The war is over, but the daily struggles for Harry simply continue. After attending the last of the Death Eater trials Harry gets a surprising visit.
Chapter 1

Harry banged open the door and slumped into his room at the Leaky Cauldron. It had been one hell of a day.

It was mid July and had been the final day of the Death Eater trials, more importantly, it had been the trial of Narcissa and Draco Malfoy, Lucius having been tried separately a few days prior. Thank Merlin he was back in Azkaban, although it had made the proceedings today, if possible, more difficult. It was hard to be acknowledging the tragedies on the other side of the war too, given what his side was still mourning; there was only so much Harry could empathise.

He was wrecked. The entire ordeal had been a painful dissection of the last year and a half, revisiting all of the memories Harry spent most of his time actively repressing these days. The Wizengamot had hurried along the court proceedings after the Battle of Hogwarts, mainly due to public outcry for justice but also, Harry suspected, because Azkaban was full to bursting and getting some people under magically enforced house arrest soon would ease the strain.

Despite the anxiety rising like bile within him throughout it all, Harry had stood for Narcissa and Draco in the trial today, recounting how, despite their collaboration with the Dark Lord and mistakes over the years, that when it had come to down to defeating Voldemort once and for all, that they had both independently made the choice to betray him, despite the immediate danger to themselves. Harry conveniently left out the events in the Room of Requirement.

He reiterated that Lucius had exerted a lot of influence over the family's steeping in the Dark Arts, leaving neither of them with much choice as to how their lives would proceed. It'd been tough to recount that night on the Astronomy Tower, but he'd done it. Draco's face had been stricken when Harry revealed that he'd been there too, under the Invisibility Cloak. He'd also gone into detail as to how, at Malfoy Manor, Draco had not identified him, even though it must have been obvious it was Harry, even behind the stubble, stinging hex and overgrown hair. Draco knew his eyes, they were easy to identify for anyone who knew him, and he'd seen the spark of recognition in Malfoy's gaze.

Part way through recounting his time in the Forbidden Forest, Harry had realised with horror that tears were sliding hotly down his cheeks, in front of the entire Wizengamot and the two Malfoys! He'd rubbed them angrily off his face, even as his limbs had still been shaking.

His stomach lurched at the memory, and he ran his hand through his hair, bracing himself at the foot of his bed. He didn't want to think about it anymore! But the memories kept intrusively swirling, the familiar rising panic clawing up through his insides as he breathed faster and shallower. He wished he could say this wasn't a common occurrence, that he was just shaken from the trial, but he staved off attacks like this one more days than not.

It made him feel weak; that he couldn't handle life after the war. Living in Grimmauld Place likely was not helping, but he couldn't bear to be at the Burrow just now, not with the loss of Fred still so fresh. And all the people. No, being on his own, however lonely, was still preferable.

He'd been called upon for other Death Eater trials too, although his input had been minimal in most, Kingsley knew that there were plenty of other witnesses for most of their detainees' indiscretions, but Harry had made a point to insist upon standing up for the two Malfoys. A debt for a debt he reasoned.

So, during these Ministry appearances he had elected to take a room at the Leaky Cauldron, to be only a short distance away but mainly to give himself a break from the claustrophobic dankness that
still pervaded his godfather's old house. Yes, he could definitely do with a break from that.

He steadied himself against the edge of the bed and breathed as deeply as he could, attempting to keep it even and focused just on the feel of the air entering his lungs.

In, out. In, out. In—

His anxiety spiked through the roof as a loud banging jolted him upright and had him whirling around to the door as the harsh knocking continued. Drawing his wand instinctively and struggling to get his breath back under control, Harry made his way over to the door and creaked it open.

Facing him from across the threshold, glaring daggers was a pink faced, agitated Draco Malfoy.

~ // ~

Well, that had been an utterly mortifying experience! Made all the more uncomfortable by Potter's trite testimony in their defense. Honestly, it was enough that he was even speaking on their behalf, did he really need to ham it up with the theatrics?

Draco’s anger had flared at Potter's pathetic blubbering — we all get it, you're the sodding hero with the heart of gold! Everybody already wants to kiss your arse, tone it down!

