same-sex lovers outside of their heterosexual marriages; they would never, ever make it their primary relationship. It puts too much risk on the bloodlines, which they hold very dear. Draco Malfoy still holds a great deal of contempt for Half-Bloods and Muggle-Borns."

"That actually seems hard to believe, given that his own Godfather is a Half-Blood." That statement came from someone near the back.

Hermione shrugged. "Socially, it holds less precedence than it used to and Draco Malfoy has bigger problems."

There were many nods of consensus.

Luna smiled, her misty eyes turning thoughtful. "I think the real decision we must make here is whether or not there is enough evidence to send both of these men to their death for a lapse in judgment and not so much as whether or not the Horcrux Scar is responsible for their affair. This research was a tool to cast doubt and to give them both a chance for survival." Luna paused, her dreamy smile never faltering. "Both Hermione's research and mine concludes that if one dies, the other will too." Luna's smile widened. "Also, I don't think it would be so terrible for the two of them to be lovers. It would send a wonderful message to the Wizarding World if they were to survive this."

Some of Madame Comfrey's shrewdness melted. "From the ashes, a beacon of hope and forgiveness."

"Precisely." Luna looked content. Hermione gaped at her. Hermione was convinced that no one else on the face of the planet could make something so bizarre sound even remotely reasonable. But Luna Lovegood had.

Comfrey and Scrimgeour exchanged another long look. "That only leaves the Death Warrant," Comfrey said.

Hermione froze. Luna Lovegood continued to smile.

Scrimgeour nodded. "If Harry Potter can reveal the one responsible for the warrant, the original reason for Malfoy's case, then he will be acquitted. All those who agree, say 'aye'.
"

The vote was nearly unanimous.

The recess was over.

~*~

After everyone had filed back into the Court Hall, Harry Potter was called back to the Witness Chair. When Harry had taken his seat, Scrimgeour explained their decision.

Harry listened carefully before hanging his head in defeat. He still had no idea who sent out the warrant for Draco's assassination. As he opened his mouth to say so, someone from the Witness
Stands cleared his throat. Harry turned in his seat to see Blaise Zabini come forward, his features tight and his hazel eyes apprehensive.

"It was I," Blaise said, his voice dry. Even so, those three words had so much impact that everyone was shocked into silence for nearly a minute.

Scrimgeour rose to his feet, glaring down at Harry Potter who stared wildly at Blaise Zabini. "And why was he not arrested?" the Minister all but shouted.

"Because I do not wish to press charges," Draco Malfoy called from his seat in the stands. "As is my right." Draco leaned back in his seat, his eyes ever-calm, his posture ever-relaxed. "Blaise Zabini withdrew the warrant weeks ago. I understand why he sent it out in the first place. His reasoning mirrors yours, Minister. Zabini knew of the prophecy and worked to prevent the End of Days."

Draco stood and his four-Auror guard stood with him. "Will there be anything else?"

Scrimgeour looked angry but he slammed down his hammer, saying: "Auror, you have been acquitted of all charges. You may resume your post."

Harry stood on wobbly legs as everyone began to move towards the exits. What he felt went beyond shock, it went beyond anger. He was so furious and bitter, and helplessly relieved, that he was dizzy with it. He barely noticed it when Ron and Hermione made their way down to his side to congratulate him. When Harry finally caught his bearings, he looked around; but Draco Malfoy was no where to be found.

He and his guard must have slipped away again.

Harry pulled away from the crowd that began to gather around him and stalked towards the door, his angry, driven steps taking him directly to the Minister's Suite.

~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Losing My Religion~

//…I thought that I heard you laughing…
…I thought that I heard you sing…
…I thought...
...that I saw...
...you cry…//

***

Heroth, Nadger, Beron, and Firse were the four Aurors guarding the Minister’s Suite when Harry stalked up, his face a dark cloud of anger. Nadger stepped forward, bodily blocking Harry’s entrance to the foyer.

“Potter, I don’t think—“

“Get out of my way, Nadger,” Harry said in a deadly quiet voice. “Now.”

Nadger exchanged a look with Heroth, who considered Harry Potter thoughtfully. Finally, Heroth shrugged. “He’s still the Head Auror.”

Reluctantly, Nadger stepped aside, still looking dubious. Harry pointed to the door and waited for all four Aurors to step out into the hall.

“No matter what you hear,” Harry murmured as he shut the door, “do not interrupt us.”

Harry momentarily closed his eyes and shuddered, trying to get his infamous temper under some semblance of control. He took a deep breath. And then another.

It wasn’t working. His blood was still boiling.

Harry stepped into the Suite.

//…Consider...
...Death…
…Consider…
…The lengths that I would go through…//
And saw stars as pain blossomed on the side of his jaw, forcing out a ragged gasp. Harry’s hand shot up to his mouth as he stumbled back, catching the blood that was dribbling from the corner of his split lip. Draco swam in his gaze, a very strange look on his face.

“What the fuck, Draco?!” Harry exploded, shaking his head to dispel the dizziness that came with Draco’s incredible right hook.

A slightly apprehensive look at odds with his outwardly calm demeanor, Draco took a step back, wondering if the Aurors had remembered to confiscate Harry’s wand. It didn’t matter, really. Harry could channel his magic without a wand as well as he could.

“I knew you were going to come in here and start a brawl with me, you simple-minded brute,” Draco declared, despising himself for the small tremor in his voice. “I just wanted to get the first punch in.”

Harry stared at the blond Slytherin incredulously, the urge to laugh nearly overwhelming. But then he remembered why he was here and growled, stepping forward and shoving Draco’s back against the wall.

However, what Draco lacked in strength, he made up for in speed. The Malfoy heir pivoted, snatching Harry’s wrist as he did so, pulling the Auror’s arm behind his back and pushing roughly against the wall until Harry was flush up against it. Draco leaned in and bit down Harry’s earlobe; not enough to draw blood, but just enough to evoke pain and pleasure, and everything else Draco Malfoy was to the Gryffindor Golden Boy.

“I just saved your arse, Harry,” Draco whispered into his ear. “Why can’t you just be grateful?"

//…Instead it brought me to my knees…
…And I don’t know if I can do it…//

An angry shout erupted from the young Auror as his wandless magic sparked up and threw Draco off of him. Harry whirled around, his brilliant green-eyed glare making Draco pause as the Slytherin straightened.

“That’s cheating,” Draco said finally, jabbing a finger at him, a rueful grin trying to show itself on the Slytherin’s lips.

“You think this is funny?!” Harry exploded, launching himself at Draco and grabbing the collar of his robes, shaking the blond man violently.

“He speaks,” Draco muttered sarcastically as Harry tightened his grip on his clothes.

Harry wanted to throttle him, wanted to crack his face open and make him bleed. He wanted to make him beg, to force whimpered apologies, to make him claim that he didn’t mean it. He didn’t mean it. Harry glared down into those bright, harsh gray eyes, and wanted to kiss the life out of him. To make him confess his true feelings with his hands. To thrust into him until Draco knew he was wrong. Until he knew he didn’t mean it. He didn’t mean it.

But Harry didn’t come here to beat Malfoy up, he had to remind himself. Nor did he come here to make violent love to him. Harry took a deep breath and loosened his grip on Draco’s clothes.

He had been angry and hurt, and still was; but when Harry slowed his thoughts and looked past his rage, he couldn’t remember exactly why he had come here at all. Harry let go of Draco’s collar and stepped back.

//…Hell, no…
Draco’s eyes blazed in smoky indignation. “No!” Draco shouted, shoving him. “Don’t you dare give up!” Draco shoved him again. “Come on, you coward! You can care so much about me that you hate me for it; that’s okay. I’m used to that. But you are not allowed to be passive!”

Harry let out a short bark of laughter and turned away.

“I demand that you turn and face me, Potter,” Draco shouted. “Don’t run off and nurse your wounded pride like you did when I killed Voldemort.”

Something stiffened in Harry’s spine before he whipped around, his hand flying out from nowhere and backhanding Draco across the face. Draco managed to smile, even though he had bitten his tongue and the acrid taste of blood filled his mouth. “That’s more like it.”

No one would miss you.

That’s more like it.

//…I thought that heard you laughing…
…I thought that I heard you sing…//

Harry took a step towards Draco, his wandless magic spiking up as Draco’s magic did the same. They stared at one another; grey eyes taunting, green eyes wrathful.

A strangled noise sounded near the foyer. They both tore their eyes away to see Nadger gaping dumbly at them.

“Get out!” they both shouted simultaneously, glaring murderously at the intruding Auror. Nadger gulped and backed away, shutting the door firmly behind him.

Harry’s magic diminished a fraction as he sighed. “Draco, why are you provoking me? Do you want me to hurt you?”

“Don’t you want to?” Draco replied softly, his fingers clenching and unclenching.

“Sometimes,” Harry admitted, allowing his magic to vanish completely. “I’d rather not, though. Did you mean it?”

Draco frowned, allowing his magic to disperse as well. “Of course I did. It’s true, after all.”

//…Life is bigger…
…And bigger…
…You won’t want me…//

Harry seemed twice as angry with his response, but made no indication of attacking Draco again.

“I thought you would be happy to know it was the Horcrux Scar all along,” Draco murmured even though he looked as if the words tasted strange in his mouth. “You and me…it’s absurd, and you know it. I…” Draco hesitated, and then sighed. “I don’t want you to die for me, Harry. We both know you can use the Sword of Godric Gryffindor to sever our connection and destroy the Horcrux Scar if it’s necessary. Should you fail—”

“Don’t.”
“Should you fail, I want you to swear to not go and try to be a hero. We all know you’re very brave—”

“Don’t.”

“But you don’t need to—”

“Malfoy, stop it!” Harry all but screamed, a white hot line, sparked from their connection through the Horcrux Scar, blazed between them, and they were both momentarily blinded. “Stop being a fucking martyr!” Harry surged forward, grabbed Draco by his upper arm, led him into the living room, and shoved him onto the couch. Harry stood over him, shaking with the might of his frustration. Draco looked away.

//…The lengths that I would go through…//

“If you claim that everything between us was nothing more than a side effect from that blasted Scar, and that you knew it all along, you are no better than Cruent Mantle,” Harry grated.

Draco looked up then, baring his gritted teeth as an inexplicable wrath burned in his chest at the mere mention of the Gatherer’s name.

“I can buy that the Scar connected us unnaturally,” Harry continued, his face dark, his eyes bright. “Merlin knows I’ve had enough experience with it when Voldemort was alive. But, fuck you very much, Malfoy; I never, ever shagged the Dark Lord.”

“I never said—“

Harry laughed harshly. “You may as well have.”

“That’s not true,” Draco retorted defensively. “I never insinuated—“

“You insinuated that I was unable to choose my own feelings because of, quote: ‘the driving force of the Horcrux Scar!’”

//…I said too much…
…I said enough…//

Draco looked away again, seething.

“You want to know what I think—?”

“No, actually; but I have a sneaking suspicion you’re going to tell me anyway.”

Harry clenched his fingers into fists, digging his fingernails into the flesh of his palms to keep his temper in check. “I think you brought up that ridiculous theory about the Horcrux Scar just to anger me. I think you’re trying to distance yourself because you’re afraid. I think you believe that we’ll make it out of this and then you won’t know what to do with yourself. You’ll have no more reason to be the depressed, persecuted Slytherin snob and you’ll have to make a conscious decision whether or not be happy. And I think it scares the shit out of you. I think you’d rather die than try to be happy because it’s so foreign a thing for you.”

//…I thought that I saw you cry…//

Draco took in a deep breath. “Even if people like me could be happy, do you think I deserve to be?”

//…It’s me…//
“People like you?” Harry echoed angrily. “Draco Malfoy, you insufferable ponce; there is no one like you.”

//… Me…//

Draco looked up at him then, knowing, instinctually, that even if was a backhanded compliment at best, Harry had meant it nevertheless. “Even so.”

//…Me in the cold…//

Harry shook his head and swiveled his eyes skyward in desperation. When he finally looked back at Draco, the young Auror looked resigned. “I can’t say whether or not you deserve to be happy, Malfoy. No one can, except you. That’s the point of happiness; you have to choose in. It doesn’t just happen to some hapless person at random like the common cold.” Harry paused a moment, feeling suddenly vulnerable.

Do you love him? Do you love him? Do you love him?

“And I don’t know if we could be happy together, the ‘absurdity’ of our affair aside,” Harry continued at length. “I’d like to try; but I’ll tell you right now: I won’t carry the both of us by myself. You have to attempt to be happy. The last thing I need is some Pureblood Wizarding Hero depressing the hell out of me every time I turn around.”

The ghost of a smile curved the corner of Draco’s mouth. Who knew Harry Potter had a sense of humor?

I will leave my handprint on your soul.

Laughter.

I’ll let you sleep. I’ll let you sleep forever.

//…Losing my religion…
…Trying to keep an eye on you…
…And I don’t know if I can do it…
…I said too much…
…I said enough…//

Suddenly, all traces of a smile vanished from Draco’s mouth and he scowled. “It’s all very valiant of you, Harry; but—”

“Good God, Draco!” Harry exclaimed, throwing his hands up.

Rage suddenly shot through every fiber of Draco’s being like electricity and he jumped to his feet. “No, dammit! You leave God out of this!”

“What?”

“You know nothing of God!” Draco shouted, trembling. “NOTHING!”

Harry looked confused. “I didn’t mean—“

“What the hell’s the matter with you?” Draco demanded, and Harry suddenly felt he didn’t recognize this man at all. The calm, steady, sarcastic Draco was gone, replaced by a very frightened, very angry and vulnerable man with wild grey eyes. “You do not understand what you ask of me! I
cannot… I cannot… Why can’t you just believe it was the Horcrux Scar? Why can’t you just… just…”

//… I thought that I heard you laughing…
…I thought that I heard you sing…//

Harry abruptly pulled Draco into his arms, wondering if mentioning the word ‘God’ had triggered Maul’s resentment, shocking Draco out of his reserved façade.

“It’s easier to believe it wasn’t real,” Draco whispered into Harry’s neck. “It’s easier to believe we didn’t have a choice.”

There will come a time when we will have to decide between what is right and what is easy, Dumbledore had once said.

“Why?” Harry whispered back, feeling some Draco’s trembling subside as he calmed. It scared Harry how hair-triggered Draco’s emotions were becoming. Maul was getting stronger.

//… Losing my religion…//

“Because hope can destroy a person,” Draco said, pulling away and going to stand in front of magicked window. “Eating away at everything from the inside out.” Draco shuddered and rubbed his left forearm—where the scars of his scratched out Dark Mark lay hidden beneath his sleeve. “I learned that lesson when I was sixteen.”

Harry stayed standing awkwardly where he was. “I think your confusing hope with despair.”

“Fear makes you weak, anger makes you strong,” Draco said in a dead voice, watching the simulation of birds flitting past the window and disappearing into the deep, deep valley. “There’s no room for hope. Nor is there room for happiness. Not for someone like me.” Draco took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Maul will leave his handprint on my soul, even if he does not claim my life.”

“Anger makes you just as weak as fear,” Harry murmured. “I learned that lesson when I was sixteen.”

Draco snorted despairingly.

“Necessity lends us strength,” Harry went on to say. “I’m not going to let you die.”

“I’m telling you, it will be better to blame it all on the Horcrux Scar.”

Harry shook his head, even though Draco couldn’t see the movement because his back was turned. “Not better, Draco. Easier, but not better.”

//… It’s me…//

Do you love him? Do you love him? Do you love him?

“You can’t save everyone, Harry Potter.”

“I can’t save anyone. In the end, we all have to save ourselves. Some things you have to do for yourself, Malfoy.”

“I don’t understand.” Three words; and they pulled at Harry’s heart like nothing else.
“I could help you understand, but you would have to let me.”

“Responsibility, duty, dignity.” Draco looked at his hands. “And purity. Pure contempt, pure malice, pure hate. These things we understand. Nothing diluted; nothing confused or sporadic. Everything else is weakness. Everything else is watered-down. Dirty, muddy. Purebloods hold themselves above the rest because nothing is tainted. We understand the compassion in cruelty; we comprehend the desire in pain. Today, I was Pureblood.” Draco glanced mournfully over his shoulder at Harry. “And you hated me for it. I saw it in your eyes. And you know what I thought?” Draco turned back to the window. “‘Good.’ I thought, this is better. This is the way it should be. You were never supposed to not hate me, Potter. You were always supposed to despise me.”

//…It’s me…//

“Not better; easier,” Harry said firmly, his eyes turning a sad shade of jade-green; a color Draco had never seen in his gaze before—nor would he still, because Draco still would not look at him. “I refuse to blame the Horcrux Scar. It is irresponsible. And if it is the reason we came together, than I am grateful for it.”

“Why?”

Do you love him? Do you love him? Do you love him?

Harry swallowed, his mouth suddenly dry. “Because I love you; and love is not a science.” Harry watched Draco’s back go completely rigid and felt his heart clench painfully. “I can love you past your pain, I can help you understand; but you have to let me.”

//… Can’t you see?..//

Then, before Draco could turn around and reject him, spouting anymore Pureblood nonsense about duty and dignity and the abject cruelty of their compassion, Harry turned on his heel and left the Suite.

Draco stared wide-eyed at the simulated landscape, his very breath vanishing from his lungs, his heart pounding in his chest. “Don’t go,” Draco whispered after he heard the door slam shut, feeling Harry’s absence like a punch in the stomach. “Don’t go.”

Draco closed his eyes. “I didn’t mean it.”

~*~

Lyrics from song “Losing My Religion” covered by Tori Amos.
Weep Not for the Memories

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Weep Not for the Memories~

//…I will remember you, will you remember me?..
…Don’t let your life pass you by…
…Weep not for the memories…//

The Ministry of Magic; Conference Room B67. The next morning…
***

Harry shuffled through the documents in Malfoy’s file as Ron scribbled notes on the board behind him. They were preparing for a thorough briefing with all those involved with the Malfoy Case due to the impending ‘exorcism’ and it would begin in twenty minutes. Everyone was outside in the hall as they waited for the Head Aurors to be ready for them.

Harry picked up a charmed photo containing a sleeping Draco Malfoy resting in St. Mungo’s. His hair was wild and he looked incredibly unkempt. This photo was taken soon after the Eve Battle when the Malfoy heir had defeated Voldemort. Harry took a deep breath and set it down for another photograph. This one was taken by a Muggle; and the only thing he could really see were a batch of squad cars surround the train station on Willow St.

~*~

Draco leaned against the wall and cleared his throat. “I suppose we’re even then.”

Immediately, Harry’s eyes shot open and his head jerked up. Harry blinked a few times before his green eyes focused on the figure before him and Draco smirked, making sure to keep the lines around his curling lip hard and minutely bemused.

“What?” Harry managed finally.

“I saved your life, you saved mine; we’re square,” Draco answered calmly.

~*~

Harry set down the photo and put his head in his hands.
“You alright, mate?” Ron asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“I’m fine.”

~*~

_Draco drew his brows together. “I was talking about your comeback, you ponce. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You’re even less Gryffindor than I am.”_

_Harry was immediately on his feet. “What the hell is that supposed to mean? And what the hell makes you think you know anything about me?”_

_Draco slowly, deliberately raised his hand to his forehead and tapped the lightening bolt scar with his forefinger. Harry’s eyes followed the movement and he unconsciously chewed on his lower lip as he gazed at the scar that used to belong on his skin._

_“It bloody hurts when you feel like shite, Potter,” Draco murmured. “Do us a favor and suck it up, you pansy.” Draco paused. Then, “Was it like this with you and Voldemort?”_

_Harry shook his head slowly. “Not really. I hated him; the pain was more violent.”_

_Draco snorted. “And what makes you think I don’t hate you?”_

_Harry gave him a long-suffering look._

~*~

“Oh.”

Harry blinked at Ron, suddenly coming back to the present. “Hm?”

Ron gave him a concerned look. “Are you still vexed about yesterday?”

Harry shrugged. “No, not really.”

“Then what’s with you?”

Harry looked away and, instead of answering, said: “We’re going to need more man-power than we originally thought to keep out the press. Now that the case is public, we’ll need to set up a perimeter of security. We’ll also need to condense the exorcism safely to protect outsiders and to cage Maul should he attempt an escape.” Harry pulled out a map and pointed to the area where they were planning to perform the exorcism and circled the X’ed spot. “We’ll need to ascertain a definitive radius. What’s the protective dome shield the Quidditch World Cup uses?”

“Heroth told me you went to Malfoy last night,” Ron continued, peering at the map and marking the coordinates on the board. “He said he didn’t think it went very well.”

Harry gripped the map tighter than necessary but continued to ignore his partner. “I think we should have Luna write a paper that misleads the populace to another location. That should help our security at least a little.”

~*~

“Don’t kid yourself, Potter. I will always be a Muggle-hating Malfoy and if you don’t hate me now, you will eventually. Isn’t that the game we play?”
“No,” Harry said softly, placing his hands flat against the wood of the table. “What have we given, Malfoy?”

Draco went very still.

“My friend, blood shaking my heart,” Harry continued as Draco slowly turned and stared at him. “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender…which an age of prudence can never retract—“

“By this, and this only, we have existed,” Draco finished for him, his voice as icy as his eyes. “You sneaky bastard, you found my Pensieve.”

~*~

“What happened, Harry?” Ron persisted. “I know this depressed look. It took you months to smile after Ginny—“

“Actually, Ron, I’d rather not talk about it,” Harry snapped, pushing the map away in disgust and turning to glare at him.

Ron searched his gaze. Suddenly, his eyes widened. “Oh, no. You told him, didn’t you?”

~*~

“It’s all very touching, really.”

“What is?” Harry asked, not bothering to look up.

“Your utterly noble concern for my welfare.”

It was Harry’s turn to smirk as he turned towards Draco. “You are nothing but a job to me, Malfoy; never forget that.”

~*~

Harry looked away. “We’ll need to ask Alt if the Markaghirelle will effect the exorcism.”

“Oh, Merlin…” Ron looked even more concerned. “You really did fall for him, didn’t you?”

Harry gave Ron a pained look. “Ron, please drop it, okay? Let’s just get this over with.” Harry turned back to the file on the desk and began arranging everything neatly. Ron bit his lip as his partner looked away, worried, more than ever, about his friends fragile heart.

Harry was strong, noble, and brave, but his heart had been shattered too often. Too much heartache can turn a man bitter.

Harry closed his eyes.

~*~

“What’s this?” Harry asked, eyeing the plate of butter pasta, chicken, and peas.

Draco raised a bemused brow. “Most cultures call it food.”

Harry stared incredulously at Draco, tossing his head to the side to dispel a stray lock of jet-black hair from his eyes. “I didn’t know you could cook.”
Draco frowned and bent to take the plate away.

“No!” Harry said immediately, grabbing the plate covetously. “I didn’t mean…well…What’s in it?”

“Arsenic,” Draco replied, stone-faced.

~*~

//…Remember the good times we had?.. …I let them slip away when things got bad…//

Harry smiled slightly and opened his eyes. He took in a deep breath. “It’s time. Let them in.”

Minister Scrimgeour entered first, followed by Mary Heart. Hermione Granger escorted Father Alt and a pair of Aurors escorted Maximus Cure. Draco’s guard—except the four currently on duty—filed in after them. Blaise came in last, trailing behind Trisha Knockwood and Luna Lovegood.

From his seat, Harry narrowed his eyes on Blaise Zabini. “Zabini, you presence in this room is inappropriate. Please excuse yourself.”

Zabini frowned. “I have been cleared.”

“That may be so,” Harry said calmly, lifting his chin. “And I am grateful to you for your timely confession. However, you did, in fact, withhold information from the authorities on this case and are responsible for Draco Malfoy’s Death Warrant. I believe you may have genuine intentions and, yes, you have helped us in the past.” Harry paused. “But I do not trust you,” Harry finished matter-of-factly.

Zabini glared at the Auror despite seeming resigned to the fact that he would no longer take a primary role in the rest of Draco Malfoy’s Case…for now. Blaise Zabini was no fool; he had expected this. “Don’t fuck this up, Potter.”

“I won’t.”

Zabini left quietly. Harry sent Heroth to follow him. The Minister gazed at the Head Auror approvingly. “Well done.”

Harry stood and nodded to the Minister. “Please be seated. Let’s begin.”

Harry turned to the board, marker in hand, and paused before beginning his lecture.

~*~

“You want to know some truth about purebloods, Potter?” Draco asked quietly, suddenly stalking towards Harry with quick strides. Harry barely had time to blink before Draco reeled back his arm and slammed his fist into Harry’s jaw.

Harry’s head snapped back and immediately his magic charged up around him. Harry automatically reacted by burying his fist into Draco’s gut. Draco grunted and jabbed his elbow into Harry’s face. With a shout, Harry swung hard; trying to land a punch to the side of Draco’s face, but Draco grabbed the flying wrist and stepped inside the swing, pressing his lips against Harry’s.

~*~

Harry shook his head, attempting to clear his head of his brain’s apparent need to concentrate on Draco Malfoy.
Harry then underlined the word “exorcism” on the board and turned to those seated before him. “Father Alt, if you please.”

Alt stood and made his way to the front. He eyed the notes on the board before turning to those assembled. He explained what he had told Draco, saying that Maul could not be killed by mortal hands, but he could be cast back to hell. The Roman Ritual of Exorcism would draw out the Black Tulpa while the Inversion Enchantratem forced Malfy’s magic outside of his body. Harry would then need to move inside Malfy’s sphere of energy and face Maul. Once weakened by the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, Harry would then need to remove Maul from Malfy’s sphere and Alt would bind the Tulpa, casting it back to the depths with the holy rites.

Harry frowned. “You plan to perform the exorcism?”

~*~

When Harry stirred and slowly opened his eyes, Draco glanced over at him with a perfect, pureblood smirk.

“I cannot possibly be expected to believe that that chair is more comfortable than my bed,” Draco drawled.

Harry looked down at Draco’s robe that covered him and a small smile graced his lips. “How incredibly sweet of you, Malfy,” Harry remarked, almost cynically…but not quite.

“Oxymoronic,” Draco said with a shake of his head. “Malfy’s are never sweet.”

~*~

Alt nodded. “It is Malfy’s wish, Zauberer.”

Harry laughed bitterly and rolled his eyes. “Of course Malfy would want a man convicted of negligent homicide to perform his exorcism. Of course.”

Alt looked strangely at him. “Ich vergebe dir.”

“I didn’t ask for your forgiveness, priest,” Harry snapped.

Alt nodded, conceding the point. “Sometimes it is good to forgive even if it is not requested.”

Harry paused.

~*~

Feeling foolish, Harry shook his head and made to stand up, unnerved by the intensity of those sharp, gray eyes. Draco reached out and pulled him back down, his mouth curling into a bemused smile.

“It’s early yet,” Draco murmured, the boldness in his eyes becoming more pronounced. “I was just thinking about how you were awake and still here. That’s all.”

~*~

Trisha Knockwood inquired about Alt’s reference to Maul as a demon and Alt explained that, in his faith, demons are fallen angels. In his opinion, angels are condensed energy and, therefore, Tulpa.

As they all considered this, Alt took his seat and Ron stood to explain their plans for security. Harry
sat, his mind wandering as Alt’s words rang in his ears.

~*~

“Trust me,” Harry whispered against Draco’s mouth.

Draco wrapped his arms around Harry’s neck and pressed his forehead against Harry’s sweat-dampened brow. “I’ve never trusted anyone.”

“Trust me,” Harry repeated, feeling the magic between them become more energized and spike in red and white bolts of electricity around them.

Draco closed his eyes and nodded.

~*~

Luna Lovegood agreed to write the paper, thinking it was a good idea. Hermione Granger was looking strangely at Harry.

~*~

Harry shot him a single baleful look before resuming his glower in the direction they were headed.

Pursing his lips, Draco leaned forward on his broom and twisted upside down, edging over until he was flying directly beneath Harry. “Look, Potter,” Draco said slyly, carefully locking his ankles around his broom and releasing his hands from the neck of the broom until he dangled beneath Harry, upside down, by his knees. “No hands.”

“Knock it off, Malfoy,” Harry muttered, trying not to grin. Truly, it was probably the funniest thing he had ever seen Draco do.

“Race me,” Draco demanded, pulling himself up and twisting again so that he flew parallel to Harry’s broom. Below them, the city began to shrink smaller and smaller and the clouds darted between them.

Harry snorted. “It won’t be much of a race.”

Draco sighed. “All right, I’ll be fair. You can have a head start.”

“Please; you haven’t flown in nearly three years.”

“Natural talent never dies, Potter.”

Harry laughed, feeling his terrible mood begin to recede. “You’re such a prat. Try to keep up.”

~*~

//…How clearly I first saw you smiling’ in the sun…
…I want to feel your warmth upon me…
…I want to be the one…//

Harry felt his chest constrict painfully and did his best to focus on the briefing. Hermione continued to stare at him. Anin and Mackle where going over security plans, being charged with its completion.

Maximus Cure stated that the Inversion Enchantratem would be finished by tomorrow evening. Alt affirmed that the Markaghirelle would negatively affect the Roman Ritual. They decided to take
Harry watched for a few minutes, wondering why Draco, of all people, was not using magic for the grizzly task at hand. At one point, while Draco continued to labor silently over his father’s grave, Harry turned to retrace his steps to the shed, fairly certain that there was another shovel in there somewhere.

Behind him, Draco shoved his tool into the dirt again and read Harry’s thoughts. “No, Harry. This is something I need to do alone.”

Harry turned back and watched the blond Slytherin resume his task. “Why won’t you use magic? You weren’t exactly built for hard labor.” Harry wasn’t sure what had made him say something cruel but Draco seemed to shrug it off with a harsh laugh, pulling another clump of dirt from atop his father’s grave.

“If you had been in China with me,” Draco murmured, grunting softly as he shoveled and heaved pile after pile of dirt, “you would not say such things.”

They decided to schedule the exorcism for two days from now., which left three days before the finalty of Scrimgeour’s prior thirty day time frame.

The Minister cleared his throat. “If the exorcism should fail—“

“I hate this,” Harry muttered for the third time that night, making to move past Draco towards the door.

Draco grabbed his arm and pushed Harry against the wall, pinning him there with his own body. “You bought us some time, Harry,” Draco whispered, his lips pressed against his ear. “Let’s use it...we may not have another chance.”

//...I will remember you...
...Will you remember me?..
...Don’t let your life pass you by...
...Weep not for the memories...//

Harry slammed his fist on the table, causing everyone in the room to jump in surprise. “Should I hear the word ‘if’ one more time, so help me Merlin, I will personally remove the person saying it from this case indefinitely.”

“Mr. Potter!” Scrimgeour began, affronted.

“This requires all involved to be utterly devoted and completely committed,” Harry continued, his eyes flashing passionately. “Should there be anyone walking out on that field two days from now thinking this will fail, assuming that Maul will get out, or Draco or I will die, it would screw up the entire operation. Cure will complete the Inversion Enchantatem tomorrow. I will march into Malfoy’s magic and ram the Sword of Godric Gryffindor through Maul’s black heart. Alt will perform the exorcism and cast this thing back to Hell where it belongs. No one will die and that
includes Draco Malfoy and myself. Am. I. Clear?"

Minister Scrimgeour regarded Harry Potter thoughtfully and tilted his head to one side. “Transperantly.”

A knock sounded at the door and Snape let himself in. He bent to whisper something in Hermione’s ear. She rose and stepped out into the hall with Snape.

Moments later, they returned.

“Harry,” Hermione said, wringing her hands. “Malfoy’s refusing to take the Markaghirelle.”

“What?” Harry snapped irritably. “Merlin! Fine; I’ll hold the little bastard down and force it down his throat, so help me God…” Harry rose and stormed out into the hall, Severus Snape trailing behind him.

Hermione stopped Ron from following, shaking her head at her fiancé. “They need to work this out,” she whispered to him, keeping her voice low so no one else could hear. “Harry can’t do this thing all distracted like he is.”

Ron nodded, his eyes widening as he realized Hermione and Snape had just lied to Harry to get him to go to Draco. “He’s really worked up,” Ron agreed.

“Can you finish the briefing without him?”

“Yeah,” Ron said, making his way to front of the room again. “Alright, people…”

~*~

The Minister’s Suite…

***

Draco sat on his bed, staring off into space and hating, for the hundredth time, the aftertaste of the Markaghirelle.

It had been a good plan. But it had backfired.

Sure, he had managed to get Harry off the hook and back to his duties as Head Auror. But Harry Potter was no fool, and Draco had underestimated him. The Auror had seen right through his ploy to distance himself. To try to make Harry think it would be alright if something went wrong, that it would be okay if Draco had to die in order for Harry to be able to save himself.

Goddamn him and his insufferable pride. Why does he always have to be so sodding noble?

~*~

"I'm filing a transfer today."

"What?" Draco snapped, his eyes suddenly going wide and his casual demeanor slipping. "Why?"

Harry swallowed and refused to look up. "Last night, I acted unprofessionally. There are well-equipped Aurors who can handle your case better than I."

"You must be joking," Draco said, incredulous. "You're going to run away? I thought heroes never ran away."
"I'm no hero," Harry answered, his voice quiet. "I can survive against incredible odds, but that doesn't make me a hero. You need someone who will handle your case responsibly."

"I'm not interested in having my case transferred, you coward," Draco hissed, suddenly angry. "It shouldn't matter what goes on here, Potter. It's only you and I."

"What do you want from me?"

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"I want you to stop holding me in the past."

Harry finally looked up at Draco, the vulnerability in his green eyes almost too much for Draco to bear.

"When you stop holding me in the past," Draco continued, "things like last night won't seem so terrible. You and I both know this has nothing to do with me being your 'case'."

"I can't--"

"You can't, what?" Draco interrupted, clenching his fists. "Snog your old school rival? Get too close? Have a little goddamn fun? Let yourself believe I may not be as terrible as you once thought? What, Potter? I really want to understand this one, mate, because, frankly, I'm not the only enigma here!"

~*~

\[... I'm so tired but I can't sleep…\]
\[...Standing on the edge of something much too deep…\]

Draco blinked, the memory fading. Draco took a deep breath.

Too much and not enough. It was never, ever enough. It would never be enough. Didn’t he get that?

Draco knew, for bloody fact, that he could never make Harry happy. This whole charade was pointless. There was a reason he tried to push Harry away. There was a reason he orchestrated everything to look like they had all gone behind Harry’s back. He knew it would infuriate the Gryffindor Golden Boy. There was always a rhyme and reason to everything he did.

Except, of course, falling for him.

Draco could tell himself he allowed himself to get close to Harry Potter because he wanted to piss off Pure Blood circles until he was blue in the face.

But loving the Auror sworn to protect him was something he chose into with no real plan in mind, with no real objective.

In fact, he wasn’t even all that certain when it had happened.

~*~

Black shrouded Death Eaters could be seen only a few yards away from them, the Gatherer strolling lazily behind them all.
Draco’s eyes welled in frustration. "RAISE YOUR WAND!" he screamed.

Harry shook his head and spread his hands wide. "I won't."

"Harry!" The young Auror's name caught in his throat.

"No."

The cold chill of the impending dawn seemed to thicken as the Death Eaters came so close, one could see their evil grins.

"What I'll become if you don't is so much worse than you killing me," Draco all but sobbed. "Please!"

"We'll get through this another way," Harry whispered, his eyes full of that terrible kindness Dumbledore had looked at Draco with when the Headmaster explained that he wasn't a killer. Despite it all, he wasn't a killer. "Narcissa Malfoy, a martyr to your soul. And you, to mine. You know I can't do this thing. There must be another way."

Draco choked on another sob trying to escape his throat as he heard his own words coming back to haunt him. And, like before, Draco was defeated by his own conscience. He felt it as his arm became unbearably heavy and lowered, seemingly of its own accord. Deja vu swamped at him and the only thing that kept him on his feet was the thought of whether or not a person could play martyr twice in one life. Draco didn't think so. He lowered his wand and stepped into Harry's embrace.

~*~

//… Its funny how we feel so much but cannot say a word…
…We are screaming inside but we can’t be heard…//

And what was even more frustrating, yesterday Harry Potter stood two feet away from him, telling him he loved him, and Draco couldn’t move a muscle. He couldn’t turn around and tell him he felt the same. Something inside of him was screaming to turn and go to him, but he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t see that look in Harry’s eyes. He couldn’t afford to hope.

And then Harry was gone.

Just like that.

Draco just wanted the last memories he had of his life to be good ones. Last time, Draco died with nothing but grief, sadness, and hatred to look back on. This time, Draco wanted to see someone smiling at him when he felt his last breath escape his lungs. He wanted to hear laughter, and not that of an evil entity. He wanted to feel forgiven.

~*~

Draco didn't answer as he dashed at his face with the back of one hand, irritably wiping away his tears as if they were shameful. "I'm so sorry, Harry."

Harry pressed his lips to Draco's brow before rising to his feet. "I'll get you out of here as soon as I can."

Draco nodded and rose to sit on his cot.

Harry crossed the room but paused at the door. "I know in my gut that Cruent's not worth your
tears, Draco," Harry murmured. Draco raised his head, meeting Harry's gaze. "But it makes me feel better," Harry continued. "knowing you think he is. It means you're winning against this bastard Maul."

"Does it?"

Harry offered a faint, encouraging smile. "I think so."

/~~/

//… I will remember you…
…Will you remember me?..
…Don’t let your life pass you by…
…Weep not for the memories…//

Harry Potter had given him that. Harry didn’t seem to need him to be someone else; the Auror seemed to be content with Draco just as he was.

But he had gotten too close. Harry had fallen into the same trap. And now the blasted Gryffindor was going to be noble.

//…I’m so afraid to love you, but more afraid to lose…//

Now, Draco felt obligated to live, and he despised that. He felt obligated to try, and hated that even more. Why was it so much easier to give up?

//…Clinging to a past that doesn’t let me choose…//

The Slytherin pondered this for a few minutes, as he used to when he was isolated in the Chinese wilderness. Draco chewed on the inside of his cheek, coming to no conclusions. Perhaps it was just natural. Perhaps it was just natural for him.

Perhaps not.

//…Once there was a darkness, a deep and endless night…//

Draco then thought of their brief moments of happiness at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, remembering the conversation he had had with Harry only a few days ago. Was it worth it to try?

Definitely.

//…You gave me everything you had, oh you gave me life…//

Still, Harry was right. It scared the shit out of him.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang near the front door and Draco could hear Harry angrily shouting his name. Frowning, Draco stood and went into the hall.

“What is it?” Draco asked softly, seeing his godfather hovering near Harry’s shoulder.

“Snape tells me you’re refusing to take the Markaghirelle,” Harry grated. “Why?”

Draco looked past Harry and regarded his godfather, raising a silver brow. “Godfather?”

Severus coughed and began heading back towards the door.
“Snape, what is the meaning of this?” Harry demanded, whirling on his old Potions Master.

Snape shrugged. “Reconcile.” With that, Snape took his leave, shutting the front door firmly behind him.

Harry turned back to Draco.

“I just took my morning dosage,” Draco said with a sigh.

“I gathered,” Harry replied, not quite meeting his eyes. “I’ll go.”

“Harry.”

Harry froze. His heart always seems to forget its primary function whenever Draco said his name that way. Damn him.

Draco took a step forward.

//…Weep not for the memories…
…Weep not for the memories…//

~*~

Lyrics from “Will You remember Me” by Sarah McLachlan
Dancing in the Rain

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Dancing in the Rain~

The Minister's Suite...
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Draco took a step forward, his heart pounding in his chest. Harry’s face was guarded and he would not look at him.

“You’ve been thinking a lot about us,” Harry said, keeping his gaze averted. It wasn’t a question, and they both knew it. “I have been too.”

Draco paused, hating the sound in Harry’s voice. “Have you changed your mind?” Draco watched a muscle work in Harry’s jaw. “About what you said yesterday?”

Harry stiffened. “You still don’t get it. My mind has nothing to do with what I said yesterday.”

Draco slid his hands in his pockets and gazed at the far wall. Watching Harry refuse to look at him was too much. “I know.”

“Do you?” Harry retorted shortly. “‘Responsibility, duty, dignity’,” Harry quoted. “‘Fear makes you weak, anger makes you strong’…” ‘everything else is weakness’…”I don’t want to hear any more of your bullshit, Draco.”

Draco lifted his chin, his grey eyes burning indignantly like fired coals. “I was trying to protect you.”

“I told you once, Malfoy; I don’t need your protection,” Harry grated through clenched teeth. “That’s my job—“

“It won’t always be,” Draco interrupted without thinking what he was saying through. Draco hesitated. “Given that we survive this, my case will be closed, Auror. It won’t be your job anymore. Then what? We ride off into the sunset on a white horse? Give me a sodding break, Potter.”

“I’ve never really been fond of horseback riding,” Harry remarked, still gazing off into someplace Draco couldn’t see. “You think we’re ‘absurd’, and it may be true, but there are stranger things than two people falling in love.”

Draco’s breath caught in his throat and he felt every muscle in his body freeze. There was that word
again. Love.

Wô ài nî. I love you.

Could he say it? Could he believe it? Is it worth it?

Is it worth it to try?

“I have a different understanding of things, Potter.”

~*~

The noise was horrendous. Piercing grey eyes managed to tear themselves away from the bubbling, foul-smelling brew in the cauldron and glance irritably towards the window. It was freezing outside. And now it was raining. Why couldn’t it snow when it was cold like this? Why did it have to rain?

Big, fat drops of water continued to pound the roof and walls of his charmed hut relentlessly. Taunting him, teasing him. Beckoning to him.

~*~

Harry snorted. Draco found he didn’t like it when he did that. It always meant the young Auror wasn’t taking him seriously.

“My mother loved me,” Draco murmured, nearly choking on the word. “In her own way. But even she was cruel. She loved my father. She was blinded by it.”

Something softened in Harry’s demeanor. “Love doesn’t always blind, Malfoy.”

“I do not think that’s true,” Draco argued in a soft voice. “When I’m with you, all I can see is you. When you’re gone, you’re all I think about. I do not want to be molded by what I feel for you. I want to hold on to at least a little of myself.”

“Did your mother change?” Harry asked, glancing at Draco out of the corner of his eye.

Draco frowned. “If the rumors are true; no, I think not. It’s hard to say for sure, I was not alive back then.”

Harry nodded and looked away again. “I’m not Lucius, Draco. I wouldn’t let anyone hurt you like your father hurt your mother.”

“I know that.” Draco bit his lip and walked quietly into the kitchen, taking a seat at the table. After a moment, Harry did the same. “You said something yesterday that… I didn’t know before. You said that happiness doesn’t just happen to anybody. It’s something you have to choose into.” Draco paused, seeing Harry finally look up at him. Draco gazed at Harry for a long time before saying: “I didn’t know you could choose out of Slytherin until you did with the Sorting Hat. I was always taught that some things were just… as they were.”

~*~

The hours dragged by, as they always did, one into the other. Minutes ticked by in a slow, monotonous drone, and still it poured. The rain drops hammered his hut, and he simmered in his frustration. He glared again towards the sound of rain. It rang in his ears, driving him mad. His hands shook as they knotted the frayed ends of his robes, giving his split and raw fingers something to do as the cauldron continued to bubble and stew.
Taunting, beckoning, ceaseless rain. The dreary world outside mirrored the color of his eyes. He wanted to go, but a splash of red petals against his mother’s cold, dead hands prevented him. He once enjoyed the rain. He once hoped for overcast skies and the angry roll of thunderheads. They used to match the turmoil in his soul, the need for cleansing, the want for change. Storms always seemed to leave rebirth and destruction simultaneously in its wake. But it had been raining that day too. And rain lost the excitement in him. It meant something different now. It meant grief and guilt and sworn vengeance.

It meant unshed tears. It meant loss.

Still, it rained.

~*~

Harry nodded slowly, thinking he understood; if just a little bit.

“And at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place,” Draco continued, his voice scarcely more than a whisper, “I tried something new. I tried letting go and letting you in. Happiness seemed to come naturally, didn’t it?”

Harry nodded again.

“It always seemed so natural for you,” Draco murmured. “Natural to laugh, natural to joke, natural to befriend people. It wasn’t though, was it? The Scar was driving you mad. I saw the growing darkness in your eyes and the lengthening of time between your smiles, and I wondered if you were giving up. I wondered what it would take to make you smile. And then I convinced myself I didn’t care. I had bigger problems.”

~*~

He had to go out into it. He needed the Leerdog Root. It was time for the new ingredient.

“Xiàn zài jì diǎn?” he muttered to himself, checking his time piece. He had been doing that a lot lately: Whispering to himself in the darkness, just to make sure he was still there. Just to make sure he wasn’t fading away.

He couldn’t wait any longer. He had to go get it. It was still raining. Ceaseless, beckoning, very, very cold.

A splash of red and his guts twisted in on themselves. A swirl of black, and his blood boiled with wrath. He stood, not bothering to dust off his pants. He had learned vanity got him nowhere here long ago.

Besides, he would be cleansed soon enough. Scoured, and wet, and frozen. He had to go. He had to get it. If he failed now, there would be no point.

~*~

“I don’t want to be the reason you don’t smile, Harry,” Draco muttered brokenly, his voice catching in his throat. “But I cannot promise you I’ll make you happy.”

“You can’t,” Harry said simply, his voice equally as quiet. “It’s something that I’ll have to choose into. It can be effortless, Draco. That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you.”

Effortless. Draco looked away. Nothing was effortless.
It was cold. His breath came out in white, cloudy gasps and freezing water bit at his exposed skin, clawing at his pores and driving the bitter chill down to his very core. He trudged through the mud, getting soaked with each step, and finally reached the spot.

He shivered violently as he bent to collect the Leerdog Root and then forced himself to run back to the hut in time to place the plant into the cauldron.

Inside the hut, it was warm. Inside the hut, it was dry.

He watched with shrewd grey eyes as the Leerdog Root disappeared into the boiling brew and yearned to go back outside. The cold was calling to him. The rain wanted to kiss his flesh. The wind wanted to whisper something sacred to his soul.

He glanced at the door. He must be mad.

Is it worth it to try?

Is it worth it?

Draco stared into Harry’s green eyes, the Auror's face no longer guarded, but open. There was an invitation there. Draco imagined Harry holding out his hand, though, really, he wasn’t.

I love you. Why couldn’t he say it? What was wrong with him?

Was he broken?

Draco stood and turned away.

He stood in the rain, shivering so violently he could barely breathe; his teeth chattering so hard his jaw hurt. He lifted his face to the weeping heavens and felt the wet, freezing rain pour over his face. He lifted his shoulders, letting his robes slip over his arms. He kicked off his shoes and felt the cold mud between his toes.

Water snaked down his bared arms, washing over his scars, soaking through his tattered shirt. He was part of it now. He was enveloped by it. There was nothing separating him from the storm. It wasn’t as loud outside as it was inside.

He felt the thunder rumble in his soul, he felt the lightning strike in his heart, and there was no difference between his own tears and the ones falling from the heavens.

Harry stood but did not go to him. He stood on the other side of the kitchen table and waited.

Draco gazed at his hands. “I was never supposed to come back, Harry. I never thought I would get a second chance. I never really thought of it as a second chance until yesterday. Not really. I thought maybe I was living in some sort of strange, surreal dream. Maybe that’s why it’s easier to believe it wasn’t real.”

Say it. Say it. Say it.
Draco turned back around, his pale pointed face pallid against the feverish, vulnerable look in his eyes. “But it was real. I know that.” I won’t say I’m sorry. Not again.

Say it. Say it. Say it.

~*~

He began to move, spinning in the mud, in the rain, faster and faster. Heat warmed his blood, flooded his muscles. He twirled, around and around. He fell.

Mud on his face, mud in his hair, mud everywhere. He stood up and began to spin again, flailing his arms wide, his eyes crazed, a smile beginning to curl his lips. He jumped, kicking his feet, spraying mud in every direction. He fell again.

Pain shot through his shoulder and he groaned. He was slower to get up this time. He had to do this. Something was breaking. He finally got his feet under him.

~*~

“It was real,” Draco repeated.

Harry continued to wait. He wasn’t holding out his hand, but he may as well have been.

Say it. Say it. Say it.

Draco opened his mouth, but the words caught in his throat. He tried again but closed his eyes. He struggled with some internal battle Harry could not help him with. Harry waited, holding his breath, his heart pounding in his chest.

“Wǒ ài nǐ.” The foreign words escaped Draco’s pale lips in a ragged gasp. “It is worth it. Wǒ ài nǐ.”

Harry didn’t speak Mandarin but it was enough. He was in front of Draco in three quick strides, pulling him roughly into his arms.

Wǒ ài nǐ. I love you.

~*~

Spinning, faster and faster, he suddenly broke into a run. He stumbled, a laugh escape his throat. His pale hair was soaked and sticking to his face and neck, his clothes seemed to be painted on his body, and his feet felt like blocks of ice. He ran.

He ran until his chest hurt from the freezing air he sucked into his lungs, he ran until his muscles burned from exhaustion, he ran until his mind swam from the cold. And then he ran some more.

He laughed again, the sound free and unfettered. Something broke. Something shattered. He spun again, his arms flailing, rain and cold, and mud everywhere. He was the storm. He would leave rebirth and destruction in his wake.

He was free.

He laughed and laughed.

He wasn’t mad. Not really.

He was free.
And very, very wet.

He stumbled again and fell to his knees, laughing the entire way down. He laughed until he wasn’t cold anymore. He laughed until the noise in his soul subsided. He laughed until the clouds parted and the sun peeked through.

Then, through the steam and fog, he made his way back to the hut.

~*~

Harry kissed him softly as Draco’s arms came up and wrapped around his neck. Harry sucked Draco’s lower lip into his mouth and nibbled on it with his teeth, slowly, carefully, before releasing it and kissing him again. He moved his mouth over Draco’s, his movements gentle and loving. His tongue caressed Draco’s, unpretentious and unhurried, carefully mapping out the cavern of Draco’s mouth. He brought his hands up to cup Draco’s face, fingers feather light on the Slytherin’s skin. Draco shivered under his touch, his eyes opening slightly to watch Harry as the Auror kissed him.

Harry’s eyes were closed, his lashes a stark sweep of black against his cheeks. His features were relaxed and genuine. His dark messy hair framed his beautiful face and Draco was suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling that bubbled up inside of him.

This was different. This wasn’t like the way they had kissed before. Their Scar did not interfere. There was no spark of swirling magic. There was no binding tension. This was just them. This was their own passion, their own touch, their own need.

And, Merlin help him, Draco liked it this way better.

Harry moaned into his mouth as Draco began to return the kiss, brushing his own tongue up against Harry’s, dancing and battling for control. Their kiss deepened; Harry’s fingers dug into Draco’s hair, Draco clutched at Harry’s robes, trying to bring them closer together.

Draco unpinned the collar of Harry’s robes and pushed them off his shoulders, moving his fingers lower to undue Harry’s pants as he panted under Harry’s talented mouth. He felt Harry smile against his lips and kiss him again as Harry began to return the favor. They undressed one another slowly, passion setting their blood afire, desire making their heads swim.

Draco shivered as Harry traced one finger down his throat and over his collarbone. The hand traveled lower, twirling small, invisible patterns on the skin of Draco’s quivering abdominal muscles. The fingers brushed lightly against the bobbing head of Draco’s straining phallus. The blond Slytherin grabbed his hand, breaking away from the kiss, and led them both into the bedroom. Harry grinned and Draco froze, entranced.

He had caused that smile. It was for him.

Harry dipped his head for another slow kiss after closing the door, gently pushing Draco onto the large bed. Harry moved above him, pressing his own erection into Draco’s thigh, moaning as their bodies made contact. Harry shivered as Draco ran his fingers down his spine.

Harry kissed his neck, his blood hot and racing through his veins. Harry traveled lower, leaving a trail of searing kisses on Draco’s pale throat and shoulder. Harry paused, listening to Draco’s breathing turn ragged beneath him. His own breath was coming in short gasps.

Heat gathered in their groins as Harry shifted his hips, forcing their erect shafts to rub against one another. Draco’s eyes fluttered closed and he sucked in a sharp breath, the sensation from his aching cock shooting up his spine and spiking at the ends of his fingers and toes.
Harry laid his cheek on Draco’s chest and traced one finger down his lover’s left arm, brushing his fingertips lightly over the scars on the inner part of his forearm. He gently lifted Draco’s arm and shifted his torso so he could press his lips against the scars.

As Draco watched, unbidden tears pricked his eyes and he had to blink them away. Draco sat up, forcing Harry to prop himself up on his knees. Draco stared down at the Order of the Phoenix tattoo inked into the flesh of Harry’s chest. He had never dared to touch it before, thinking Harry wouldn’t like it. But he reached out and traced the stark black lines with his index finger.

Their eyes met.

Abruptly, their slow lovemaking shifted into passionate need. Draco grabbed the back of Harry’s neck and slammed their lips together, causing their teeth to clash painfully. Draco pulled Harry back down on top of him, pushing his hips into Harry’s. Harry growled into Draco’s mouth and rutted violently back against him.

No magic sphere enveloped them. No Horcrux tension muted out their cries and buzzed loudly in their ears. They could hear very pant, feel every touch, taste every bead of sweat. Draco bit down on Harry’s lip, tasting blood. Harry slid his hands under Draco’s firm buttocks and squeezed tightly. Draco arched up, moaning, Harry gasped as another wave of pleasure swept through his limbs as their shafts pressed against one another. Draco reached between them and wrapped his fist around Harry’s hard cock, causing Harry to throw his head back as the friction sent skittering waves of sparks throughout his nerve endings.

Harry pulled his hands back, gripping Draco’s hip with one hand. With the other, he scooped up the salty drops of precum that was beginning to gather on both their purpling heads with his fingers. He brought his hand up to his mouth, but Draco snatched his wrist and led Harry’s fingers into his own mouth. Draco rolled his tongue over the pads of Harry’s fingers, tasting their co-mingled fluids and soaking Harry’s fingers with his own saliva.

Harry watched, open-mouthed and entranced, as Draco worked his lips over his fingers, feeling Draco’s silky tongue sliding over the digits of his hand, twirling and sucking.

“Merlin, you’re good at that,” Harry breathed as he withdrew his hand from Draco’s mouth and lowered his soaked digits between them, lifting Draco’s hips with his other hand. Draco smirked and his eyes twinkled mischievously as he wrapped his legs around Harry’s waist. Harry pressed a slick finger against Draco’s puckered entrance, probing gently until the finger slid inside. Harry bent to recapture Draco’s mouth as he worked the finger inside, pulling it in and out until he could slip another finger in. Draco moaned into Harry’s mouth as Harry’s fingers worked inside of him, his own hand continuing to pump Harry’s phallus until Harry found it too hard to concentrate on what he was doing.

Draco released his hold on Harry’s cock as the Auror began positioning himself above Draco’s stretched entrance. Harry pressed his lips against Draco’s temple as he entered his lover in one swift motion. “I love you,” Harry gasped into Draco hair.

Draco clutched at Harry’s back, digging his fingers into the Auror’s flesh, the pain slowly easing into pleasure as Harry waited for the Slytherin to adjust. Finally relaxing, Draco tightened his legs around Harry’s waist, urging him to move. Draco pressed his mouth against the hollow of Harry’s throat, whispering ”Wǒ ài nǐ” over and over as Harry pulled out until only his head was inside Draco, and then thrust back in.

Harry dipped his head and kissed Draco’s already swollen lips fiercely, doing his best to keep his thrusting pace even and unhurried, despite the urge to slam into his lover until he cried out, until he
could say those words in English. Harry reached between them and gripped Draco’s cock, pumping it in time with his hips, wanting Draco to feel what he was feeling as he moved inside of him.

The tight heat that enveloped Harry’s cock quivered and Draco gasped when his lover's phallus found Draco’s prostate. Harry shifted so he could thrust into that spot every single time. Harry worked his mouth lower as Draco’s fingers tangled in his black locks.

“Wô àì nî.”

Harry’s mouth latched on to one hardened nipple. He sucked on the little nub, sunk his teeth into it, swirled his tongue around the nipple until his lover was moaning uncontrollably, his cock thrusting into that tight heat, his hand working his lover’s hard shaft. Draco gasped as he moved to the other nipple, Harry’s pace becoming faster and more erratic, the heat gathering storm clouds in their bellies.

“Wô àì nî.”

Harry growled, slamming harder into him. Draco cried out, seeing stars. “Wô àì nî!” Harry lifted his head and gazed down into Draco’s lidded-grey gaze as he labored above him.

Terrible love shown in Harry’s pleasure-clouded eyes.

Draco swallowed and bit his lip, desire, pleasure, and fear blurring his vision, sensations too many to name overwhelming him.

The hand gripping Draco’s hip wrapped around his pale shoulders, and Harry drew him up and held him close. Harry pressed his face into Draco’s neck as he slammed roughly and quickly into Draco, whispering indiscernible words against his flesh. Draco clung to Harry’s back, crying out as he came, climactic pleasure shuddering through his body as cum sprayed between them and poured over Harry’s hand. Harry thrust twice more, his hips jerking violently, and he bit into Draco’s neck to keep from screaming as he shuddered through his own climax.

Harry all but collapsed and Draco held him close.

“I danced in the rain once,” Draco murmured much later, after they had descended from their climactic bliss and cleaned up. Harry’s head, which rested in the crook of Draco’s arm and shoulder, shifted as he peered up at Draco with disbelieving green eyes.

“In the Tien Shen Pass.”

“Really?”

“Mmhmm. I’d always wanted to, but…well, it’s was never something a Malfoy would do. So I never did.” Draco glanced down at Harry and smiled. “I told Dumbledore once, about wanting to do something crazy like that.”

“What did he say?”

“He laughed in my face.”

Harry loosed a laugh of pure delight, the sound deep and rich and completely unrestrained. Draco smiled again, cherishing the sound of it before continuing. “He laughed because he thought it was absurd that I thought it was absurd. I understood that after I had done it.”

“How was it?”

“How was what?”
“Dancing in the rain?”

Draco curled his lip. “Incredibly cold. And wet.”

Harry laughed again.

“I ended up getting really sick,” Draco went on to say. “There was fluid in my lungs, my throat was on fire, everything hurt like shite. And, Merlin, the headaches were murder. Eventually, I used the time-turner to go back to Dumbledore and ask him for medicine.”

“I take it he gave it to you?”

“Mhmm.”

Harry shifted, tossing a stray lock of jet-black hair from his eyes. “I miss him.”

Draco closed his eyes so Harry couldn’t see the pain in them. “Me too.”

They were quiet for a long time, drifting into the lull of beckoning sleep as the minutes ticked by.

“Something broke inside of me that day,” Draco whispered into the gathering darkness, listening to the sound of Harry’s steady breathing, certain his lover had fallen asleep. “After all of this, I’d like to do it again.”

Draco thought he could hear the sound of rain and smiled sleepily, dropping a kiss on top of Harry’s black locks.

“Wǒ ài nǐ means I love you,” Draco murmured.

“I know,” Harry whispered back.

～*～

A/N:

Wǒ ài nǐ “I love you” Mandarin. A Chinese dialect ‘most likely’ spoken in the Tien Shen Pass.

Xiàn zài jī diǎn? ”What time is it?” Mandarin. A Chinese dialect ‘most likely’ spoken in the Tien Shen Pass.
Remember Me This Way

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: The Latin in this chapter is choppy and a bit awkward. In later chapters, all languages used have been translated by professionals and not myself, so the quality is undeniably better, lol. I will, at some point, come back and re-do the transliteration in this chapter. Until then, bear with me. Thanks! *winks*

~Remember Me This Way~

The Minister’s Suite…
***

Fast becoming a creature of habit, Draco awoke precisely twenty minutes before Hermione Granger or his godfather would arrive to supervise his 6am dose of the Markaghirelle. Draco turned on his side, following the sound of Harry’s soft snoring, and smiled as he saw the young Auror sleeping peacefully beside him.

The Wizard had disappeared for a few hours the day before, after they had rested, and returned shortly after Draco’s 10pm dose. When the clock had struck two o’clock in the morning, Harry had smiled cheekily at Severus when his godfather had come with the Markaghirelle, but offered no explanation for his presence and Severus, wisely, asked for none.

The Auror-Guard, for their part, gave them no trouble. Draco wondered if they had ever really minded at all. But their opinion was their own and Draco would never ask them to share it.

They had made love twice more during their stolen hours together, played Wizard’s Chess, and talked long into the night.

Draco watched Harry sleep, careful not to touch him lest he wake him, and once again marveled at how perfectly harmless he seemed when he slept. He was gloriously nude, lips parted, features relaxed, head propped on one folded arm and the other flung out…and that awful noise coming from his nostrils. Strangely, the snoring didn’t really bother him. It was just another little Harry Potter oddity that came with the wonder of him sleeping in his bed.

Draco’s lips twisted into a sneer. Well, not his bed, Minister Scrimgeour’s bed. But, close enough. Draco would take what he could get.
Just one more day and everything would be over. And then what?

Harry had once told him that he had his own flat in London and that he didn’t like residing in Number Twelve Grimmauld Place. Draco was barely thrilled about the idea of returning to Malfoy Manor. He did give the Manor to Molly Weasley in his Will…but that hardly counted because Draco was still alive. Also, he knew the Weasley’s would be even less comfortable living in Malfoy Manor than he was.

Draco frowned. Perhaps he could sell the Manor, give a percent of the liquidated funds to Molly Weasley, and use the rest to buy a new home; somewhere he and Harry could start fresh. Draco liked that idea.

The Library would still go to Hermione Granger. Draco would call it a wedding present. Though, the former Slytherin had never bothered to ask when the wedding was scheduled, he was certain Harry would know.

His godfather would always want for nothing. Draco was certain of that. Draco Malfoy would always have money, even without the Manor, and Severus Snape would have full access to those funds…whether Draco died tomorrow or no. Draco had arranged that long ago.

Draco Malfoy would be expected to re-introduce himself into pureblood Society. There would be no escaping that necessary evil. He was a natural born Socialite. The Parkinson’s would support him, to whatever end.

The rest would be left to chance, Draco supposed. Choosing to be happy, choosing to be content…ah, well. It should be interesting.

Draco sat up, the clock on the far wall signaling only a minute until six o’clock, and put on his robe. He wandered out into the hall, ready to greet his visitor bearing the Markaghirelle, and found it was Hermione Granger waiting for him in the entryway of the foyer.

“Good morning, Malfoy,” Hermione said, handing him the vial of the Markaghirelle. “Is Harry here?”

Draco tossed back the potion and handed her the empty vial when he was finished. “He’s sleeping,” Draco answered pointedly.

Hermione chewed on the inside of her cheek, blushing to the roots of her bushy hair. “Oh. Well, um, I need to speak to him.”

“About what?”

“About how we should transport you to the Dome once you’ve stopped taking the Markaghirelle,” Hermione answered, impatiently tapping her foot.

Draco narrowed his sharp grey eyes. “What?”

“Portkey,” Harry informed Hermione, coming up behind Draco with nothing but a sheet wrapped around his waist. Harry rubbed at his eyes. “I thought we covered that one.”

If it was even possible, and Draco supposed it had to be, Hermione turned even redder as she beheld the obviously naked-under-the-sheet Harry Potter. Despite her discomfort, Hermione responded evenly. “You may have, but Ron couldn’t remember and Anin was asking about the danger of letting Malfoy Apparate while the Markaghirelle was wearing off.”
“WHAT?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed, running his hand through his hair and rubbing the back of his neck. “That’s why we decided on the Portkey. Ron and I went over this yesterday. Four Aurors wait for Draco inside the Dome, Draco arrives by Portkey, and then the remainder of the guard Disapparate after that. It’s full proof. Must I do everything?”

“You and Ron went over a lot of things yesterday,” Hermione retorted, defending her fiancée. “I was asked to double check.”

Harry’s eyes softened a bit. “Yeah. I’m sorry ’Mione. You know I’m a grouch first thing in the morning.”

Hermione nodded. Draco Malfoy looked wildly between them. “No…” Draco breathed as he started to piece together what they were planning. “Oh, no. You’re out of your mind.”

Harry glanced at his lover. “We’re taking every precaution.”

“You’re taking me off the Markaghirelle?” Draco asked. “Are you daft?”

“Alt said it would interfere with the exorcism,” Hermione said.

“And Cure claimed it might affect the Inversion Enchantratem,” Harry added.

“When?” Draco demanded, his face the perfect mask of fury.

Unfazed, Harry scratched under his chin. “Your last dose will be tomorrow morning at two. It’ll wear off around six and then we’ll transport you to the Dome where we’ll give you the Inversion Enchantratem and wait for it to take effect. Cure’s calculated it to start working some twelve hours later.”

“When were you planning on telling me?” Draco grated, his grey eyes flashing dangerously.

“This morning,” Harry replied with a helpless grin.

“Twelve full hours of an unrestrained, pissed off Black Tulpa roiling in my belly,” Draco said slowly, his voice a deadly quiet. “Have you prepared for the Plagues?”

Harry exchanged a glance with Hermione. “Yes. Last time it was just frogs and flies, Draco—“

“And locusts,” Hermione interjected. She had been there. She knew.

“Last time, Maul was under the Markaghirelle,” Draco growled, fear beginning to burn in his chest. “There are ten plagues, Harry. Ten of them. Fire will fall from the sky. Livestock will die. Boils and lice and then the worst: The death of the first born.” Draco glared at the both of them. “All three of us are firstborn.”

Hermione bit her lip. “I hardly expect Maul would kill his own Host.”

“You do not know him as well as I do,” Draco snapped darkly.

Harry placed a hand on Draco’s shoulder. “We’ve prepared, Draco. Whatever Maul can dish out will be restrained to the interior of the Dome. Alt will be unaffected; he is protected by his God. If it becomes too much for the Aurors, they will leave the Dome. If it comes to that, it will be just you and me and the priest. Trust me.”
Trust me.

I've never trusted anyone.

Trust me.

…Alright.

Draco shrugged off Harry’s hand and sighed, rubbing his hands over his pale, pointed face. “Fine.” Then he left them staring after him as he went back into the bedroom.

A few minutes later, Harry rejoined him, closing the door gently behind him. Draco sat at the desk, reading a book by the Squib poet T.S. Eliot.

Recognizing the book, Harry said: “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender.”

Draco closed the book and set it back on the table. “By this, and this only, we have existed.”

Harry approached the pale wizard and wrapped his arms around him, holding him gently. “Draco…”

“How many?”

“How many people will be in this Dome?”

“I don’t know the exact number. Two dozen? Maybe more.”

Draco closed his eyes. “That’s a lot of people Maul could hurt wearing my face, Harry.”

Harry rocked him lightly. “I know.”

“Will Deans be there?”

“No. He’ll stay in his cell at the Ministry.”

“Good. He’ll be safe then. And Blaise?”

“He left days ago. Heroth says he claimed asylum at the Parkinson’s.”

“Good,” Draco repeated, leaning his head back on Harry’s shoulder as the Auror rocked him like he was a child.

“Draco...” Harry placed two fingers under Draco’s chin, urging his face closer to his. Harry placed a soft kiss against Draco’s frowning mouth. He pulled away, if only just for a moment, and kissed him again, moving his mouth over Draco’s unhurriedly, gently, sweetly.

However, the second Draco began kissing him back, a strange strangled noise growled in the back of Draco’s throat and blond man pulled abruptly away, standing stiffly to his feet. “This isn’t something you can kiss away, Harry,” Draco said, beginning to stroll towards the closet to pull on some decent clothes.

Harry made an exasperated sound and lunged forward, bringing the flat of his hand to land smartly on the Draco’s rear. “Would you lighten up?”

Draco whirled around, his face incredulous, his eyes blazing. “Did you just…smack my arse?”
Harry cringed, second-guessing himself. “Ye-yes?”

Draco rolled his eyes skyward, muttering “Griffindors” mutinously under his breath before turning, once again, and disappearing into the massive bowels of the Suite’s walk-in closet. When he re-emerged, some five minutes later, he was fully dressed in a simple black turtleneck and dark slacks.

Following the sound of Harry fixing himself something for breakfast, Draco snuck into the kitchen and…smack!

One hand instinctually clutching his wand, and the other rubbing his now-sore bottom, Harry stared wildly at a laughing-eyed, grinning, Draco Malfoy.

“What the fuck, Draco?”

~*~

The hours passed swiftly, too swiftly for either of their liking. The morning was pleasant, the two young Wizards exchanging time-less insults until they were sure their snark was back in full swing. Harry could hardly keep a straight face through most of it, his mind more on jumping Draco’s bones, than the verbal task at hand.

As afternoon faded into evening, their smiles began to be forced, and their conversations crumbled into ever-too polite ones, and Harry grew apprehensive as the silence between them tensed from Draco ever-glum perspectives of the grimly task scheduled on the morrow.

After, Harry had finished supper, he joined Draco in the living room, who was more glowering at the book in his hand than reading it. Harry sat on an opposing sofa and sighed.

“Talk to me, Draco,” Harry said. The simple words hung in the air between them as Draco dragged his eyes from the pages of his book to Harry’s face. Hundreds of things seemed to pass behind Draco’s cold, grey eyes all at once.

Draco gazed at his lover, imagining the sound of wind and rain. The awful cackle of surrounding Death Eaters. The raspy laugh of Lord Voldemort. The snort of disgust from his father.

Draco remembered the doomed, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach the day he was told he had been exiled.

Run away, Draco. It is, after all, what you are best at.

Exile.

He had run. He had. Bringing books on potion-making, copies of authentic genealogies, a Pensieve, a cauldron, a Time-Turner, and a wild plan with him. He ran.

To a place where no one could find him. To a place where no one spoke his language or knew who he was. His blood pumped battery acid, thick with grief. His mind churned with vengeance and his very breath came out in wrathful gasps. The local villagers would not meet his eyes. They were a superstitious lot and knew better than to cross the powerful-seeming foreigner.

The Tien Shen Pass.

The home of the Leer Dog Root.

Blinded by fury, nauseated with grief, nourishing himself with hate, Draco set himself in to do the
one task that would exact his revenge. He was alone.

He had never before been alone.

Days had dragged into even more days. His nails became cracked and dirty, his hair grew long and wild. His only consolation was that this would be the one time he chose. This would be his one good thing.

Dumbledore, Draco thought, had saved his sanity during those long years. He had faced his worst fear, and approached the Headmaster to inform him of his fate.

And he went back, again and again, until they no longer needed to talk to pass the time. Until the silence was no longer uncomfortable and Draco was content just to be in someone else’s presence.

He had dedicated years to a cause. And now, after it was finished, after it was through, he had to invest his very freedom for another.

His soul was his own.

One could exile him, force his father to murder his mother, take his freedom, slander his name, take his very life…but no one could ever take his soul.

Maul could not have it, Draco decided. No matter what. His soul was his own.

Draco had given enough. Draco Malfoy had had enough.

“No matter what happens tomorrow, Harry,” Draco said, leaning forward, his eyes suddenly blazing with the severity of his words. “No matter how Maul makes me seem, remember me this way. Remember Number Twelve Grimmauld Place, remember the boy who tormented you to make himself feel better, remember the prat you never liked but managed fall in love with; but whatever you do, don’t you believe He’s me.”

“Not for a minute,” Harry promised solemnly.

~*~

At two in the morning, after Hermione Granger had come and gone with Draco’s last dosage of the Markaghirelle, Harry and Draco settled in for the night. Harry was resolved to stay awake until dawn and Draco was content to just be held by his Auror as he attempted snatch a few hours of sleep.

Harry wrapped his arms loosely around the Malfoy heir, giving him time to get comfortable, before tightening his embrace. Harry thought of what Draco had said earlier as the heady scent of Draco’s hair filled his nostrils and their long, steady breaths became the only sound he heard.

Remember me this way. Don’t you believe He’s me.

Harry held him until the hour struck four, his lids becoming heavy, and then decided that most of the danger had passed. Maul usually struck the hardest during three in the morning, the infamous Witching Hour.

He allowed his eyes to close, deciding it wouldn’t hurt to just rest his lids for a moment.

~*~

Maul smiled, those new, wonderful, pale lips stretching to accommodate him. The black-haired man—Harry, his name was; Harry Potter—had finally fallen asleep.
Patience had never been one of Maul’s outstanding virtues. In fact, Maul was fairly certain he had no virtues.

His first instinct was to turn around, wrap his long fingers back around that slender neck of his, and throttle the life out of the Eighth Key. However, Maul knew how to be cruel, and he knew what would be a worse death for his Host’s lover. Maul longed to see the hurt and betrayal in the Eighth Key’s long-lashed, green eyes. To see him hesitate before striking the telling blow. To see him tremble in fear and helplessness.

So, Maul decided to bide his time, to wait for him to fall into a dreamless sleep. He knew the best way. He could wait.

And now, the Eighth Key was sleeping, harmlessly, beside him.

Maul shifted in his Host’s body, getting a feel for those fingers and toes, those long limbs and quick muscles. Feeling he was ready, Maul, fast as lightning, twisted in the Eighth Key’s arms, reached out with one slender hand, and grabbed the back of his neck, shoving his face into the pillow.

Maul laughed as the Eight Key struggled beneath him and used his legs to flip the body fully on his stomach. The Eighth Key let out a wild roar, muffled by the pillow smashed into his face, and reached out his hand. Maul felt the crackle of wandless magic as the Eighth Key attempted to Accio his wand. Maul laughed, swatting away the wand and allowing it to scatter harmlessly onto the ground.

Maul pressed his Host’s legs between the Eighth Key’s, grabbing the man’s hip and lifting it so his bottom stuck enticingly in the air. The Eighth Key stilled for a moment before thrashing violently.

Maul could taste his panic.

Maul laughed, rubbing his fingers roughly over the plump cheeks. He leaned in close to the Eighth Key’s ear and whispered: “Vos suscipio intellego.”

The Eighth Key shouted, pushing himself up with his forearms. The Host fought against him too. There was a spark of resilience against His hold on the body and the Eighth Key managed to flip himself over.

The Eighth Key’s eyes widened when he saw the face He was wearing and Maul laughed again. “Operor non nixor,” Maul said, smiling savagely. “Is est nusquam ut rape of suus animus! Operor vos non volo intellego?” Maul laughed again, the sound horrible and unmistakably evil.

Maul’s smile faded, feeling the Host slam against him, over and over, in his valiant attempt to push him back and reclaim his body. Maul grabbed the Eighth Key’s throat, squeezing harder as his hands came up to claw at His hand. Maul watched his eyes bulge and his face change color before he leaned in, once again, so close that His hot breath dusted across the Eighth Key’s noble cheek. “Duodeviginti Key, EGO mos attero vos! EGO mos eat suus animus! Quod EGO mos planto meus abdomen pinguis per desparo!!! EGO spendo vos.”

Then, with a strangled noise, Maul receded.

~*~

Harry saw Draco’s eyes shift rapidly from black to grey and back again. Harry watched Draco begin to shudder violently and knew he had won. Harry reached out for him, but Draco looked between them, assessed their position, and he suddenly scrambled back, his hand flying to his mouth, and his eyes wide and terrified.
“Oh, God,” Draco breathed. “Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God…”

“It’s alright, Draco,” Harry whispered, reaching out. “He didn’t hurt me. You came back in time.”

“Oh, God,” Draco breathed again, continuing his litany of shock. “Oh, God, oh, God…”

Harry tried to pull him in an embrace, but Draco violently shoved him away. “Don’t touch me!” he shrieked. “Merlin, I nearly…I nearly…”

“But you didn’t.”

Hearing the commotion, Draco’s four-Auror guard was pounding on the bedroom door. “Is everything alright?” Nadger called.

“We’re fine,” Harry called, keeping both eyes on Draco. “We’ll be out soon.”

“Very good, sir.” Nadger called back.

Harry stood and grabbed Draco’s robe, holding it out for him. “Draco…please…”

Draco hesitated, but then let Harry put his robe on him and lead him to the bathroom, where the still-shivering Slytherin could collect himself and get dressed.

Draco closed the door behind him, leaving Harry to stare around the room, his head still reeling from what had just happened.

Maul had tried to rape him.

Harry’s face darkened as he pulled his clothes on and retrieved his wand. Maul had tried to rape him using Draco’s body.

Now, it was on.

Now, it was personal.

Remember me this way. Don’t you believe He’s me…

Now, it was time.

~*~

A/N:

Vos suscipio intellego Latin “You begin to understand.”

Operor non nixor. Is est nusquam ut rape of suus animus! Operor vos non volo intellego? Latin. “Do not struggle. This is nothing to the rape of HIS soul! Do you not want to understand?”

Duodeviginti Key, EGO mos attero vos! EGO mos eat suus animus! Quod EGO mos plano meus abdomen pinguis per desparo!!! EGO spendo vos. Latin. “Eighth Key, I will destroy you! I will eat his soul! And I will make my belly fat with despair!!! I promise you.”

A/n: Thank you, Bubba, for helping me give the "umph" to this chapter.
Are You Ready to Make Your Confession?

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: A special heartfelt thank you to Manga Cat, Bubba, and George for helping me with translations and keys to certain parts of the Roman Ritual of Exorcism. Translations for Latin and German lines at the end of the chapter.

~Are You Ready to Make Your Confession?~

The wind howled angrily in his ears as Harry stared wildly at his partner, Ron, who was screaming something at him.

"What?!" Harry shouted back, his arm straining under the pressure of his wand, where a spell was aiding the other Aurors to keep the worst of the Plagues towards the top of the Dome. Ron's lips parted again, forming words that were ripped from his freckled mouth the second he produced them.

Ron grimaced, his extended arm twisting unnaturally under the pressure of his own wand as he flung out his other arm to gesture behind Harry. Harry turned, following Ron's pointing finger. A dark cloud of approaching Wizards and Witches, lead by Headmistress McGonagall, had reached the lake's border, and were flying swiftly towards the Dome on brooms.

Harry charged up his wandless magic, allowing its raw energy to shield him from the flies and lice and locusts that threatened to overwhelm their task force, and pocketed his wand. He ran over to Anin, pulling at the man's collar so he could holler directly into the older man's ear. "Reinforcements are here! Keep them out of the Dome! Maul's radius is widening but he won't be able to reach the edge of the lake! The I.E. has thirty minutes! I repeat, thirty minutes! Have them control the outer perimeter from the Plagues until then!"

Anin twisted in Harry's grip, glancing behind him as their reinforcements made their approach, and then back at Harry. "You're certain they'll disappear once the potion activates?!" Anin shouted.

Harry looked up at the roof of the Dome, where the entire Auror's Division--and then some--had been working laboriously to keep the frogs, insects, fire and ice isolated. Outside the Dome, it was a different matter. Boils and lice attacked humans with a vengeance, livestock seemed to wither from the inside out, the day was black as a moonless night, lightning and hail crashed around them in a rainless storm, and parts of the lake were thick and red with blood...and it was spreading. And so too,
the length of Maul's power.

Maul.

Harry looked with blazing eyes towards the center of the Dome where Draco stood amidst the swirling winds of raw and ancient power, his eyes wide, pitless pools of utter black. Harry tore his gaze away, finding, at last, Father Ernst Alt, who circled the perimeter like a lion stalking its prey, shouting prayers in an ancient tongue while clutching a small black book. His white priest's robes swirled around his bony frame, a purple stole whipping around his shoulders...and like he had predicted, the exorcist was unaffected by the plagues that Maul spat towards them.

So then...

Harry chewed on his lower lip as the wind hurled their robes around and fingered violently through their hair, screaming its passage in their ears. He glanced once back at Anin, nodding curtly. "Yes, I'm certain."

"Very good, sir!" Anin affirmed before jerking at his amulet and exiting the Dome.

Harry raised his wand again, adding to the restrictive pressure of the topmost part of the Dome, and spared a glare in Maul's direction. Maul, using Draco's lips, smiled cruelly.

Harry knew that smile. Harry loved that smile. Rage burned in his chest as he tore his eyes away, once again, from Draco Malfoy's figure.

*Don't get used to it, Maul. In half an hour, you'll never know what it is to possess him again. I am going to rip your bloody heart out.*

~*~

Eleven and a half hours prior...

The Ministry of Magic...

***

Harry waited in the foyer with Draco's four-Auror guard--at the present: Anin, Heroth, Saith, and Marim--as the blond Slytherin used his last precious seconds of isolation to gather his nerve in the Minister's Suite. When the pale, pointed Wizard finally stepped out into the foyer, dressed, appropriately, all in black, Draco's face was the perfect mask of resolve.

And dignity.

But as Harry looked up into his lover's eyes, checking to make sure they were still that perfect, icy grey, something passed behind them and the young Auror knew better. Draco looked away first.

What could Harry possibly say? What could either of them say?

So, amidst a heavy silence, Anin and Heroth filed behind Harry Potter, then the soon-to-be-exorcised Draco Malfoy, and finally Saith and Marim behind him. Then, they stepped out into the hall.

Ronald Weasley was waiting for them. Ron was supposed to be awaiting their arrival at the location of the Portkey, but, strangely, Harry took comfort in his best mate's presence and did not rebuke him. When all was said and done, Ron had good instincts on when to be at his partner's side and when to let be. Now, even though Harry was certain Ron couldn't possibly know exactly why, this was a definite moment when he needed his best mate's steady presence at his shoulder.
Quietly, Ron stepped in beside Harry and the column made their way down the hall.

Their steps seemed to drag and time seemed to slow; though, in Harry’s mind’s eye, everything around them seemed rush past them. Harry could hear his very breath like the loud hum of a car engine clanging through his head and every footstep seemed to ricochet off of the walls around them. And the only thing he could think of was the two, piercing grey eyes that bore into the back of his neck, burning holes into him.

The Portkey was an oil lamp, placed inconspicuously on a seemingly random table in one seemingly unimportant hall near the Department of Mysteries. Luna Lovegood stood by the table, marking its spot. Her eyes were luminous but intensely grave and she seemed to shine like a slender beacon in the dark hall. Harry Potter remembered that look. Luna wore it many times during the war.

Luna Lovegood was a dreamer…but she did not always dream. She knew when her world and everyone else’s collided into a heavy moment of severity. This was one such moment. Harry took comfort in her presence too.

She was looking past him, smiling gravely at Draco.

Anin and Heroth parted before Draco, allowing him to step up to the Portkey. Without hesitating, Draco reached out one slender hand and laid his finger tips gently on the oil lamp. Luna nodded slowly and placed a hand on Draco’s shoulder, leaning in to whisper in his ear.

"The name of the game is ‘Guilt’," Luna said in a voice so soft, even Draco could barely hear. "Nobility isn’t about being better than others; it is about being better than you used to be. Do not play."

A great deal of Draco's demeanor slipped, allowing him to look intensely shocked by Luna’s words, and he favored her with wide eyes. Instantly, however, he regained his composure and Luna stepped away. She turned her grave smile on Harry and Ron, and the Head Aurors stepped up to touch the Portkey.

After a slow minute, the world lurched around them and suddenly the three Wizards were spiraling down a whirling vacuum and dropped unceremoniously in the middle of...nowhere.

Except, a great many Aurors were present. Hermione Granger and Severus Snape were there too. And so too was Minister Scrimgeour, Mary Heart, and Father Ernst Alt.

Four Aurors stepped in close, surrounding Draco Malfoy as Harry and Ron left to speak to the Minister. Draco took in the faces of his guard, a part of him not wanting to recognize them, a bigger part needing to know who he might be responsible for. Mackle, Denon, Liv, and Viggo. Good men, sturdy men. Innocent men. Draco swallowed and looked around him, taking in the landscape and trying to figure out where he was. It was a vast valley of sorts, with a broad lake directly east of them and a fringe border of trees to the south and west. To the north, jagged rocks of a sloping mountain stretched up. However, the plain seemed to stretch for kilometers before reaching any of these. Draco’s eyes wandered back towards the lake. He squinted. Was that--?

"There's a what?" Harry suddenly shouted. Clenching his fists, Harry ran a hand roughly through his hair. "Can they be evacuated in time?"

"It will draw too much attention," Hermione said, worrying at her lip and handing Harry the charmed medallion that would allow him to enter and exit the Dome at whim. "If anyone catches so much as a
whiff of the Ministry removing Muggles from a remote area, Harry, you better believe Wizards and Witches will be swarming this area to get a glimpse of Malfoy."

"Then we'll have a real problem," Ron muttered sarcastically, earning a withering glare from his fiancée.

"The Dome will keep the operation hidden," the Minister said in an uncertain tone.

Father alt shook his head. "If Maul is antagonized, he will wreak out his power. No Dome will restrict it under its roof...and even if you could construct one in time, it is unwise to bottle the Plagues into the sole area reserved for an exorcism."

Harry gaped at him for a moment, wondering if the priest had just made an attempt at humor. Harry shook his head. "Fine. Fine, fine, fine. Ron, get someone--"

"Who?"

"Anyone to cast silence spells all around the perimeter..." Harry pulled out a map from his back pocket. "Here...and here; making sure that the Muggles in their resort remain oblivious. Priest, will Maul's power be one set radius, or will it slowly grow?"

"It will grow," Father Alt replied. "Maul will most likely wish to destroy the Dome, as it is designed to cage him after being expelled from Malfoy's body. But...His Gatherer was supposed to aid Him and failed...and He has been trapped under the Markaghirelle for a long time...He will become stronger as each of his Plagues are presented. I would suggest timing them."

Harry chewed on the inside of his lip, staring hard at the exorcist. Ron looked between them. "I think it'd be best not to antagonize him, eh?"

Harry and Alt slowly looked over at Ron. Ron raised his brows and looked back. Harry and Alt glanced at one another.

"The Inversion Enchantratem will not begin to work for another twelve hours," Harry said, glancing over his shoulder at Draco who was listening closely amidst his four-Auror guard. "During that time, for what reasons would Maul be antagonized?"

Alt regarded the young Auror with heavy eyes. "Other than His reading of His Host's thoughts and the mere presence of an exorcist nearby?"

Harry nodded impatiently. "Yes."

Harry's dark brows rose high on his forehead. "Sorry?"

The old priest stepped up close to Harry, bending his head to speak directly into his ear. "According to my faith, I may not exorcise a non-believer. According to my faith, it is impossible to rid a demon from the body of a sinner. He must be forgiven by the grace of God before I can perform the holy ritual."

"He's a Wizard!" Harry spat incredulously.

"This I know, young magician," Father Alt replied, ever the patient one. "I will not ask that he convert to Catholicism...but I will request that he at least confess his sins to God. And if he is forgiven..." Alt shrugged. "We will see."
"We will see what?"

"We will see if he is freed."

Harry stared hard at the priest, his face scant inches from his own. "And this would antagonize Maul?"

"Assuredly."

Harry ran his hands blindly over his face as the priest stepped back but froze when he heard Draco's voice behind him: "I'll do it, priest. I'll confess."

Everyone turned and the world seemed to come to a hush all around them. Draco lifted his chin. "I'll confess," he repeated.

Dignity. Resolve.

Harry looked into his eyes. Utter rubbish. The eastern sun began to peek over the horizon. Harry checked his watch. 6 a.m.

It was time for Draco to take the Inversion Enchantraatem.

Draco watched with sad eyes as Harry's face took on a look he'd never seen on him before. The youthful light left his eyes, a strange hard line formed around his mouth, and the muscles in his back turned stiff and rigid as Harry began barking orders to those around him. In a flurry of motion, Aurors began taking formation around the inner and outer perimeters of the Dome—which, before this moment, had been invisible, but now had begun to turn an opaque-ish white—and Draco was ushered to its center. After a few minutes, Harry approached him with a small vial held in his right hand, his eyes downcast and hidden by the dark fringe of his messy hair.

With a jerky movement of his arm, he offered the bottle to Draco.

In a strange sense, even though they were surrounded by Aurors and Ministry officials—and even a priest—they felt like no one was there but them because every one else skirted the edge of the Dome, a full kilometer and a half radius. Draco took the bottle and drank from it, the liquid tasteless and odorless.

He felt nothing.

"Father Alt will not approach you until noon," Harry said in a soft voice, his eyes still averted. "In this way, we'll have a better chance of controlling the Plagues before the potion takes affect. Ten Plagues, six hours..." Harry's voice trailed off.

Draco handed back the vial. "Well then."

"Well then," Harry echoed. Harry had the most horrible feeling that there was something being left unsaid. As he snapped his fingers and Draco's guard came forward, Harry hoped that, in the next six hours, he would be able to figure out what it was.

~*~

For the first two hours, Draco remained on his feet at the center of his four-Auror guard in the middle of the Dome, watching with guarded eyes as Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley paced around the edge of the Dome, barking orders in commanding tones, casting protective spell, and checking to make sure all their plans were in order.
At the beginning of the third hour, Draco began eyeing the grass at his feet, not exactly relishing in the idea of sitting on it and soiling the backside of his pants, but even less thrilled with the idea of standing at attention for the next four hours.

By the fourth hour, Draco was seated on the grass and sneering. His look of utter discontent was directed mostly at himself. He was incredibly bored. The minutes that dragged by eroded his imminent fear as they passed and he found himself disappointed at the lack of excitement as this day of days wore on.

Of course, Draco knew that if Harry had his way, the entire day would be like this. But, no; this was simply the calm before the storm.

At the start of the fifth hour, Draco’s heart began to pound. Frowning, he scolded himself silently, willing his heart beat to slow. Hermione Granger and his godfather, Severus Snape, approached with a small vile, a potion of nutrients. Draco declined the offer, opting to fast instead. Because he offered no explanation and remained seated, they eventually went away.

Now, the minutes were slipping by more quickly, and Draco had to force himself to be still lest he begin to squirm. Draco rested his hands on his knees and closed his eyes. He breathed in and out slowly, willing himself not to think, but just to feel.

And then, almost instantly, it was noon. Draco’s eyes snapped open and the snake inside of him lifted its head, hissing a warning. Harry and the priest were approaching. The young Auror made a small, jerky movement with his hand and his guard retreated to the perimeter of the Dome as Draco rose to his feet.

Father Alt paused at one point and Harry kept moving forward, his brilliant eyes shadowed and guarded. The priest remained where he was, giving them a little space.

The snake inside of him began to hiss again, whispering malice against his soul, and Draco’s heart began to pound once more. Harry stood in front of him and Draco pressed into his lover’s mind, trying to get a sense of why Harry wouldn’t look at him still.

Fear. Anger. Draco pulled back. Raw emotions, powerful enough to guard the young Auror’s thoughts, but Draco could guess well enough what they were.

Harry looked up into his eyes suddenly, a terrible love shining forth with blinding brilliance of the sun. Draco wanted to look away but couldn’t.

“Are you ready?” Harry whispered.

Draco laughed softly, the sound bitter and dry like the rustling of autumn leaves. “No.”

The hard white line around Harry’s mouth softened slightly. Harry lifted a hand and ran his fingertips along the pointed line of Draco’s jaw, emotions swimming behind his green eyes that Draco had no names for.

The snake inside him hissed again.

Abruptly, Harry looked startled. “I forgive you,” the young Auror said as if he had just had an epiphany, his eyes full of wonder, the hard line around his mouth disappearing altogether.

Draco blinked at him. “I didn’t ask for your forgiveness, Auror.”

Harry glanced behind him, briefly, at Father Alt and then looked back at Draco, the same look of
wonder in his eyes. The snake stirred, Draco pushed it away.

“No,” Harry agreed, running his thumb over Draco’s cheekbone. “But sometimes it’s good to forgive even if it is not requested.”

Draco searched his gaze, trying to decide if this was some sort of riddle. But Harry Potter was too honest and abrupt to confuse him with riddles now. Whatever he meant, it meant a great deal to him. Draco nodded and leant his forehead against Harry’s, charging up their connection through the Horcrux Scar, allowing the energy to sweep through them, allotting them a strength neither felt they had. “Remember this,” Draco whispered.

“You’ll never be just a memory, Draco,” Harry whispered back with conviction. “Never a memory. I’m going to get you out of this alive. I swear it.”

Then, Harry sealed his oath with a firm, hard kiss, turned on his heel, and returned to the border, leaving Draco to stare in his wake as the priest made his approach.

“Are you ready to make your confession?”

Draco turned to the exorcist and nodded.

~*~

Harry watched from the Dome’s perimeter as Father Alt sprinkled his lover with holy water and laid one hand on his shoulder and the other on his forehead, covering his lightning bolt scar with one palm.

Then Father Alt stepped away and said a few words. Draco then opened his mouth and began to speak. Everyone was too far away to hear what he said, but Harry could see his mouth moving. He spoke for many minutes and Father Alt listened intently, a passive look splayed across his wrinkled features.

Then, Draco paused and closed his eyes. Then his mouth was moving again and suddenly Harry was swamped with sorrow. It coursed through in surging sweeps. Then there was anger and bitterness and grief. Each feeling swept through him violently, one replacing the other, as Draco confessed his sins, one by one, a kilometer away. Then they merged and collided, causing Harry to sway on his feet. There a blinding sense of hate as a harsh gust passed through the plain on swift wings. Harry shivered in his robe as he braced himself against the onslaught of hate and envy and guilt that attacked him, again and again, over and over.

Someone was shaking his shoulder and Harry had to forcibly close his mind to his connection to Draco in order to register who was speaking to him. It was Ron and he was pointing to the lake. Another gust of wind. There thunderheads gathering on the horizon.

And there, at the edge of the lake closest to the dome, was a strange red semi-cicle on the water right off of the shore line.

Harry whirled back to the center of the Dome, his eyes wide. Draco’s black robes whipped around his slender form and Father Alt was speaking to him in a low voice, backing away slowly with each step.

Draco’s eyes were utterly black. Draco opened his mouth and the winds swirled around him as words thundered past his lips.

“Quid tum?”
Those black eyes searched the field, is terrible gaze taking in the Dome that caged him and the
sorcerers who held him in it. Maul curled Draco’s lips into a nasty smile.

”Etsi hoc corpus morietur, tamen ego perseverabo.” His words shook the Dome and everyone
within took a step back, wands at the ready.

He turned that awful smile and those black, abysmal eyes on Harry Potter and the young Auror had
to fight not flinch against his stare. True, he was physically far away, but his presence was
everywhere. And it was oppressive.

Those black eyes glittered with malice and malcontent.

“Per quamque solutionem problema est…”

Harry narrowed his eyes, anger burning in his chest. “Not this problem!” Harry shouted.

There was a stilling in the gusting winds and then a sound like laughter, but it rumbled like thunder
and shook the very earth beneath their feet. ”Innocentia mortua est…”

“Maybe so,” Harry murmured, closing his eyes briefly and seeing Draco’s sad, piercing grey eyes.
“None of us has been innocent for a long, long time.” He didn’t need to shout this time; he knew
Maul could hear him.

The gusts swirled closer to Draco’s form and it seemed as if Maul was thinking. Then, his black,
bottomless eyes seemed to brighten and the thunderous laughter returned.

”Anima mala,” Maul said with an evil grin.

Somewhere near Harry’s left, Aurors were scrambling. Someone exclaimed: “its blood! The red in
the water; its blood!” Father Alt was running towards him, his mouth moving frantically, forming
words that the buzz in Harry’s mind drowned out.

“No…” Harry breathed. “No, his soul is not evil. You’re wrong.”

The laughter again. The buzzing in his head was getting louder.

”Benedice parvulum qui pro maiestate desinatus est!”

Father Alt is shaking Harry violently, shouting at him, his hot breath on his cheek.

”Benedice parvulum qui pro maiestate desinatus est!”

The buzzing drowns out all else. Sad grey eyes.

“I hate you,” Harry whispered, and he meant it. Oh, he meant it.

”Benedice parvulum qui pro maiestate desinatus est!”

Father Alt drew his arm back and backhanded Harry across the face with all his might. The buzzing
shattered.

Harry blinked at the exorcist.

“You must not speak to the demon!” Alt exclaimed. “Do not commune with him. He is the son of
the Prince of Lies! Have you no common sense?”
Harry nodded slowly. Maul frowned and his eyes suddenly dimmed. A violent pain erupted on Harry’s forehead and he gasped. Harry’s eyes went dead and then they suddenly brightened again.

“Permitte mihi silere ut susmuros deorum audiam”, Harry said to the exorcist, feeling somewhat dazed, as if the words weren’t really his own.

Alt nodded slowly, releasing his grip on the young Auror’s shoulders. “Yes. Accipe ad quae te tatum astringit, et ama quibuscum te fatum covocat, sed fac de corde totaliter:“

Something retreated from Harry’s mind and he cried out, stumbling against the priest, feeling Draco’s absence like a blow.

The gusts picked up again and Maul let out an angry roar.

Alt looked deep into Harry’s eyes, his stern face swimming in Harry’s gaze. “Do not speak to Him. He will only lie to you. Protect your men from the plagues.”


Draco threw his head back and screamed, the angry sound wretched and ringing in their ears.

Shaken, Harry turned to Ron who looked back at him with searching eyes.

“It’s begun,” Ron said in the most serious voice Harry had ever heard him use.

~*~

A/N:

Quid tum Latin; “What then?” Sort of a slang way of saying “What’s up?”

Etsi hoc corpus morietur, tamen ego perseverabo Latin; Means roughly “This body may perish, but I shall continue.”

Per quamque solutionem problema est Latin; means roughly “There is a solution for every problem.”

Innocentia mortua est Latin; means roughly “Innocence is dead”. Maul is basically saying that there is no more innocence in his Host.

Anima mala Latin; means “Evil soul”. Maul is just taunting him now.

Benedice parvulum qui pro maiestate desinatus est Latin; means “Bless the child who is destined for greatness.” Maul is attempting to seduce Harry into giving up.

Permitte mihi silere ut susmuros deorum audiam Latin; means roughly “Allow me to be silent so I
can hear the whispering of the gods.” Remember this is Draco speaking through Harry’s mouth.

Accipe ad quae te tatum astringit, et ama quibuscum te fatum covocat, sed fac de corde totaliter Latin ; “Accept the things to which fate binds you, and love the people with whom fate brings you together, but do so with all your heart.” This is Alt’s response to Draco.

“Ich treibe dich aus, du unreiner Geist, gemeinsam mit der teuflischen Macht des Feindes, jedem Gespenst der Hölle und allen deinen üblen Gefährten; im Namen des Herrn Jesus Christus. Weiche und halte dich fern von diesem Geschöpf Gottes. Denn er ist es, der dir befehlt, der dich kopfüber aus den Höhen des Himmels in die Tiefen der Hölle stieß. Er ist es, der dir befehlt, Er, der einst die See und die Winde und den Sturm besänftigte. Höre nun und erzittere vor Furcht, Satan, Gegner des Glaubens, Feind der menschlichen Rasse, du Vater des Todes, du Räuber des Lebens, Verderber der Gerechtigkeit, du Wurzel allen Übels und allen Lasters; Verführer der Menschen, Verräter der Nationen, Anstifter des Neids, Quell aller Gier, Säer der Zwietracht, der Verursacher von Schmerz und Leid...” German; means “I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every Satanic power of the enemy, every spectre from hell, and all your fell companions; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Begone and stay far from this creature of God. For it is He who commands you, He who flung you headlong from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell. It is He who commands you, He who once stilled the sea and the wind and the storm. Hearken, therefore, and tremble in fear, Satan, you enemy of the faith, you foe of the human race, you begetter of death, you robber of life, you corrupter of justice, you root of all evil and vice; seducer of men, betrayer of the nations, instigator of envy, font of avarice, fomentor of discord, author of pain and sorrow....”
Sinner

Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~Sinner~

“It is believed there are good dybbuks and bad, with a good dybbuk’s "attachment" performing more the role of a "spiritual guide" there to help the person through their current trials and tribulations that the soul was attracted to. These "good" possessions are usually referred to as a 'sod ha’ibbur.

In the case of a negative dybbuk, the spirit is not there to help as much as cause the same mistakes and chaos that it originally experienced during its own lifetime.” ~Exorcism Discussion found in wikipedia.org

“Especially important is the warning to avoid conversations with the demon. We may ask what is relevant but anything beyond that is dangerous. He is a liar. The demon is a liar. He will lie to confuse us. But he will also mix lies with the truth to attack us. The attack is psychological, Damien, and powerful. So don't listen to him. Remember that - do not listen.” ~ Father Merrin in The Exorcist

The Dome…

***

The death of the first born.

Harry knew that was what came next. Someone mentioned that they doubted Maul would slay his own Host, but Harry wasn’t so sure.

The wind was deafening, clawing madly at their clothes and biting at their faces. It was all they could do to just remain upright as the Auror’s Division fought to contain the nine deadly plagues Maul was hurling at them.

Outside the Dome, McGonagall led a small army of trusted Wizards and Witches against the onslaught of spreading plagues, screaming deflective curses and casting spells.

Harry shouted to his men, barking orders and words of encouragement. Hermione, who, against
Ron’s adamant wishes, had stayed to help, struggled against the swirling gusts to approach the Head Auror.

She lifted the heavy Sword of Godric Gryffindor and Harry solemnly accepted it. Hermione pointed to her wrist, her bushy hair whipping around her face, and Harry glanced at his watch.

They had fifteen minutes.

~*~

Five hours and forty-five minutes prior…

***

A jolt.

A pulling sensation against his skin, like something was trying to rip his flesh from his body.

And there.

Let me be quiet, so I can hear the whispering of the gods.

Allow me to be silent, so I can comprehend their thoughts.

A spasm of pain. Wraiths spat their venom, blocking the response. A tightening in his chest, his heart sped up, battling against the pressure.

Everything went a red so dark, it was nearly black. A drowning, thick color.

The Awful Daring of a Moment’s Surrender…

He stared at his reflection, the gilded mirror a massive thing that could crush him instantly. He knew it wouldn’t.

He stared and stared, wondering at the paradox of the unnatural and the familiar. His face was a stranger’s, but no, he knew this face very well.

Hair the color of frosted glass, pale and shimmering. Long locks of moon light cascading down his shoulders, pulled back to reveal a high, regal brow, smooth and impeccable.

Cold grey eyes the shade of an English dawn, thunderheads fat with rain and twice as dangerous. Silver, cruel lashes, a stark sweep of them against his pale, jutting cheeks.

A frowning, stern mouth below a straight nose. A pointed face. Harsh lines marred the corners of his mouth, and even harsher lines defined the angles of his jaw.


Unnatural.

Familiar.

It smelled like home here. The scent of fresh rain and beeswax. The cold still air scarred only by the shuffling feet of House Elves busy somewhere else in the Manor.

His frown deepened, and so did the lines surrounding it. He would have to chastise his servants later
for making such unnecessary noise.

“Draco wishes to become a Seeker.”

He turned. There, seated on a dark, plush sofa, candlelight washing over her features in an ethereal glow, was his wife. She gazed coolly back up at him.

A pale vision of cold beauty, like the whimpering flower buds of early spring encased in ice. Her eyes, dark and somber, her mouth, created purely for cruel, knowing smiles, and her hair, the color of dawn light, she sat there, her hands folded over one another.

“He only wishes to be a Seeker because he wants to compete with Potter,” he replied, his voice dead and harsh.

“Is that so terrible a thing?” she said, her voice schooled to seem disinterested, but he knew better.

“He will embarrass us,” he said, turning back to gaze at himself. “Our son is no athlete.”

“He knows this. He requested that you purchase new brooms for the Slytherin Quidditch team.”

He smiled. Clever.

Draco was a studious boy, but he knew the hearts of those surrounding him. At so young an age, he has already mastered the art of manipulation.

“He’s a fair flyer, Lucius,” she continued. “He may do well.”

“The Dark Lord will have no use for Quidditch players,” he retorted.

“The Dark Lord will have no use for those who cannot compete with Potter,” she countered. “We can arrange private lessons for Draco.”

He turned again, regarding his wife. Her dark, luminous eyes shone back at him with an unspoken challenge.

She adored him, that was no secret. But when it came to her son, she would only settle for the best.

He crossed the room with quick, purposeful strides and grabbed his wife’s arm roughly. She rose, uncomplaining and unnaturally silent. She didn’t utter a word as he shoved her violently against the wall nor did she make a sound as he pulled up her skirts and thrust himself painfully inside of her.

He saw a muscle tighten in her jaw and knew she was clenching her teeth as he rammed into her, over and over. She stared into his eyes, something swimming behind her dark gaze that was a mixture of terrible love and loathing.

He clutched at her throat, his slim fingers tightening dangerously, and still she was silent. Still, she stared. He felt the heat begin to build in his loins and she tightened her legs around his waist, steadying them both for what was to come.

A challenge.

He tightened his grip, he thrust harder. She was making noises now. She was trying to breathe.

A dare.

Her eyes misted over and his movements inside of her became jerky and erratic.
Unnatural and familiar.

Cruel. So utterly cruel.

His hand came away from her throat and he buried his face in her hair as he came. She sucked in a ragged breath.

The scent of fresh rain and beeswax nearly suffocated him. His home smelled like her hair.

He pulled out of her abruptly and refastened his trousers around his waist. He watched passively as she staggered against the wall, a limp thing that still managed to level him with her eyes.

“Fine,” he said. “Let our son become a Seeker.”

Then he swept from the room, away from the scent of rain and beeswax. Away from candlelight and his horrible reflection. Away from those terrible, loving, loathing eyes.

Away from her cruelty.

Away from his own.

A jolt.

A spasm of pain.

His hand pushed his head into the pillow, the man’s dark locks stark against the pale skin of his hand. He struggled beneath him, trying to summon his wand. He swatted it away.

He grasped his hip and pulled him up, thrusting his buttocks into the air, burying his face further into the pillow. He dug his hand into the soft flesh before him, kneading it roughly.

He managed to flip himself over. Green eyes glared murderously back up at him.

A jolt.

A spasm of pain.

He blinked. When his eyes refocused, those blazing green eyes were swimming in a sea of concern and worry. The man reached for him.

He wanted to vomit, nausea crawling up the back of his throat. What has he done? He scrambled away. Away from his concerned touch. A gesture he didn’t deserve.

A jolt.

His heart squeezed painfully.

He gazed at his reflection, the paradox becoming a realization. Anger replaced the confusion. Wrath boiled beneath his flashing grey eyes.

He reared his arm back and slammed his fist into the glass, shattering the image of his father.

Another jolt.

Another spasm.

~*~
Father Alt circled the screaming, possessed Wizard, shouting the rites over the howling wind Maul had summoned.


~*~

“The second Plague has arrived!” and Auror shouted.

Frogs swarmed around their feet, trying to trip them. They struggled to levitate them to the center, topmost area of the Dome.

Harry ran over to Ron, shouting something into his ear. Ron nodded and grasped Mackle’s wrist. “We will need reinforcements! Send word to Hogwarts! Tell her, ‘By the oath of the Order of the Phoenix—“

“I’ll go!” Snape shouted over the wind. “She’ll trust my word.”

Ron glanced over to Harry but the black-haired Auror was already nodding for their old Potions Master to go.

Snape clutched at the amulet around his neck and stepped from the Dome.

“Potter!” Heroth exclaimed. “Look! The blood is spreading!”

All eyes turned to the lake. Indeed it was. And so were the swarming frogs.

The frogs began jumping onto the Dome, blotting out the sunlight. “We need to get Aurors out there!” Ron shouted.

“Take fifty and secure Maul’s perimeter,” Harry shouted back. “Keep those damn things off the Dome!”

“Got it.”

~*~

Pansy was saying something to him. That accursed girl always had the incessant need to chatter when she felt something was bothering him.

He ignored her, and continued to walk, his pace quickening as the effort to keep from screaming against the pain began to be more than he could bear. His arm twitched, the burning in his Mark becoming more violent, and he clenched his fingers into a fist against it as it snaked up and down his arm.

“Mr. Malfoy, a moment with you, please.”

Dumbledore. He had not even heard him approach. His arm screamed in agony.

Pansy gave them a dubious look before sauntering off down an adjoined hall.

He stared expectantly at the Headmaster who gazed back him from behind half-moon spectacles. Finally, the Headmaster turned and he followed the old man back through the castle and up the winding staircase that led to his office.
The Headmaster offered him a seat. He opted to stand. Dumbledore smiled as if he had expected that.

"Your grades are wavering, Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore said in that deep voice of his. "Is there a particular reason?"

He wanted to scream. The pain in arm was relentless and the Headmaster he had sworn to kill was inquiring about his grades. The utter ridiculousness of the situation made his head swim.

"No, sir," he said, lying through his teeth.

"How are things at home?"

He stopped himself from glaring at the old man. "Fine."

"Fine?"

"Yes, fine."

Silence stretched out between them and the Headmaster seemed to be weighing his next words carefully. "If things aren’t as you make them seem, Mr. Malfoy, I hope that you would trust me with the truth."

"I’m sure you have better things to do with your time," he retorted harshly without completely thinking his words through.

Dumbledore smiled kindly. "As it would seem." The Headmaster paused. "I was hoping to make you Head Boy next year."

He had the utterly fantastic urge to laugh, but swallowed against his hysteria. "Thank you, sir. That would be an honor."

"Would it?" Dumbledore asked softly, allowing the question to hang in the air.

He stared back at the old man, anger and guilt clotting his throat. He didn’t want to do it. He really didn’t want to. But he had to.

He played with idea of killing him now. Maybe then, the burning would cease. Maybe then, he could get some much needed rest.

His wand felt heavy where it was tucked in his sleeve. So heavy. It wouldn’t take much. And if he failed, perhaps the old man would kill him and put him out of his misery.

"You look unwell, Mr. Malfoy."

"Do I?" Again, he had to swallow against his hysteria.

Again, the heavy silence. The piercing blue eyes seemed to see right through. He wondered if the old man already knew what was in store for him. It would be just like the old bastard to play with him like this.

"Perhaps I should go rest."

"Perhaps you should."

Whether it was actually a dismissal or not, he took it as one anyway. He left on shaking legs, down
the stairwell, through the castle, the urge to break into a run overwhelming.

Then he was there, in the bathroom. Moaning Myrtle hovered curiously over his shoulder as he stared at his reflection in a mirror.

His father’s disappointed gaze swam before his eyes. Voldemort’s threat rang through his mind. Dumbledore was the only one who could save his mother. Anger boiled in his chest and, with a shout, he slammed his fist into the mirror. The shattered glass cut into his knuckles, relieving, momentarily, the burning in his Dark Mark.

He bent down to retrieve a shard of the reflective glass, gripping it tightly and allowing it to cut easily into the flesh of his palm.

He burst into tears, sliding slowly down to the floor and rocking back and forth, gripping the glass harder and harder.

The burning returned with a vengeance and he rolled up his sleeve. He gazed at the Dark Mark for a moment, hot tears blurring the vision of a roiling snake pouring from a skull’s mouth. He gritted his teeth and put the glass against the Mark. Slowly, at first, he cut a line across the face of the skull, watching with morbid fascination as blood welled up, a new kind of pain muting out the steady burning.

He cut another line, and then another. And then another and another and another. Soon, he was slashing at the Dark Mark with a vengeance, his sobs ringing off the walls of the bathroom, until his arm was a bloody, ravaged wreck.

He dropped the glass and cradled his arm, rocking back and forth as his sobs quieted to mere whimpers. He took off his tie and wrapped it tightly around his bloody forearm, using his teeth to secure the tourniquet. After using his wand to clean up the mess, he leant his head against the tiled wall behind him, his free-falling tears slipping down his face like a relentless rain. He pulled down his sleeve to hide the makeshift bandage and gripped his arm, relishing in the dull throb of pain versus the horrible burning of Voldemort summoning his Death Eaters, languid in the aftermath of agony.

Moaning Myrtle sat beside him, a silent, cold presence at his shoulder and did not say a word.

Suddenly, a voice sounded a few feet from him. With an angry shout, he jumped to his feet, wand at the ready.

It was Harry Potter. Damn him.

A jolt.

A spasm of pain.

He lowered his wand, defeated by his conscience, and Dumbledore gazed back at him with that terrible, terrible kindness and compassion.

Suddenly, his godfather burst into the room, shoving him behind him, and shouting the Killing Curse at the Headmaster.

“No!” he shrieked.

But it was done, and he was falling. Falling, falling, falling.
Dazed, he registered an angry shout behind them. The thunderous sound of running footsteps. And then the lurch of being Disapparated.

A jolt.

His heart felt like it was going to explode.

“I need to find my mother!”

“The deed is done, Draco,” Snape replied wearily. “Voldemort has no reason to slay your mother.”

Could he really be that stupid? Or was he the only one who really and truly understood the Dark Lord? “The mission was mine,” he exclaimed. “I failed. Don’t you understand? My mother—“

An owl flew in holding a scrap of parchment. Snape snatched and read it with sharp, black eyes. Suddenly, his godfather paled.

“What?” he demanded. “What is it?”

“I’m so sorry, Draco.”

“Don’t you fuck with me, old man,” he growled dangerously.

“Your mother…your father was there. He watched Voldemort—“

”Noooooo!” he roared. Snape had to bodily restrain him from flooing to the Malfoy Manor.

He thrashed in his godfather’s grip, struggling with all his might. “Don’t be stupid, Draco,” his godfather was saying. “He’d kill you without even blinking. Don’t be stupid…”

Abruptly, he went limp in Snape’s arms and he crumpled to the floor like a heap of dirty laundry when his godfather released him. He sat there and stared at the floor for nearly half an hour before looking up again.

Snape, despite himself, flinched at the horrible look in his godson’s eyes.

“You must stay hidden,” his godfather said.

“I know,” came his dead, hollow reply.

A spasm of pain.

He Apparated to the funeral, knowing Lucius’ son would be there. He laughed as he saw him stooping low to kiss his mother’s brow.

How incredibly poignant.

“Hello, Draco,“ he said, a smirk curling his lips.

Flashing gray eyes glared up at him. “How dare you speak to me at my mother’s funeral, you illegitimate piece of Half-Blood filth?!“ the boy snarled.

No. No, I’m not him. Never him.

Laughter.

A jolt.
A spasm of pain.

And a vault of swirling blackness opened up beneath his feet.

~*~

Father Alt sprinkled holy water on the young man as he circled him, his voice becoming hoarse as he shouted the rites over the vengeful winds for the third time.

Again and again, he would shout them, until the deed was done.

“... Ergib dich, dadurch, ergib dich nicht mir selbst, sondern dem Gesandten des Herrn, Jesus Christus. Denn es ist die Macht Christi, die dich bezwangt, der, der dich durch sein Kreuz gestürzt hat. Zittere vor dem mächtigen Arm, der die dunklen Kerkerwände einriss und die Seelen ins Licht führte. Möge das Beben das diesen menschlichen Körper schüttelt, die Angst die dieses Abbild Gottes ergreif, auf dich übergehen...”

~*~

Lice, murrain, and boils.

For their part, most of the aiding members here from the Ministry of Magic were able to ward themselves from the worst of it. But Harry knew Ron and the other Aurors outside the Dome were having one hell of a time with the Muggles down at the resort.

They had sufficiently been able to quarantine them and were planning to Obliviate the Muggles when it was all over. However, when all was said and done, it was a right mess.

Inside the Dome, the swirling wind and raw power Maul was exuding along with His first five plagues was worsening and becoming stronger.

Already bone-weary, Harry shouted encouragement to his Aurors and braced himself for the next three hours.

~*~

He stumbled in the darkness, his hands outstretched as he ran, desperately trying to find his way out. His sins buffetted him, sounds and smells and touches of them coming from all around.

In the darkness, he could smell lavender and vanilla; and he could remember exactly how it felt to break Pansy Parkinson’s heart.

As his eyes searched the blackness, he could feel the bite of the thorny stem tearing into his palm as he prepared to smear his blood on the white rose; and he knew he was responsible for his mother’s death.

He could feel the glass dragging into his skin, permanently scarring his flesh where Voldemort’s Dark Mark once lay; and he knew he was responsible for Dumbledore’s death too.

He could hear every harsh word he had ever said, every manipulative comment, every racial slur.

He could feel the morning dew all around him the day he slew the Gatherer, Cruent Mantle, in cold blood, watching him writhe in agony before he murmured the Killing Curse.

He could sense war alive and bloody all around him as he pointed his wand at himself and prepared to destroy the very last of Voldemort’s Horcruxes.
Two murders.

One, he would ask forgiveness for. One, he yearned to be redeemed. One, he regretted.

The other...never.

He stumbled again.

Sinner. Sinner. Sinner.

---

“...Zittere und flieh, wo wir den Namen des Herrn anrufen, vor dem die Bewohner der Hölle sich niederkauern, dem die himmlischen Tugenden und Mächte und Herrschaften untertan sind, und den Cherubim und Seraphim preisen mit unendlichen Stimmen, wenn sie singen: Heilig, heilig, heilig, Herr Gott Zebaoth. Das fleischgewordene Wort befiehlt dir, der Sohn der Jungfrau befiehlt dir, Herr Jesus von Nazareth befiehlt dir...”

---

Abruptly, a massive, thunderous pounding began to ricochet off the walls of the nearly opaque Dome. Instinctually, Harry ducked, along with a dozen other Aurors, before Saith, clutching his medallion, entered the Dome and ran up to the Head Auror.

“Hail!” Saith yelled. “Hail the size of bludgers! They’re—“

Someone screamed. Harry looked up just in time to see an unnatural storm cloud form at the inner surface of the Dome, directly above the Maul-possessed Draco Malfoy. Suddenly, a flood of pouring, bludger-sized blocks of ice began raining down on them.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” Harry shrieked, narrowly catching the first wave and preventing them from being crushed. Immediately, every Wizard and Witch began following suit as wave after wave of pouring hail fell from the dark, swirling cloud at the top of the Dome.

Then, it got bad.

Massive burning boulders of fire came crashing down around them, causing his make-shift troops to scatter frantically. Maul’s radius of power was getting wider and the Auror’s Division was getting overwhelmed. Soon, Wizards and Witches were getting severely injured and were forced to Disapparate to St. Mungo’s.

“Where the hell is McGonagall?!” Harry roared to no one in particular as he worked to get his Aurors back under control, safe, and focused on the massive task at hand.

After an hour and a half, Harry’s blood ran cold as a blinding swarm of locusts fell from the storm cloud and circled Draco in a vortex of pestilence.

Maul’s horrible laughter rumbled like thunder, shaking the ground beneath their very feet, before the vortex of locusts expanded and shot outward towards the perimeter of the Dome.

“Merlin...” Harrybreathed as the heavy cloud of locusts sped towards him and his men.

---

Nobility isn’t about being better than others. It is about being better than you used to be.
He stopped running and became very still, listening to that voice that made absolutely no sound at all.

The Awful Daring of a Moment’s Surrender…

By This and This Only, We have Existed.

He smelled burning eggs and felt warm fingers caress his cheek.

He heard Harry’s deep throated laugh and could remember the sight of his wind-blown raven hair.

He felt the cold rain biting harshly into his exposed skin and the freezing mud between his toes. He lifted his face and began to twirl, spinning faster and faster.

“I forgive you.”

“I didn’t ask for your forgiveness, Auror.”

“I know.”

~*~

“... du magst die Menschen täuschen, aber Gott kannst du nicht spotten. Er ist es, der dich hinaustreibt, vor dessen Blick nichts verborgen ist. Er ist es, der dich zurückdrängt, dessen Macht alle Dinge untan sind. Es ist es, der dich verstoßen hat, der das ewigwährende Höllenfeuer bereitet hat, für dich und deine Engel, er, dessen Stimme kommen wird wie ein scharfes Schwert, der kommt zu richten die Lebenden und die Toten und die ganze Welt mit Feuer...”

~*~

It was becoming as black as night. Harry didn’t have to look up to know the moon was beginning to blot out the sun.

The ninth Plague. The Plague of Darkness.

The Dome was beginning to crack.

Headmistress McGonagall had arrived.

Harry gritted his teeth.

~*~

He gazed at his reflection, knowing that the gilded mirror could crush him instantly, but he didn’t care. He knew it wouldn’t.

His father glared back at him with disapproving, bright grey eyes. He reached out and touched the glass, a sorrow welling up inside of him he couldn’t suppress.

“I forgive you,” he said to the mirror, to the glass, to his reflection…to his father.

His father sneered back at him, his contempt flashing dangerously in those sharp grey eyes that were so like his own. “I didn’t ask for your forgiveness, boy.”

“I know,” he murmured. “But sometimes...sometimes...”
“Ich treibe dich aus, du unreiner Geist, gemeinsam mit der teuflischen Macht des Feindes, jedem Gespenst der Hölle und allen deinen üblen Gefährten; im Namen des Herrn Jesus Christus. Weiche und halte dich fern von diesem Geschöpf Gottes.”

Hermione handed Harry the sword of Godric Gryffindor, her bushy hair whipping around her face, and tapped at her wrist.

There was no sense in trying to speak now. Maul’s wrath was too loud.

Harry glanced at his watch. Fifteen minutes.

Harry tightened his grip on the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, familiarizing himself with its weight.

He stared at his reflection, knowing his father didn’t deserve his explanation, knowing that he would never understand. Nor would he care.

Lucius Malfoy would burn for eternity for his sins.

But that didn’t mean he had to. “But sometimes it is good…”

The Awful Daring…

He closed his eyes and smelled the scent of fresh rain and beeswax. “Sometimes it is good to forgive, even if it is not requested.”

Of a Moment’s Surrender…

He opened his eyes and saw his reflection.

Sharp gray eyes, mocking, slender brows, and a cruel, pale mouth set in a pointed face surrounded by hair the color of frosted glass. His bangs fell forward to dust shyly over his eyes and he found the strength to smile.

His face. Not his father’s.

The scent of fresh rain and beeswax engulfed him.

The exorcist sucked in a deep breath, knowing that the time was near. He raised his hand to the heavens.

“Denn er ist es, der dir befiehlt, der dich kopfüber aus den Höhen des Himmels in die Tiefen der Hölle stieß.”

Five minutes.

Four.
Three minutes.

Five Aurors stood around Harry, shielding him from the onslaught of plagues so the Head Auror could get a moment’s rest before the Inversion Enchantratem activated.

Harry shifted his weight from one foot to the other, his grip on the Sword of Godric Gryffindor firm and steady. His face was set and serious, his gaze focused intently on the center of the Dome where Maul, wearing Draco Malfoy’s face, screamed and writhed relentlessly.

Two minutes.

Sixty seconds.

~*~

*Fresh rain and beeswax. He searched the darkness, knowing that scent better than the back of his own hand.*

“Mother?”

Let me be silent…

Allow me to be quiet…

~*~

Father Alt, having backed away to the safety of the perimeter of the Dome, watched intently and muttered prayers under his breath as Maul suddenly stilled, his mouth forming a large O in a silent scream.

~*~

Harry sucked in a breath and held it.

The madness of Maul’s nine deadly Plagues suddenly slowed.

Then, in a flash of brilliant white, every pestilence, every block of hail, and even the very darkness that surrounded them, was sucked towards the center of the Dome. A clap of thunder shook the very earth beneath their feet and an agonizing scream rang through the air and, suddenly, the entire world seemed to shift.

And then, Draco Malfoy’s magic exploded.

~*~

“One!”

~*~

Translations:

...Weiche nun, im Namen des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes. Mach Platz für den Heiligen Geist durch dieses Zeichen des Heiligen Kreuzes unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, der lebt und herrscht in Einheit mit dem Vater und dem Heiligen Geist in alle Ewigkeit...
... Ergib dich, dadurch, ergib dich nicht mir selbst, sondern dem Gesandten des Herrn, Jesus Christus. Denn es ist die Macht Christi, die dich bezwingt, der, der dich durch sein Kreuz gestürzt hat. Zittere vor dem mächtigen Arm, der die dunklen Kerkerwände einriss und die Seele ins Licht führte. Möge das Beben das diesen menschlichen Körper schüttelt, die Angst die dieses Abbild Gottes ergreift, auf dich übergehen...

...Zittere und flieh, wo wir den Namen des Herrn anrufen, vor dem die Bewohner der Hölle sich niederkaufen, dem die himmlischen Tugenden und Mächte und Herrschaften untertan sind, und den Cherubim und Seraphim preisen mit unendlichen Stimmen, wenn sie singen: Heilig, heilig, heilig, Herr Gott Zebaoth. Das fleischgewordene Wort befehlt dir, der Sohn der Jungfrau befehlt dir, Herr Jesus von Nazareth befehlt dir...

... du magst die Menschen täuschen, aber Gott kannst du nicht spotten. Er ist es, der dich hinaustreibt, vor dessen Blick nichts verborgen ist. Er ist es, der dich zurückdrängt, dessen Macht alle Dinge untertan sind. Es ist es, der dich verstoßen hat, der das ewigwährende Höllenfeuer bereitet hat, für dich und deine Engel, er, dessen Stimme kommen wird wie ein scharfes Schwert, der kommt zu richten die Lebenden und die Toten und die ganze Welt mit Feuer...

Ich treibe dich aus, du unreiner Geist, gemeinsam mit der teuflischen Macht des Feindes, jedem Gespenst der Hölle und allen deinen üblen Geführten; im Namen des Herrn Jesus Christus. Weiche und halte dich fern von diesem Geschöpf Gottes. (German) Means “I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every Satanic power of the enemy, every spectre from hell, and all your fell companions; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Begone and stay far from this creature of God.”

Denn er ist es, der dir befehlt, der dich kopfüber aus den Höhen des Himmels in die Tiefen der Hölle stieß. (German) Means “For it is He who commands you, He who flung you headlong from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell.”
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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~One, Two, Seven, Six~

“Three years?” Draco asked suddenly. “What do you mean?”

“Potter didn’t tell you?” Snape asked. “You were in some kind of coma for three years after the Eve Battle.”

“What was the exact number of days?”

“Pardon?”

“The exact number of days, Godfather.”

Snape thought for a moment. “I believe…One thousand, two hundred, and…seventy six days.”


“What is?”

“That is how long I was gone making the VCE Elixir.”

Snape shook his head. “No, it takes four years and nine months to make the—“

“You really think I would sit there by a cauldron for the entirety of nearly five years, Godfather?”

“I see.”

Draco rested his chin in his hand. “One, two, seven, six…I wonder if that has any merit.” ~ Not Quite Paradise

“When all stellar energy sources are exhausted, the interior of a star will undergo a gravitational collapse. In this sense a star is a “temporary” equilibrium state between a gravitational collapse at stellar birth and a gravitational collapse at stellar death.” ~Astronomical Physics
The Dome…

At the center of the Dome, Draco hovered, surrounded by spheres of his magic. His eyes glowed an eerie yellow, his mouth was slack and slightly open, and his head was thrown back, hair like shimmering moonlight askew and brushing against his shoulders. The outer sphere was a cocoon of red and gold crackling energy and the inner sphere spiked with a myriad of blue and green sparkling lights.

And a dark shadow hovered over Draco Malfoy’s upright and levitating form, near the edge of the outer sphere.

“There He is…” someone to Harry’s left breathed.

Harry focused on the dark blot within the red and gold crackling sphere of raw power and began to calculate how long his Shield would be able to protect him while he sought out and fought the demon Tulpa. The awful smell of ash and burning coal hung in the air as Ron struggled to make his way to Harry’s side.

“Harry,” Ron murmured, finally coming close enough to place a hand on his partner’s shoulder. “We have a lot of injured.”

Harry continued to focus on Malfoy and his state of temporary equilibrium between Wizard and Muggle, Possessed and Freed, but tilted his face towards Ron to let his partner know he was listening.

The Aurors parted before the two, making way for Father Alt, who approached with swift, purposeful strides. “Jungzauberer,” he said to the young, black-haired Auror. “None of these people need to be here. They should go.”

*That’s a lot of people Maul could hurt wearing my face,* Draco had said.

Harry nodded. “Ron,” he said in a low voice. “I want you to make the Dome transparent so you can monitor what’s going on. Every Wizard who can still stand needs to surround the Dome; I want a wall of Wizards acting as the perimeter now. Only Alt will remain within.”

“And if something should go wrong?” Ron murmured.

“I trust your judgment,” Harry answered evasively. Harry looked over at him then and spoke to his best mate with his eyes, as they had always done, ever since they were young. At long last, Ron nodded.

“Consider it done,” Ron said in a hard voice.

Harry nodded back, the gaze they exchanged, the very epitome of severity. Harry glanced at Hermione, who was worrying her lower lip with her teeth. He placed a finger tenderly under her chin. “Chin up,” he said, and forced a smile. For Hermione Granger, Harry would always be able to force a smile. Hermione forced a smile as well and handed him her wand. Gratefully, he accepted it.

“Alright people!” Ron shouted. “You heard him. That was an order, not a suggestion! Let’s go!”

Quickly, the remaining Aurors and able-bodied Wizards and Witches jerked at their amulets and exited the Dome, until only Harry and the exorcist, Father Ernst Alt, remained. Together, they gazed towards the center of the Dome.
Harry Potter couldn’t give half a shit about any of it. The only thing that kept his adrenaline high and his focus steady was getting Draco Malfoy out of this God forsaken Dome alive. That was why his lungs worked in that steady rhythm, that was why his hand did not shake as it gripped the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, and that was the only reason why he did not favor the exorcist with a long-suffering look as the priest laid one hand on his head and the other on the center of his chest, muttering some ancient blessing in his Germanic native tongue.

“Amen,” Father Alt finished, removing his hands and stepping away.

Strangely, Harry felt a strange lifting in his body, as if a large weight had been taken off his shoulders. He straightened, gripped the Sword ever tighter, and walked steadily toward the outer sphere.

~*~

Ron grabbed Hermione’s arm after he had made adjustments to the Dome Shield and formed ranks among the able-bodied Wizards and Witches still able to help in Malfoy’s exorcism. Ron favored her with the strangest look Hermione had ever seen. There was something wild there, something fiercely protective and loving. Abruptly, Ron crushed her to him and kissed her long and hard.

“You don’t have to be here,” Ron said roughly as he released her from the bruising kiss. “Is there any way I can convince you to go back to the Ministry?”

However, Ron recognized the stubborn set of her jaw and the defiance in her eyes before he heard her answer. “No, love. I’m staying. There have always been three of us, and there always will be. Until the wheels fall off, Ron. And they haven’t fallen off yet.”

He made a noise in the back of his throat, something close to a growl, before pulling her into another rough kiss. Only, this time, Hermione kissed him back. “I love you,” he whispered against her mouth. “I love you,” she whispered back.

And then Ron was gone, barking orders to the men and women who were surrounding the large Dome, shoulder to shoulder, and heading in McGonagall’s direction.

Hermione took in a deep breath, steadying herself against an onslaught of unexpected emotions. Love for her fiancée, concern for Harry, and much, much more.

Harry was going into Malfoy’s magic again to face a demon. Voldemort had likened himself one, but Maul actually was one.

Hermione hoped against hope that all their preparations would be enough to get everyone out alive.

~*~

The Ministry of Magic…
Cell Block D…
***

Maximus Cure opened his eyes slightly, only mildly interested as he heard a surprised yelp and then a loud thud outside of the door that acted as the entrance to his Cell Block. He remained still on his cot even when he heard the door groan open and a person step softly inside. He remained still even as the intruder approached the cell that confined him.

“Up with you,” a cultured English voice drawled. “It’s time to go.”
Cure smiled, in spite of himself. “Wherefore art thou here, Wizard?”

Blaise Zabini rolled his eyes, muttering advanced disarming spells under his breath to break the locks trapping the wily outlaw. “Why do you think? Every Wizard and Witch worth their salt is at the Dome aiding the exorcism right now. Security is slim. Do you want out or not?”

Cure sat up and swung his legs over the side of his cot, jumping nimbly to his feet. He stretched with a mighty yawn and grinned again. “Now is as good a time as any, I s’ppose. Get m’out!”

Zabini laughed, startling Cure, who froze and peered up at him with bright hazel eyes.

“You should do that more often,” Cure said, a thoughtful look playing across his features.

“What?” Zabini asked, opening the cell and stepping to one side to let the eccentric genius through.


Zabini frowned. “I’ll laugh when we’re pardoned.”

“You think breaking me out of the Ministry of Magic is going to get you pardoned?” Cure scoffed in disbelief.

Blaise made a face. “You can stay here, if you like.”

“No, no, I’m coming.”

Zabini handed him a pair of shoes, some robes, and was quiet as Cure slipped them on. “Do you think he’ll make it?”

Cure glanced up at him, a sudden seriousness darkening his hazel eyes. “I don’t know,” he answered honestly.

Zabini chewed at his lip for a moment. Cure placed a hand on Blaise’s shoulder. “Everything turns out as it should,” Cure murmured. “How could it not? If it is the end result.”

Zabini gazed back at him with pained, golden eyes, a weariness there they both shared, if one looked hard enough.

“You did what you thought was right, to protect your friend’s soul,” Cure murmured. “To save him from a worse fate. You’ve done all you can. The rest…the rest is not ours to dictate.”

Zabini swallowed and looked away. “I know.” He took in a deep breath. “I just wish I could’ve… that I could’ve done more.”

Cure smiled gently. “And so does the stone that resides in the center of the mountain.”

Zabini exhaled slowly and nodded, offering Maximus Cure one of his easy, seductive smiles, all white teeth and crinkling golden eyes. “Let’s go, then. This stone doesn’t want to be here when the mountain returns.”

Cure laughed.

~*~

The Dome…

***
Distantly, Harry registered the sound of Ron’s shouting voice being muted out from the raw energy crackling and spiking around the wall of the outer sphere. He sheathed the Sword of Godric Gryffindor in his belt before taking out he and Hermione’s wands. He placed the tip of one wand above his head and slightly to the right, and the other slightly to his left. Slowly, muttering the Shield Charm, he brought the tips of the wands together, forming a white hot line with the condensed and stretched energy field. Quickly, he pushed into the weakened spot.

Immediately, Harry was enveloped in an oppressive heat as his Shield attempted to protect him from Malfoy’s exploding, roiling magic. He took a step, pressing forward, and then another.

He heard a cackle of laughter which ended in a horrible hiss. Harry took another step.

And screamed.

Blinding pain raked down his chest and he doubled over, coughing up blood as his hands went immediately to the bloody gashes in his chest. Harry sucked in a breath, his eyes going wide as agony erupted across his shoulder blades and up and down his spine. He doubled backwards as the sensation of five sharp knives dragged themselves down the flesh of his back. Something shoved him from behind and he fell to his knees.

He couldn’t see, whether it was the dreadful pain, the oppressive heat, or the roiling, deadly magic that engulfed him and blurred his vision with hot tears, he couldn’t be sure. He reached for the Sword of Godric Gryffindor, gasping as fire exploded up and down the length of his ravaged torso, and pulled it from his belt. He pressed the tip of the blade into whatever hard surface he knelt upon and used it to aid him in getting his feet under him. He coughed again, spitting up blood.

The thunderous, purely evil laughter sounded again, somewhere to his right. Harry swung hard with the Sword, and hit nothing but air. The momentum twisted him around, stretching his torn flesh. He loosed a shout, staggering forward wildly.

Maul laughed again.

~*~

“Granger, a word with you.”

Hermione turned away from the Dome, where she and two dozen other Witches and Wizards watched as a dark blur moved within Malfoy’s outer sphere. Whether it was Maul or Harry Potter, no one could be certain. Father Alt circled the outer sphere, his eyes on the spectacle within and seemed to be whispering prayers in a low voice.

Hermione saw Severus Snape approaching her, a worried look marring the usually disdainful expression in his black eyes. “Professor Snape,” Hermione Granger greeted tentatively, stepping away from the Dome so they could speak privately. “How can I help you?”

“Why did you give Potter your wand?” Snape inquired in a quiet voice, his beady black eyes still trained on the inner part of the Dome.

“Because, in America, Harry needed both our wands to get into Malfoy’s outer sphere,” Hermione answered steadily. “Why? What’s this about?”

Snape looked at her then. “Something has been bothering me. When I told Draco of his coma following the three years of the conclusion of the Eve Battle, my godson had asked the exact number of days…”
Hermione’s face scrunched up unbecomingly as she did the math in her head. “One thousand, two hundred and seventy…six days? Is that right?”

“Yes,” Snape said, taking a step closer and lowering his voice. “My godson then claimed that that was the exact number of days he was in China brewing the VCE Elixir.”

Hermione looked perplexed. “One, two, seven, six…Snape, these days, I don’t much believe in coincidences…”

Snape nodded. “Yes…I saw you hand him your wand and—“

“One Prophecy, two wands—“

“Seven Keys…” Snape nodded again.

“What is ‘six’?” Hermione breathed, her eyes widening.

Snape ran a hand through his oily hair. “I don’t know.”

~*~

“You cannot protect him,” a voice whispered through the hazy heat.

Harry swung the Sword again, biting his lip as the movement sent wave after wave of agony shuddering through his body—and stopped short when he thought he recognized the voice.

“Malfoy?” Harry called out, reaching in front of him with one hand. “Draco?” Was he hearing Draco’s memories like the last time? Was he close to the inner sphere?

“You love him,” the voice spat again, teasing in its wickedness. “Everyone you love and seek to protect dies. You will fail.”

Harry froze.

Sirius Black stood in front of him and smiled. Suddenly, a woman screamed “Avada Kedavra!” and a spasm of green light shot through his godfather’s body. Harry gaped as a stunned looke froze Sirius Black’s handsome features and he fell, bonelessly and very, very dead.

Harry choked back a sob and nearly dropped the Sword of Godric Gryffindor in an attempt to reach out to his godfather as he began to collapse. He nearly touched him, but as his fingers swept forward, the image blurred and disappeared in a cloud of swirling dust.

“You will fail.”

“Where are you, Maul!?” Harry screamed. “Where are you!?”

“You are responsible for Dumbledore’s death,” a voice whispered in his ear, a voice that sounded so much like Draco’s. Harry whirled, but nothing was there.

The heat was oppressive but his valiant Shield Charm protected him from Malfoy’s dangerous magic. Tears continued to blur his vision. He could barely see anything at all.

“You are a burden,” the voice whispered again. “To your friends, your colleagues; even the Ministry of Magic finds you nothing more than a nuisance.”

“No…”
“Oh, yes.” A laugh. A hiss. “No one can love you, Harry Potter. No one. They will always leave you when they find out what you truly are.”

Harry bit his lip, the heat becoming unbearable. Yet, somehow, that had nothing to do with the tightening in his chest.

“Ginny, Cruent, even Draco, once he is through with you…”

Harry shook his head, refusing to believe it. Yet, how often had he thought these things himself? How often had he glanced at Draco and wondered how long it was going to last after Malfoy no longer needed his protection? How often had he watched people he cared about leave him for something better?

A hand settled on his shoulder, cool and unthreatening. Harry flinched but did not turn, his head lowering as if he was under some kind of spell, the Sword of Godric Gryffindor going slack in his hand, his Shield Charm beginning to waver.

“You parents,” the voice whispered lovingly, “would be alive if it were not for you.”

A sob caught in his throat and he lifted his head, turning his face to see the owner of the voice as a tear slid down his cheek. Draco Malfoy smiled pleasantly back at him, solid black eyes gleaming.

“You know it is true,” He said.

“Draco?” Harry backed away from Him, feeling his blood run cold. “No…”

He smiled again, white teeth flashing dangerously. “Oh, yes.”

“Draco, snap out of it!” Harry ordered, narrowing his eyes and taking a step forward. He tightened his grip on the Sword of Godric Gryffindor.

The face of Draco Malfoy looked surprised. “You wouldn’t kill me, would you, Harry? Not after everything!”

Harry paused, feeling uncertain.

“After everything you said,” He continued in Draco’s voice. “You wouldn’t hurt me, would you? You said you loved me.”

Harry lowered the Sword. “I do…”

Harry closed his eyes, feeling a tingling sensation where his Scar used be. Something nudged into his mind, something whispered against his soul. He sought after it, straining to hear what the whispers said.

Remember…

What?

I can’t…

Remember me…

Harry leaned closer, strained harder. The heat surrounding pressed painfully against his torn chest, burning the open, bleeding gashes there.
His eyes shot open, a blaze of emerald green. Maul gazed back at him, watching to see if His Six Lies had worked on the Eighth Key.

…whatever you do, don’t you believe He’s me…

Harry raised the Sword of Godric Gryffindor and, with a shout, attacked Maul with all his might. He brought the sharp blade down, the Gryffindor weapon striking true, and cut into the pale flesh between Draco’s neck and shoulder, dragging the sword through skin and bone and grimacing as Maul, wearing Draco Malfoy’s face, wailed miserably under the crushing blade. Bones crunched and blood sprayed; and Harry withdrew the Sword and prepared for a second blow.

Draco’s features morphed into a terrible, mutated expression of utter wrath as the Sword of Godric Gryffindor pierced deep into His shoulder. The hot metal burned His demon flesh like it was forged in Hell itself. Maul broke His claws free of their human-fleshed confines in a spray of black blood and rammed them into the Eighth Key’s chest, aiming for his heart, as the Wizard plunged the Sword of Godric Gryffindor into Him a third time.

Harry screamed, his anger more powerful than the sea of pain that flooded his senses and pushed. He took one step, then two, and with a shout, flung Maul from him with all his might, feeling every tissue, organ, and bone Maul clung to rip from his torso as his chest cavity tore open…

And then there was nothing but blackness.

~*~

In a cloud of dense black, spraying bits of blood, bone, and tissue in its wake, Maul was thrown from the outer sphere, flew across the field, and slammed against one thick, magicked wall of the Dome. The Dome shuddered, but held firm.

Father Alt’s voice rose to a mighty shout as bits of gore rained down upon him, binding the Black Tulpa and reciting the powerful words that would cast Him back down to the depths of Hell.

A massive scream erupted from the heavy, black mist as it spread across the roof of the Dome, searching for an outlet, the wailing like the sound of a million mothers grieving for the deaths of their newborns, the shouting like the clap of a wrathful deity stamping his foot upon a thunderbolt.

And then, in a flash of brilliant white, the very air seemed to shudder as the ground trembled and the black, dense cloud of pure evil, Maul, the Black Tulpa, Son of Lucifer, dissipated into nothingness.

~*~

Gasps rippled through the Witches and Wizards situated on the outer perimeter of the Dome. Someone screamed.

It was Hermione.

She ran, jerking at the amulet around her throat, her eyes wide with terror, as she hurled herself into the Dome, Ron, Snape and McGonagall hot on her heels.

"What is that?!” she shrieked, gesturing wildly at the gore that was spattered all over the priest and the dewy grass outside Malfoy’s outer sphere of magic, which still crackled with powerful and raw
red and gold magic as Ron grabbed her about the waist and tried to restrain her. “Harry!” she wailed, tears streaming down her face.

Trembling, Father Alt met Ron’s gaze, a sorrow there that said it all.

It wasn’t Maul’s blood. It was human. And Draco Malfoy was still entranced under the potion of the Inversion Enchantatem. Soon, Malfoy’s magic would implode.

McGonagall gasped and Snape wrapped an arm around her shaking, bony shoulders as the implications became too much to bear.

”No…” Hermione breathed, squirming in Ron’s grip to look up into the terrible, shocked expression twisting his features. “No, Ron…we can’t…”

Ron made a strangled noise and gripped her tighter. “Malfoy’s about to make a crater of this place and with no one to bring him out of it…”

“Harry’s still in there!” Hermione shrieked. “He’s still…”

“’Mione,” Ron said, his voice cracking. “Harry’s—“

“Don’t you say it!” she screamed, punching him in the chest. ”Don’t you say it!!”

“Weasley!” Snape suddenly shouted, pointing at Malfoy’s inner, blue-green sphere of magic. ”Look!”

There in the center of Malfoy’s state of temporary equilibrium, the figure of the Slytherin Prince’s levitating form flickered once. Then twice.

And then disappeared.

~*~

To be continued….~*~
Author's notes: Draco Malfoy loses his memory after the battle that destroyed the Dark Lord for good and Harry Potter finds himself protecting the Malfoy heir from renegade Death Eaters who would see him dead for his actions against Voldemort. Then, their world spirals out of control when an unforeseen Prophecy begins the countdown for the End of Days.

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A/N: This chapter was designed to have two time continuums going on at the same time. I hop back and forth between them so you get a sense that real time is going a lot faster than "Limbo" time. I hope this prevents any "Technically, Harry should be dead by now" comments, lol.

The final chapter will be up shortly and in a few days, I'll whip up an Epilogue if you ask nicely enough. *wink, wink...nudge, nudge*

Enjoy.

~Lullaby~

*My precious one…
My tiny one…
Lay down your pretty head…

The scent of fresh rain and beeswax.
The scent of home. The scent of her hair.
The scent of his mother.

Draco closed his eyes and smiled as he was wrapped in her cool, comforting embrace.

*My dearest one…
My sleepy one…
Its time to go to bed…

“Mother…” he sighed.

“Draco,” she murmured. “How I have missed you…”

“Is this Heaven?”

“No, my dearest. Not Heaven. You are not yet dead.”

~*~
“Where did he go?!” Ron demanded to no one in particular. “Where is he?”

Malfoy had disappeared, yet his spheres of magic remained in the center of the Dome, pulsing madly. They walked around the sphere, and doubled back. They could see a dark shadow near the ground within the outer sphere, but they could not distinguish who or what, exactly, it was.

Hermione was convinced it was Harry. Twice, now, they had to restrain her from marching into the outer sphere to retrieve him, knowing it would be too dangerous.

“I don’t understand,” Ron continued. “Malfoy’s memories were what held his magic together last time, right? How are the spheres stable if he’s gone? Hermione?!?”

“I don’t know…” she whispered, her gaze fixed intently on the dark shadow within the outer sphere.

“Priest?!”

Father Alt shook his head, at a loss for words.

”Anyone?!”

The spheres’ pulsing began to push outward, sending out a shockwave of raw energy.

“I want everyone out of the Dome now,” Ron ordered, his eyes going wide as his magic charged up a shield to protect him and his fiancée from the shockwave. “Right now!”

“Harry’s still in there!” Hermione protested.

“NOW!”

~*~

My precious one…
My darling one…
Don’t let your lashes sweep…

Draco stirred in his mother’s arms, the dreamy, sleepy state he had drifted into interrupted by the sound of someone crying. “Who is that?”

“Lily,” his mother replied in a sad voice. “She weeps for her son. She does not wish for him to pass on.”

“Who is her son?”

“Would you like to see?” Narcissa Malfoy, as cold and beautiful as the dawn in early spring, gently took her son’s hand and led him away.

Draco, for first time since he had arrived at this place, looked around as his mother showed him the way towards the sobbing woman. Everything was a brilliant, blinding white. The white stretched on and on, until Draco felt they were in nothingness, walking on nothingness, and traveling into nothingness…

The weeping became louder. His mother paused and stepped to one side.

There, kneeling in the white nothingness, was an auburn-haired woman crouched over a body, rocking back and forth, her hands covered face. Draco stepped closer.
My cherished one…
My weary one…
Its time to go to sleep…

The body was that of a young man, the blood pouring from his gaping chest a stark splash of red against the pale pallor of his torn flesh.

Draco gasped, able to see the large muscle of his heart beating a frighteningly slow rhythm. The man’s lips were parted, red frothing in the corners and dribbling down the sides of his face.

The man had a shock of tousled black hair and his eyelids were open just enough for Draco to see the magnificent green hue of his eyes. Not a tamed or infected green; but a true green. Bright, and pure, and wild…and dangerously unfocused.

Draco tore his gaze away from the man’s pale, beautiful face and glanced at the sword that lay slack in the man’s grip.

“Mother, who is this man?”

Narcissa turned her luminous, dark gaze and settled it on her son. “You don’t know?”

The weeping woman quieted and peered up at them with her watery gaze. Draco looked down into her tear-stained face and was startled to see the young man’s striking green eyes in his mother’s face as well.

“Why is he dying?” Draco breathed. “What happened here?”

Narcissa ran a tendril of her son’s milky hair between her slender fingers. “He fought a demon on your behalf, my son. He is dying for you.”

Just bow your head…
And give your cares to me…

Draco’s eyes widened, the knowledge marring the illusion of innocence shining in his pale gray eyes. “Why would he do such a thing?”

Narcissa watched a look of horror flicker across her son’s pointed features as he looked back at the ravaged body. The large muscle continued to beat, a rhythm that was steadily slowing.

“Because he loves you,” Narcissa answered, touching her son’s cheek tenderly.

Just close your eyes…
And fall into the sweetest dream…

~*~

“What’s happening, Weasley?” Minister Scrimgeour asked the second they emerged from the Dome.

“Malfoy’s disappeared,” Ron replied in a rushed voice as Aurors gathered around. “There’s blood everywhere and no sign of Potter. The spheres are becoming erratic.”

“Are they preparing to implode?” the Minister demanded.

Ron glanced at his dazed fiancée and looked back at the Minister. “Yes. Just like the last time.”

Scrimgeour swore under his breath. “And no sign of Potter? We have to get these people out of here.
Will the Dome contain the implosion?"

Ron turned to Anin, who had appeared at the Head Auror’s shoulder, one hand pressing against a bleeding wound in his side, and exchanged words with the older Auror. When Ron turned back to the Minister, his face was drawn and pale. “Most of it,” Ron answered finally. “But the Dome was not designed to hold that kind of magic. It is likely it will collapse.”

Scrimgeour swore again. “And Draco Malfoy…?” The question hung thick in the air between them. Hermione stifled a sob.

Ron bit his lip. “Without Harry to calm him, his magic will implode, Minister. And while the Inversion Enchantratem was not likely to kill Malfoy—“

“If the Dome collapses—“ Hermione murmured.

“And it will,” Anin interjected.

“It will crush Malfoy?” Minister Scrimgeour asked, his hands clenching and unclenching.

“And Harry,” Ron said, heaving his shoulders heavily. “Yes, Minister. Most assuredly.”

Scrimgeour swore a third time. “And what was your and Potter’s plan should this have happened?” he demanded.

Ron swallowed past a lump in his throat. They had discussed, he and Harry, what Ron was expected to do should Harry fail to aid Draco back to normalcy.

“Let it,” Ron answered, his voice cracking, and he despised himself. No real friend would have allowed Harry to walk in there to face that demon alone.

*There have always been three of use and there always will be.*

But Harry had insisted…and when Harry Potter was intent on doing something alone, there was nothing anyone would be able to do or say to sway him. Never had been.

“Let the Dome collapse around them,” Ron repeated, avoiding the look Hermione was shooting at him. “The rest we can handle individually. I’m sending these people home—“

“I’m staying.” That was Hermione.

“I will stay as well,” Severus Snape informed them, his voice thicker than it usually was as he tried to remain outwardly calm despite the swell of anger and grief at the notion of having to watch his godson die a second time.

“As will I,” Headmistress McGonagall added, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

Ron nodded, a small, emotional jerk of his chin, nothing more. “Fine. The rest—“

“I would like to remain, young magician.” Father Alt looked down into Ron’s freckled face. “The rites are still incomplete. I must bless the freed to make certain the demon does not return to inhabit the body.”

Ron laughed bitterly. “Do as you like, priest.”

“Weasley,” Minister Scrimgeour began. “Is there no way to save—“
“Maul has been exorcised!” Ron all but shouted at the Minister. “Isn’t that what you wanted? According to the Ministry, today was a complete success. You can go, Minister.”

Scrimgeour frowned at the young man, only able to guess at the torrent of bitterness that the Head Auror was contending with right now. “Despite what you may think, Auror, I had hoped that—”

Ron laughed again, running a hand roughly through his red hair. “Forgive my rudeness, Minister. But please, please, just go.”

Minister Scrimgeour regarded him thoughtfully for a moment. “The Ministry will retreat to a safe distance, Auror. But we will remain, should you need us.”

In spite of himself, Ron was grateful for that. It meant that the outcome of the next few minutes actually meant something to the Ministry. It meant that Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy were not mere collateral damage to them.

And that they all still hoped they were still alive.

~*~

The auburn-haired woman gasped, staring at Draco’s face. Her eyes widened with surprise and she quickly glanced down at her son, and then back up the pale, pointed man before her. She reached out and tugged on Draco’s hands, urging him to kneel.

Draco knelt, looking bewildered.

She reached out and traced the lightening bolt scar on his forehead with one finger before exchanging a long look with his mother. Narcissa closed her eyes to hide the sudden pain that shone there.


Draco sent his mother a startled glance. “How?”

“But you would have to go back.”

“Back?”

“Back from whence you came, precious. Back to the world of the living.”

Draco reached out for the dying man’s pale hand, but snatched his arm back abruptly. “Can I return here after it is done?”

“No, my love. Not for many, many years.”

Suddenly, Draco stood, shaking his head. “Then I will remain. I want to stay with you.” Where it smells like fresh rain and beeswax. Where it smells like home. Where it is safe and warm and brilliantly white.

The auburn-haired woman burst into tears.

“Why do you weep, woman?” Draco inquired, placing a hand on her soft hair. “He will be here soon. He will not bleed forever.” But she continued to cry, resuming her crouch over her dying son, rocking back and forth.

“It is not his time,” Narcissa whispered, wrapping her arms about her son. “She weeps because his
life was shortened."

‘*Cause in my loving arms…
You’re safe as you’ll ever be…

Draco stirred in her arms, fighting against the dreamy spell that accompanied her embrace without pausing to wonder why. “Because of me?”

“Because he fought to save your soul.”

“Because he loved me?”

“Yes.”

Draco was thoughtful for a moment. “Did I love him?”

“Very much.”

Draco looked perplexed. “Truly?”

Narcissa nodded. “Oh, yes, my heart. You would have given him the world had you had it at your disposal.”

“Was I a giving person, back where I came from?”

Narcissa smiled. “No.”

*So hush, my dear, and sleep…*

Draco looked at the man again, noticing that he could only barely hear his heart beat. “If I can save him, can I save you too? Can you come with me?”

“No, precious. I have been dead for many years.”

“No…” Draco abruptly pulled away from her.

“Yes, my love. My time is done. I belong here now.”

“But I am not dead?”

“No, you are not.”

Draco bit his lip. “I must go back, mother.”

Narcissa nodded solemnly, her eyes grave and sorrowful. “I will miss you.”

Draco approached the sobbing woman once more and laid his hand upon her shoulder as he knelt beside her. “Lily?”

Her sobs quieted and she looked over at him, her brilliant green eyes daring to hope.

“I cannot give your son the world,” he whispered to her. “But I will take him back to it.”

~*~

“Can you hear that?” Snape hissed suddenly. “Can you hear it?!”
And in your dreams…
You’ll ride on angels’ wings…

Draco bent low over the bleeding man, an urgent feeling in his gut instructing of him what to do, and pressed his forehead against his.

A wild, spinning sensation whirled around them and Draco had to shut his eyes against it, lest the dizziness overwhelm him. He felt an empty vault open up beneath them and suddenly they were falling, falling, falling…

Draco held the man close to his heart, gripping him as tightly as he could.

~*~

Hermione gasped and clutched at Ron’s arm. The spheres of Malfoy’s magic had begun glowing an ethereal white within the Dome.

Snape lifted his face as the last rays of the sun disappeared over the western horizon and closed his eyes as he finally recognized the voice. “Narcissa…”

Beside him, Father Ernst Alt was saying prayers of gratitude.

~*~

Dance with the stars…
And touch the face of God…

Draco suddenly felt weightless and struggled to open his eyes. He was holding something heavy and wet against his chest, gripping something and pulling it against his forehead. Draco gasped as he breathed in the scent of musk and Quidditch leather, recognizing the sodden heap in his arms as Harry Potter. Draco wrapped his arms tighter around him, not wanting to know what had soaked through his lover’s robes, not wanting to know why Harry’s chest felt odd and disfigured against his own. Frantically, Draco attempted to press into Harry’s mind, as he had done so many times before, but found nothing…

Except the slow thrumming of his failing heart.

Draco sucked in a breath, knowing he would need every last drop of his magic, and prepared to overpower the Inversion Enchantratem.

~*~

The Dome, aglow by the incredible light shining within, began to resemble the moon, refracting the light of the sun.

They all watched in awe as the light grew brighter and brighter, until, finally, they had to shield their eyes. When they looked again, there was a smaller ball of energy.

No. Not a ball.

An awkward shape and not perfectly round.

They peered closer. And the energy was different.
Hermione sucked in a breath. “Is that Malfoy?!”

Suddenly, Ron was running towards the Dome. He gave his amulet a sound tug before hurling himself within the Dome thick walls.

Malfoy was holding something.

~*~

And if you should awake…

“C’mon, Harry,” Draco chanted, rocking Harry in his arms, watching as bits of tissue and bone healed itself in Harry’s chest and the gashes closed up to reveal solid scar tissue. “Stay with me, Harry. You promised, remember? You said we could give it a try, remember? You said there could be an after, dammit; so don’t you leave me now!”

Spiking, swirling magic and raw power, exuding brilliantly from their connection through the Horcrux Scar as Draco pressed their brows together, whirred around them in a fantastic, crackling vortex of energy.

The thrumming of Harry’s heart was barely a whisper.

Draco choked back a sob as the sound all but vanished, charging up their connection again and again. “Damn you, Harry Potter! You are not allowed to die here! Breathe, you insufferable prat! Breathe!”

Something trembled deep within Draco’s gut that swiftly became a growl. Then, with mighty shout, he spiked their magic one last time, focusing all its power on that one muscle that had to beat again for his lover to stay alive; Harry Potter’s heart, laid bare and bleeding for far too long.

And Draco saw no more.

~*~

My precious one…
My tiny one…
I’ll kiss your little cheek…

The swirling magic that engulfed them flashed once more and abruptly vanished. Ron skidded to a halt and fell to his knees beside them just as Draco Malfoy collapsed beside Harry Potter’s body, twitching and shivering as if he were seizing.

Ron heard the sound of running behind him and barked: “Make sure Harry’s breathing!” as he stumbled over to Malfoy’s side. Ron pulled the seizing Malfoy to him and ripped a scrap of fabric from his sleeve, holding Draco’s head in his lap and rolling up the fabric to place in the blond Wizard’s mouth so he couldn’t bite his tongue off.

“He has a pulse!” Hermione announced in a ragged, breathless voice. “He’s breathing, ah, thank Merlin; he’s alive, Ron!”

“McGonagall is sending for Healers,” Severus said, kneeling beside Ron to aid him in restraining Draco Malfoy’s thrashing limbs as the worst of his seizure-like shudders passed.

Hermione swore under her breath as she lifted torn bits of Harry’s robes and shirt from the bare skin of his chest. She ran her fingers lightly over the large, pinkish scar that ran the length of Harry’s
torso. She lifted her eyes to Ron’s, a question there that he had no answer for.

Father Ernst Alt bent low over the shivering, unconscious Draco Malfoy and placed one gnarled hand on the young man’s damp forehead. “Allmächtiger Gott,” he prayed. “Wir bitten dich, hindere diesen bösen Geist daran deinen Diener weiter zu quälen, und halte ihn fern, auf dass er nie zurückkehre. Durch deine Weisung, oh Herr, mögen die Güte und der Frieden unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, des Erlösers, Besitz ergreifen von diesem Mann. Und wir fürchten nicht länger das Übel, denn der Herr ist mit uns, der lebt und herrscht in Einheit mit dem Heiligen Geist in alle Ewigkeit...”

Finally, beneath the priest’s touch, Draco stilled, his breathing becoming steady, his limbs becoming limp and languid.

And underneath…
The smiling moon…
I’ll sail you back to sleep…

“...Amen.”

~*~

St. Mungo’s…
Three days later…

***

Harry felt a thrumming heaviness in his head and groaned, fighting against consciousness with all his might, not wishing to awake. The sheets that covered him were cool, and the air smelled like disinfectant. Harry groaned again. Hospitals.

Harry Potter hated hospitals. In his short life, he had spent far too much time in them.

Abruptly, a thought hit him and he panicked, sitting straight up in the bed and blinking wildly.

“Calm down, Potter; you’ll hurt yourself,” a drawling, lazy voice admonished him lightly. “I am fine.”

Harry twisted in the white linen and gaped at the source of the voice. Then he smiled.

There, in the corner of the tiny hospital room, sitting in a chair and reading a book filled with Muggle poetry, was Draco Malfoy.

Draco glanced at him over the rim of his book and turned a page. “Welcome back, Harry.”

Harry startled himself with a laugh. For some reason, it seemed like an odd thing to say. “Thanks,” he said. “You too.”

Draco smiled from behind his book, lowering it so Harry could see.

“What time is it?” Harry inquired.

“Hmmm. Four in the morning, I think.”

“That’s quite a stretch after visiting hours.”

“Visiting hours do not apply to me.”
“Why?” Harry scoffed, rubbing at his eyes and stretching. “Because you’re a Malfoy?”

“No,” Draco answered, setting down his book and giving Harry a strange look the Auror couldn’t quite place. “Because it’s me and it’s you and the whole world knows it now.”

The corner of Harry’s mouth lifted in a half-smile. “I see. How long have I been out?”

“Three days, interestingly enough,” Draco replied, rising to re-seat himself in the chair closest to Harry’s bed.

“Why?”

“‘On the third day, He rose again…’” Draco quoted with a shrug. “Just another thing to occupy my thoughts while you get the rest you need.”

Harry made a face but settled back into the pillows anyway. “Point taken.”

Harry was silent for a few minutes. “So we were successful, then?”

“Very.”

“What happened?”

“What don’t you remember?”

“Malfoy, answer the damn question.”

Draco gazed at him for a long time, those piercing gray eyes taking in the horrifying scar that began at Harry’s collar bone and ended below his abdominal muscles. A scar that was hidden mostly from the white shirt he was wearing. A scar Harry Potter had yet to notice.

Draco considered telling him about the strange limbo he had found himself in after the Inversion Enchantratem ripped his magic from his body, after Maul was launched from within him, and after his own scarred soul was sent adrift. Draco considered explaining the scent of fresh rain and beeswax and how, for the briefest of moments, he had actually considered remaining within the safety of his mother’s cool embrace rather than taking pity on the sobbing vision of Lily Evans Potter and rescuing her son from certain death. Draco considered reciting his battle with his own personal demons and the ultimate act of forgiving his father.

However, he decided those things could be told later and said instead: “You gave me one bloody scare, you horrid ponce.”

Harry’s brilliant, bold, and utterly true green eyes glanced over at him.

Draco reached out for his hand and grasped it tightly, a bubble of pent-up emotion bursting against his throat. “I thought I was going to lose you.”

That’s when Harry looked down at his chest. He reached down with his other hand and lifted the hem of his shirt. He chewed at his lower lip as he beheld the thick expanse of scar tissue before dropping his shirt and staring off into the distance. “Oh.”

Draco closed his eyes against the pain that tightened around his heart. When all was said and done, he had given him those scars. If it weren’t for him, Harry Potter would be hale.

“Can’t be anything like the scar on your soul,” Harry said softly, still staring into some place Draco couldn’t see. Draco’s eyes flew open and he stared at the young Auror in disbelief.
“You can’t be serious!”

Harry looked at him then. “Why not?”

Suddenly, Malfoy laughed. It was a clear, unfettered sound and it tugged a lop-sided grin from Harry’s lips. “You know, Potter? There are going to be days when you will drive me mad and I’ll have to struggle to remember why the hell I fell in love with you. But then you will say something like that and I’ll remember all over again.”

Whatever would have been said next was interrupted by a breathless Healer, who barged into the room with a flustered look on her face. “Mr. Potter! Oh, my! You’re awake!”

Soon, Ron and Hermione, sleepy-eyed yet alert, were there, the Minister and a dozen other Aurors following shortly after. The room swiftly became too cramped for Malfoy to bear and he quietly took his leave, shutting the door behind him as Harry’s friends and colleagues loudly spoke words of joy and concern on Harry Potter’s behalf.

There would be time to speak later. There would be a lot of time to speak later.

“Can I return here after it is done?”

“No, my love. Not for many, many years.”

Many, many years. Draco smiled to himself as he Disapparated.

And he planned to spend every waking moment possible at Harry Potter’s side.

A lifetime of burnt eggs and lazy smiles.

Not quite the paradise he had been expecting after he died, but it would do.

And he could definitely live with that.

~*~

A/N: Lyrics from the song “Lullaby” by Celine Dione

Translations:

Allmächtiger Gott, wir bitten dich, hindere diesen bösen Geist daran deinen Diener weiter zu quälen, und halte ihn fern, auf dass er nie zurückkehre. Durch deine Weisung, oh Herr, mögen die Güte und der Frieden unseres Herrn Jesus Christus, des Erlösers, Besitz ergreifen von diesem Mann. Und wir fürchten nicht länger das Übel, denn der Herr ist mit uns, der lebt und herrscht in Einheit mit dem Heiligen Geist in alle Ewigkeit...

...Amen. (German) Means “...Almighty God, we beg you to keep the evil spirit from further molesting this servant of yours, and to keep him far away, never to return. At your command, 0 Lord, may the goodness and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, take possession of this man. May we no longer fear any evil since the Lord is with us; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever...

...Amen.”
Minister Scrimgeour was, frankly, rather surprised to see Auror Harry James Potter in his office only a mere week after the exorcism. The Healers at St. Mungo's had made it explicitly clear they wanted Potter to remain in the hospital for at least a month for observation—though, in the Minister's opinion, it was more for St. Mungo's benefit than Potter's. The Healer's had never seen anything like this before: A Wizard healing a gaping, lethal chest wound with naught but the raw magic that connected them through the Horcrux Scar.

Despite his ordeal, and the most obvious need for rest, Harry Potter stood in his doorway, swaying slightly on his feet, with dark smudges under his bright green eyes positively causing them to gleam in the darkness, and holding a slip of parchment in his trembling right hand.

The Minister clasped his fingers in front of him, nodding for the young Auror to come in.

"What is that?" Scrimgeour inquired softly, knowing in a tiny part of his soul that the answer would leave him pondering for days.

"Pine," Harry answered quietly, his beryl gaze gleaming in the shadows that surrounded them. "Frankincense..." Harry's gaze wandered, staring into some abysmal void Scrimgeour could not see. "Sandalwood...and something else. It rolls off Draco in waves and sticks to anything he touches for a time."

"Oh?" Scrimgeour raised a brow. Harry did not have the grace to blush. His beryl gaze deepened, became darker, and yet seemed to gleam ever brighter. "Why?"

Harry did not answer right away. He looked incredibly tired. "I asked Father Alt the same question, Minister. I did not like his answer."

"What was his answer?"

"He said many who touch the Face of God come away engulfed with the scent of flowers."

"It is not the scent of flow--"

"I know, Minister," Harry Potter said, his eyes flashing in the darkness of his office. The hour was late and the shadows long. "Remember that he is Draco Malfoy and not St. Francis of Assisi."

Indeed; this would be something he would ponder for days. Scrimgeour eyed the parchment clenched in the Auror's right hand. "What is this all about, Potter?"
"I came here out of respect," the young Auror said after a moment's pause. "In light of the Ministry's...recent politics." He lifted the parchment. "I have here a letter of resignation--"

"Potter--"

"I'll hex it to pieces, if you wish it," Harry continued, his eyes mirroring that which burns within missionaries. "But you must know: I plan to remain with Draco Malfoy."

Harry paused. "The choice is yours, Minister. I will stay, if you'll have me."

Silence stretched between them as the shadows grew ever-longer in the Minister's office. Finally, Scrimgeour responded.

"I have a hundred reasons to fire you, Auror--and one day, I'll have a thousand. But you are one of my best. So, until that day comes, your private life is none of the Ministry's concern. I will be happy to see you remain as a crucial part of my Auror's Division."

Harry searched the Minister's gaze before lifting the parchment and then, palm upward, uncurling his fingers. In a blaze of yellow-green, the parchment caught fire and burnt swiftly to a billion pieces of ash.

It was easy to forget that Harry Potter had long ago harnessed the ability to channel his magic without the use of a wand because he did not often put it on display. However, right in that moment, the Minister of Magic thought that Harry Potter looked like an avenged angel, dark and powerful and true. Scrimgeour shuddered at the thought of what power Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy would wield as a pair, together at one another's side.

Well and so, the Wizarding World could use a solemn hero or two. They would do just fine.

"Now I have a favor to ask," Harry said, his voice blunt while his demeanor remained bone-weary.

"You're asking favors now?" Technically, it was rhetorical and he didn't expect an answer.

Harry gave him an explanation anyway. "We both know that within weeks, most will forget how close we came to the End of Days. It will become a fairy tale...and that is something we are all powerless against."

Scrimgeour peered up into his bright, burning gaze. "I'm listening, Auror."

~*~

"And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea."
In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo."

~ Excerpt from The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock, poem by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Janarius’ Java in Knockturn Alley…
Five months later…
***

Draco Malfoy took a sip of his cappuccino, making a face as he swallowed the hot, bitter fluid. The former Slytherin Prince of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had never been overly fond of coffee, but it was early, and he was bored; and the frothy brew served as a welcome jolt back to reality as he pored over a fascinating poem by his favorite Squib poet in a shadowy back corner of Janarius’ Java coffee shop.

Draco had always been enthralled by T.S. Eliot’s prose, though he could never really put a finger on why. And, despite putting the dark lyrical poignancy of The Waste Land aside indefinitely, Draco was freshly engrossed by this particular Love Song; perhaps because it didn’t really seem like a love song at all. There was a bitterness to this tale, and, moreover, a weariness and a resigned quality to it which Draco Malfoy felt deep within his bones. And yet, beyond the bitterness and the resignation, there was a definite shadow of wry hope. And that, too, Draco could relate to.

Draco frowned over his book as a dozen teenagers stumbled through the entrance of the café, laughing, joking, and positively reeking of Quidditch leather and sweat.

Not the clean, crisp smell Draco often found lingering on Harry’s skin, but a morbid, acrid stench of filthy, putrid cow hide.

Draco was appalled, watching over the rim of his book as a flustered Janarius made his way over to them to get their drink orders. He motioned for the Wizard with one lazy flick of his wrist. Janarius paused, mid-stride, before changing directions and approaching Draco’s isolated, shadowy corner.

Draco told the café owner to tell them he would pay for their drinks if they would graciously quiet themselves. As Janarius left his table to inform them, Draco realized they must be Hogwarts students. It was the week before Christmas and they were out on holiday, practicing Quidditch during their time off. Still, no self-respecting Wizard, under-age or no, would present themselves in Knockturn Alley in such a manner.

Draco watched as Janarius relayed his message and one particular boy turned to gaze in his direction. Draco smiled, a flash of dangerous white teeth in the darkness. One creature recognizes another.

The boy approached him with the cockiness and swagger of the privileged. Draco knew who he was.

Pantheras Parkinson, son of Porphyrius Parkinson, who is the brother of Pandora Parkinson. Thus, Pansy Parkinson’s cousin.

Pantheras took a seat, uninvited, at Draco’s table. Draco leveled him with his piercing gray eyes, knowing this boy could not see his features in the dark. Pantheras definitely held the stamp of the Parkinson lineage. Blue-black, glossy hair, that fell in waves rather than curls, deep, sapphire eyes rimmed with lush, dark lashes long enough to be a girl’s, and pale, smooth skin the color of new cream…but, no, this boy was not beautiful. Not yet. His limbs were long and colt-like, having not
yet been fully grown into, his mouth seemed awkward on his face, but Draco knew, one day, it would behold a cruel smile made for pleasure and wickedness, and his movements were an echo of grace, rather than the real thing. One day, he would be beautiful. One day, but not this day.

That being said, Draco knew, without a doubt, that this boy, this Pantheras Parkinson, had taken the long vacant seat of his throne as Slytherin Prince. Draco’s smile deepened, his eyes becoming dark and knowing. One creature recognizes another.

“Who are you,” Pantheras inquired, his voice deceptively soft, a strange lilt to his words that Draco tried to place, “to imply that we are too loud?”

Draco, his eyes never leaving the boy’s face, waited for Janarius to give the boy his coffee, before speaking.

“C’est impoli pour s’asseoir sans l’invitation, Pantheras,” Draco replied, suddenly remembering that Porphyrius had moved his family to France during Voldemort’s rise to power. That was the lilt he had heard in the boys voice. English exposed to fluent French for far too long. “Did Porphyrius never teach you that?”

Pantheras smirked. “You know my father?”

Draco gazed at him, but did not answer. He did not need to.

Pantheras glanced down at the manuscript he was reading. His lip curled. “Being a Muggle-lover could get you killed in these parts, Wizard,” the boy said, gesturing to his book.

Draco smiled again. Arrogance and ignorance, all in one pretty little head. How perfect. It seemed that his life had nearly spiraled out of control while the world kept on moving. Draco used to be this boy. “Not today, it won’t,” Draco replied, shifting in his seat to allow a beam of filtered light to fall across his face.

The boy gasped when he saw the lightning bolt scar. His eyes widened as he took in Draco Malfoy’s flaxen hair, cold, gray eyes, and pointed features; a physical stamp of his own lineage; the legacy of Malfoy and Black poured into their last remaining Scion, the true Pureblood, Draconus Lucius Malfoy.

“Here is your bill, Mr. Malfoy,” Janarius murmured, approaching the table once again and handing it to him. Draco accepted it with a curt nod, his eyes still trained on the boy’s face, his piercing gaze boring into the startled, sapphire depths of this new Slytherin Prince.

Abruptly, Pantheras stood to his feet, bowing low at the waist, muttering something about his gratitude for the coffee, and quickly retreated to where his friends were seated. Pantheras spoke to his teammates in a low voice and soon they left, casting apprehensive glances towards Draco’s shadowy corner and significantly less noisily than in which they had arrived.

Draco glanced once at Janarius, who beamed back at him appreciatively, and then peered back down at the document in his hands. “There will be time…”

~*~

Took the path that led to existence…
Into the great unknown…

No Directory Assistance…
Now you’re on your own…
But if you’re looking for a new world…
Just open up your eyes…

Because…
Its not quite paradise…
But it sure feels like home…

Not quite Paradise…
And we were meant to hold on…

It’ll be alright…
No, it’s not quite
Paradise…

Draco undid the clasp at his throat that fastened his traveling robes about his shoulders and handed the cloak to Slightly, who had appeared at her Master’s knee.

“Thank you, Slightly,” Draco said in a tired voice. He wished it would rain. “Has Harry owled yet?”

“Slightly has received an owl from Harry Potter, Master,” Slightly responded solemnly, folding her Master’s cloak over one scrawny arm. “Harry Potter instructed Slightly not make dinner. Harry Potter instructed Slightly to tell Master that he will be home at sundown.”

Home. That word never failed to tug a wry smile from the corner of Draco’s mouth. “Thank you, Slightly. Are my dress robes prepared?”

“Yes, Master. Slightly has them pressed and ready in Master’s bedroom.”

“Thank you,” Draco repeated, rubbing his palm against his eyes. “That will be all.”

With a crack, Slightly disappeared, leaving Draco Malfoy standing in the foyer of his new home.

Home indeed.

For the first few weeks after Harry Potter’s recovery, Draco Malfoy had all but disappeared within Gringotts vaults, poring over his inheritance and making certain adjustments. True to his word, Draco sold Malfoy Manor and sent the funds to Molly and Arthur Weasley with the contact information of a trusted financial planner but with no explanation. At first, Molly had adamantly refused, attempting to send the money back. When Harry Potter had caught wind of this through his partner, Ronald Weasley, the young Auror had gone straightaway to the Burrow to explain Draco’s wishes, knowing full well that Draco was stubborn and even more stubborn when it came to explaining himself.

Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger married on the twenty-second of November and Harry had forced Draco to attend the ceremony. Hermione had proved to be quite a vision in white, but had spoiled the image by bursting into tears when Draco presented them with her wedding gift: The Malfoy Library. By this time, Draco’s strange generosity to the Weasley’s had been well-spread and met with a certain degree of scrutiny and, so too, had his penchant for refusing to explain why. So, Hermione had proceeded to throw herself at the Malfoy Scion, wrapping him in a suffocating embrace, and sobbing words of thanks. Draco Malfoy had had the grace to return the embrace, if not the fervor. If Draco remembered correctly, they would have returned from their honeymoon last week.

Maximus Cure had disappeared from the Ministry the day of the exorcism and had not been heard from since. Most assumed Blaise Zabini had something to do with it, but the charming, golden-eyed
Pureblood was never convicted and a formal pardon for his actions during and after the war was scheduled for the following month of May. Harry gave up drilling Draco for clues to Cure’s location after about a month, finally deciding that even if the former Slytherin Prince actually did know, he would never say. It frustrated the young Auror, but Harry came to the conclusion that he may not even have the heart to arrest the wily outlaw even if he did find him. For some evasive reason, they were all quite fond of Maximus Cure.

Draco Malfoy had personally escorted Father Ernst Alt back to Germany. At the end of it, Alt had looked kindly at the Malfoy Scion and kissed his brow, murmuring something in Aramaic Draco did not understand. Draco had promised to teach himself the dead language simply to translate those final words. The priest had laughed and embraced him, accepting the letter of gratitude Draco had written to the Vatican that he was quite sure Alt would never deliver. Technically, Alt wasn’t allowed to perform an exorcism without the Vatican’s consent. However, they both knew the letter was Draco’s way of silently thanking the priest for his efforts, without whom, Draco Malfoy would surely have lost his soul.

The Parkinsons and the Zabinis worked diligently to aid Draco Malfoy in re-establishing himself within Pureblood circles; though, if truth be told, the Malfoy Scion had enough prestige to last twenty lifetimes after destroying Lord Voldemort, surviving American Muggles, outwitting Ministry Officials to release Harry Potter from further scrutiny as an incompetent Auror, and resisting the alleged Son of Lucifer.

Whether Maul, the Black Tulpa that had attempted to posses his body, was the Son of Lucifer or not, Draco Malfoy would never say. The Malfoy Scion would not even speak the demon’s name. Maul had left a dark shadow forever etched onto his soul, had caused a wound to crack open and bleed anew. There was never a day when he didn’t sorely wish for rain or the scent of beeswax. There wasn’t a single moment when he didn’t yearn for the peaceful oblivion of endless nothingness, for the blaze of ceaseless white. There was never a time where he watched the sun dawn bright and clear over the horizon and wished it were the first day of spring, imagining he could feel his mother’s cool embrace and her soft lullaby whispering in his ear.

Yes, Maul had indeed left His handprint on his soul; and for that, he would never give Him such respect as to say His name, or to claim He was the Son of the Devil himself. Maul didn’t deserve a single thought in Draco’s mind, and he refused to give Him one.

However, when all was said and done, it took months of endless dinner parties and informal celebrations for Draco to be able to walk into a room without setting a brushfire of whispers in his wake. But Draco Malfoy had braved the worst of the storm until it had subsided. Now, Wizards and Witches, Pureblood or no, avert their eyes in his presence, whether out of fear or respect, he was never sure. And whenever he looked away, awe shone through their lowered lashes like some morbid beacon.

Often, Draco would attempt to convince Harry to come with him as he danced the endless waltz of the Socialite, but Harry only conceded a time or two. If there was one thing that made Harry more uncomfortable than standing on ceremony, Draco had yet to figure it out. However, when he did come, Draco always felt that he could walk through any brushfire of whispers, no matter the annoying admiration, no matter the hushed tones of awe. With Harry Potter at his side, Draco always felt safe, always felt protected. Harry would always stare back at the sea of faces with those blazing green eyes of his, daring anyone to judge, daring anyone to say it wasn’t right, and they would always shrink back from it and hold their tongue. Always.

Draco supposed it was from a lifetime of weathering the press, that resilience of his.
The Daily Prophet had been the harshest on Harry Potter; especially after it became evident they were buying a house together. The scandal, sadly, wasn’t over, despite the warring opinions of Harry Potter’s heroism and Harry Potter’s lack of morals. However, Harry Potter, being Harry Potter, ignored it with such gravitas and stoicism that Draco held a new-found respect for his lover.

They bought Trysthold Manor on the twelfth of September, when the trees were just beginning to turn and the forest around the large house looked as if it were afire. Draco had picked it because of the land it sat on, knowing it would be perfect for Harry. Acre upon acre of fields and forests offered plenty of flying room for a restless Harry Potter when he returned from a day at the Auror’s Division. Harry had agreed on it when he saw the manor itself was large and luxurious enough to sate most of Draco’s needs. For the first month, it was just a house. By the second month, it had become a home.

Draco smiled to himself and strode towards the curving staircase that led to the west wing and to their bedroom. Draco ran his hand through his hair and thought he would take a bath before Harry came home. He hadn’t seen him in nearly a week because of some mission the Ministry had sent him on and Draco missed him terribly. Tonight, the Ministry was holding some sort of award ceremony for the Auror’s Division and Draco had received the invitation on Wednesday. Thinking it was because they were going to give his lover yet another bar to decorate his Auror’s robes, he had accepted. Draco had yet to see Harry really get his due as an Auror—because, really, Harry Potter was quite good at what he did for a living—so he was not going to miss this chance. Draco only hoped Harry was up to it. Harry was often bone-weary when he came home from long missions.

~*~

*Tomorrow’s an allusion…*
*Yesterday’s a dream…*
*Today is absolution…*

*But you got to let it be…*

*If you’re looking for the answer…*
*It’s right before your eyes…*

*Although it’s…*
*Not Quite Paradise…*
*It sure looks like home…*
*Not quite Paradise…*
*And we are not alone…*

*I’ll be alright…*
*No, it’s not quite…*
*Paradise…*

Though the water grown tepid and the numerous candles burned lower and lower, dripping wax in long, long lines down the sides of the expansive bathtub, Draco’s skin was warm and flush from his lengthy soak and opted to stay in the water a little longer. Sweat beaded his pale forehead, tinged a light pink from the heat, and trickled down the side of his face. The flickering light from the dozens of candles surrounding him swam in his gaze.

Draco closed his eyes and submerged himself fully in the cooling water, attempting to drown out the sound of his mother’s lullaby. He floated, seeming weightless, his platinum locks swirling around his face and neck in a teasing caress.

His chest began to burn, his lungs timidly requesting air. Draco straightened his back, allowing his
head and shoulders to surface. Keeping his eyes closed, he breathed in deeply through his nose...and smiled. The scent of freshly oiled, clean, Quidditch leather.

Draco opened his eyes and peered up at Harry Potter through wet lashes.

He stood there, leaning slightly on the doorframe, with arms crossed and a look in his eyes that was grave and musing. Draco did not bother pressing into his lover’s thoughts; he knew what he must look like. The bathroom was dark and the flickering flames from the candles danced light upon his glistening skin.

Draco rose, dripping, from the bath, accepting the towel Harry handed him. He could feel his lover’s eyes on him as he dried off and wrapped himself in a bathrobe. When Draco finally turned his gaze back to Harry’s face, his brilliant green eyes seemed to be searching for something.

Draco let him search, standing perfectly still and relaxed under Harry’s unwavering gaze.

There was a new virtue Draco had found in Harry during these past five months that the former Slytherin Prince had not previously been aware of: Patience.

They both wore physical scars, no one could gainsay that. Draco Malfoy held the mark of the Horcrux Scar, which he had forcibly taken from the Boy-Who-Lived to simultaneously defeat Voldemort and save Harry Potter from certain death. The same scar, in fact, that had proved to save their lives again and again.

Harry Potter bore a scar that divided the length of his torso. It began at the Auror’s hip and curved up his center to end in a jagged point where the right side of his collarbone met the vein in his throat. This scar Draco had personally given him. First, when he had consented—and, some would say, manipulated—to Harry Potter braving his spheres of magic to battle Maul, Sword to demon-claw. And, second, when Draco used the might of the Horcrux Scar to heal the gaping wound in his chest that Maul had dealt him before Harry succeeded in casting the Black Tulpa from said spheres.

However, the scars they bore, the scars most forgot about or held a complete ignorance of, were the deep-rooted ones that still lay fresh upon their hearts and souls. The scars that no one could see but them. The scars that hurt the most.

Whatever Maul had spoken to Harry during their battle still haunted the young Auror’s dreams. Some of it, they had spoken of. The rest, Harry kept to himself. Draco loved him enough to respect that, and did not pry. The Hearing had not seemed to daunt the young Auror, but Draco knew the malicious stares some gave him at the Ministry still bothered him. These things, too, were spoken of in private.

However, the one scar that burned Harry’s heart the most, the one he seldom spoke of, was the scar dealt to him by Cruent Mantle. There was a part of Draco that understood. Draco understood the pain in Pansy Parkinson’s deep, blue eyes whenever she looked his way when she thought Draco wasn’t paying attention. Draco understood the need to understand the truth and the bitter cruelty of knowing he never would; especially when Draco thought of his father and wondered if the man ever really did love him. That being said, there was a definite part Draco did not understand. And this part was left for Harry to work out on his own. Sometimes, there are demons only you can deal with. This was one such demon.

Now, Draco…Maul had not lied, the demon had indeed left His handprint on his soul. Yes, there was that constant yearning for the scent of fresh rain and beeswax, for brilliant white, and the comfort of a mother’s lullaby, but there was also the shadow that was engrained deep within him.
No longer was it a coiled snake hissing quietly in the center of his being, but it was a definite presence, a lingering afterthought of apathy, guilt, and grief. Contending with this shadow often pushed Draco into fits of depression, until a rainstorm or Harry Potter himself would forcibly jolt him out of it.

However, Harry Potter was patient. He would soothe, give space when it was needed, a sunny smile, and a plate of burned eggs—whatever it took. Most of all, Harry was there. He had become, gratefully, the one constant in Draco Malfoy’s life. The one who Draco’s sneer and snarl did not spurn or force away. Harry Potter was the one who remained the bright thought in his mind, the center of his best memories, and the one who reminded Draco of who he really was.

Once, after a long night of lovemaking, Draco had asked why. Harry, surprisingly, had responded: “The scent of pine, Draco. And sandalwood. And frankincense. And something…else.” Then he had smiled and fallen asleep.

To this day, Draco had no idea what he had meant.

Somehow, however, Draco found that it didn’t matter. Not really.

Harry’s gaze shifted, the shadow lifted from the green of his eyes, making them seem brighter. Harry smiled.

Harry made a small movement with his hand and Draco went to him. Their kiss was long and thoughtful. They didn’t have to say “I missed you.” To them, it was an obvious thing.

“You’re coming, right?” Harry asked as they parted.

He wanted to go? Draco said instead: “Of course.”

Harry kissed him again. “I need to shower. I’ll be ready in five.”

~*~

Somewhere from edge of time…
Where the blue sky is stale…
And words don’t rhyme…
I’ll call you up and say…
We made it okay…

They arrived at the Ministry ten minutes after seven, snowflakes from the blizzard outside still clinging to their dark robes. Harry had taken quite longer than five minutes to get ready.

And still, Draco mused, he manages to look as if he combed his hair with a sock.

The ceremony, apparently, had been awaiting their arrival to begin. There was a small stage with a modest podium surrounded by hundreds of rounded, clothed tables. Seated at the tables were Ministry Officials, Division Heads, the entire Auror’s Division, the press, and an odd assortment of other people. Hermione and Ron Weasley were there, seated with the rest of the Weasley family near the stage. The Zabinis were there, and, so too, were the Parkinsons. Draco spotted Panthers and sent him a mocking nod of his head. His face reddened, but the new Slytherin Prince nodded back.

An echo of grace, rather than the real thing.

Luna Lovegood sat near Madame Comfrey and Headmistress McGonagall. His godfather was there too. If it weren’t for this particular table, Draco Malfoy would never have become suspicious.
Harry smiled at him again and led them to their table. Draco narrowed his eyes, the fact that Harry Potter knew exactly where it was that they were to be seated not at all lost on him.

Minister Scrimgeour approached the podium and began to speak. Draco, who was attempting to level Harry Potter with his eyes, turned finally to listen.

“Four years ago, the Wizarding World was nearly engulfed under the oppression of a mad tyrant called Lord Voldemort,” Scrimgeour began. “After his defeat, we experienced an uneasy peace wherein the Ministry of Magic worked diligently to rebuild our society, create ties with the Muggle World as a decent foreign policy, and bring justice to remnants of the Dark Lord’s terrible army.

“Out of the ashes of that war sprung a new threat. A Prophecy was brought to our awareness and, with it, a Host marked for the possession by the Black Tulpa, who had given Lord Voldemort the secret to the Seven Keys of Immortality and thereby aided the Dark Lord in his rise and fall of ultimate power over our world.

“This Tulpa was bound to spur the End of Days into motion and, if He had succeeded, we would have been powerless against it.”

The Minister paused. “However, the Auror’s Division and, in fact, much of the Ministry as an entirety, with the aid of the fine Wizards and Witches teaching our students at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was able to thwart this Maul, the Black Tulpa and prevent its dark vision from coming into fruition under the command of Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley. And with the aid of Father Ernst Alt, we were able to exorcise this demon back to Hell.”

At this point, Draco expected applause. But, no; even as he looked around, the room remained quiet and attentive and Harry, seated beside him, continued to smile.

“After five months, sadly, this epic tale has already been re-constructed into some kind of over-exposed myth,” Scrimgeour continued. “We knew this would, inevitably, happen. It is the way of things. But we remember. And this tale, so real to those seated here, will always be evermore than memory.

“Five months ago, a week after the successful exorcism, an Auror approached me, his demeanor heavy with this knowledge.

“He claimed there was an even bigger tale; a mightier tale that should never be forgotten.”

Draco raised a fair brow and glanced towards Ronald Weasley, assuming this was who the Minister meant.

“This tale was of a boy who fought against a great tyrant and was forgotten. It was a tale about a man who fought against an even greater tyrant and was, again, forgotten. In truth, people recognize him and whisper in awe. But their awe springs from seeds of disbelief and half-truths. They could never believe the lengths to which this man had gone nor the demons he had fought against and prevailed.”

Draco had to fight the urge to roll his eyes. This was getting a bit dramatized.

“Tonight, we honor the tale. Tonight we honor the boy who defeated Lord Voldemort—“

Wait. Draco narrowed his eyes.

“Tonight we honor the man who resisted the Black Tulpa with dignity and poise. Tonight we honor the incredible magic he possesses and the honor with which he uses it. Tonight, we wish to award
Draco Malfoy the Order of Merlin.”

Draco blinked slowly as a deafening eruption of applause and cheering sounded around him and rang off the walls. Harry, damn him, was still smiling at him; only, now, his eyes were laughing as well.

_Somewhere in the back of your mind…_  
When you see your dream has come to life…  
And the world just fades away…  
You’ll know its okay...

_It’s going to be okay…_

“Tonight was supposed to be about you,” Draco hissed. “How long have you known about this?!”

Harry laughed his deep rich laugh. “Suck it up, you pansy. You deserve this.”

“But—“

“Get your arse up there.”

Draco rose on shaking legs and had to fight to keep an outwardly calm demeanor—something that was usually as natural to him as breathing but now seemed to evade him. Few things surprised Draco Malfoy, but when they do—and they sometimes do—the shock never lingers. He smiled graciously and it was gone. He approached the podium.

He gazed out at the sea of faces smiling and cheering back up at him and felt that dry, bittersweet, resigned, and wry hope he discovered in the Love Song sitting in Janarius’ Java that morning well up in him. Someone placed a gold chain with a large, circular medallion hanging from it around his neck and he smiled again, this one less gracious and more bemused.

His piercing grey eyes sought and found Pantheras Parkinson, who stared up at him with something akin to worship. The world really did seem to move on, if he kept pace with it or not.

In light of his ordeal, it seemed like some cruel parody, a joke at his expense. But then, there would be time. There would be time, there would be time.

Draco glanced over to Harry, whose brilliant green eyes had turned soft. A terrible, wonderful love shone forth from them like a beacon and Draco knew Harry felt it too. A cruel parody, a joke at their expense.

But they would keep up; they could keep pace with the world. All they needed was a little time. And there would be time. Plenty of it.

Draco felt a true, honest smile twist his lips and he had to suppress the urge to laugh.

Now, Draco Malfoy had himself the Order of Merlin.

Eat that, Lucius.

Ha! It certainly was not a blaze of ceaseless white or the cool embrace of his mother’s arms. He definitely couldn’t smell rain or beeswax, or even hear his mother’s soft lullaby. No, it wasn’t quite Paradise.

But it would certainly, definitely, most undoubtedly do.
He could spend a lifetime in Harry Potter’s arms. He could choose to be happy. If he could resist the Son of Lucifer, he could assuredly do that.

Someone was saying something to him, but a pair of brilliant green eyes drowned out everything else. Draco stepped down from the podium and walked on sure legs towards Harry Potter. Upon reaching him, Draco placed his hands on either side of his face, tipped the Auror’s head back, and kissed him for all he was worth.

Harry laughed against his mouth and embraced Draco tightly, the Order of Merlin trapped between them.

One door closed, another opened. Such was the way of things.

The air smelled of pine and Quidditch leather. And it made sense.

Somehow.

*But it’s not quite Paradise…  
But it sure feels like home…  

Not quite paradise…  
We can make this place our own…  

Not quite paradise…  
We were meant to hold on…  

Not quite paradise…  
We don’t have to be alone…  

We can make this place our own…  

~*~

The End.

***

Lyrics from Not Quite Paradise by Bliss

C’est impoli pour s’asseoir sans l’invitation (French) means “It is rude to seat yourself without an invitation.”

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