After being a prisoner for so long —first to the Dark Lord and then the Ministry whilst awaiting trial — it felt utterly bizarre simply being told they were free to go and just...left. Well, free to go with a few caveats. His wand would be returned 'in due course' (Draco had a sneaking suspicion that 'due course' would take a bloody long time) and both he and his mother would be under supervision for the next twelve months at least; regular Prior Incantato checks included. Conditional release was still, however, preferable to Azkaban.

He thought of his father, but could not seem to summon up too much regret there. The man had a lot to answer for, on many fronts. Plus, it was only two years, which was downright lenient. He guessed that Potter had a hand in that sentencing too. Potter, who had been Poster Boy for the Ministry during this palaver.

After the hearing had concluded Draco had spotted that mop of hideous black hair in the Atrium and, after telling his mother to floo home without him, he had followed Potter out of there. He was unsure as to what exactly he would say to the bespectacled git, he wasn't sure if he wanted to thank him or hex him.

The latter would be more than satisfying, but he was still without his wand, which rankled and stoked his anger up even further.

Potter had turned into the Leaky, probably heading back to Muggle London, but no, instead he was passing through the pub and up the stairs. The place had hushed as Potter walked though it, although the boy barely seemed to register it, but of course famous Scarhead would be used to this kind of crap. Draco's temper flared again. Ignoring the looks he received from the other patrons, he strode across the bar and up the rickety stairs behind Potter — he would have his say!

At his insistent knocking, the door had been opened to show Potter who, quite frankly, looked like shit, fuelling Draco's fury further. No, no the Chosen Dick did not get to look pathetic when Draco needed to vent his spleen!

Despite earlier thoughts of a possible thank you, Draco blurted out, before he could stop himself, "We don't need your pity, Potter."
"What?" Harry gaped.

"I said we don't need your pity," spat Malfoy again as he just invited himself into Harry's room and turned to glare at him once more. Harry couldn't quite believe what he was hearing.

"I— I just saved you and your mother from Azkaban! I stood up and defended your dumb actions so that you could live a normal life! How in the hell are you angry at me?!"

"I know you just did this to make sure the entire wizarding world still thinks you're the selfless and perfect Boy Hero. A publicity stunt. I saw those pathetic crocodile tears at the podium, Potter."

"Croc—? You think that was faked?! You think I put that on to garner sympathy?!" Harry asked, slightly hysterically.

"You've always leached off attention, Potter, it's laughable, really," Malfoy sneered.

"Ha! You really think that? Well, buckle up Malfoy because the truth is far more hilarious. I really am that damaged! You want to know why? Well, let me enlighten you. Let me tell you something that the Prophet doesn't know," he stalked closer to Malfoy, his eyes blazing, the panic attack he'd been staving off earlier threatening to consume him once again. Malfoy had started to look wary and glanced briefly towards the door. "I knew."

Malfoy blinked at him uncomprehendingly. "Wh—what?"

"I knew," Harry repeated intensely, never breaking eye contact with the petulant boy in front of him, "And before you even became a Death Eater, while you were still poncing about eating fancy sweets and being a dick, I was being groomed to fucking die! Because it couldn't just happen, oh no! That would be too easy!" Harry was shaking slightly now, the swirling fear and fury causing tremors as he bore down on the blonde git. His nose two inches away from Malfoy's own.

"I had to walk willingly into that forest, Malfoy! Knowing that I was going to die. That I had to die. You don't just walk voluntarily to your death and come out of it not a little fucked up.

"You don't get told at fifteen that you have to literally die for the sake of the world and not fucking feel, Malfoy!" He was shouting again, he hadn't meant to but his voice seemed to have a mind of its own today. He hadn't meant to say half of the things that had slipped from him to Draco sodding Malfoy of all people.

Malfoy looked stunned, as if the reality of what Harry had faced in the Forest had never truly occurred to him before. But of course it wouldn’t have, Malfoy had been so engrossed in worrying about his family and his own skin that he probably hadn't spared a thought for the mortal tragedy of Harry's last two years.

"So, yeah. Reliving all that again in front of the Ministry that tried to ruin me, all for the sake of you — I think I've earned the right to fucking cry."

~ // ~

Insanity. Temporary Potter-induced insanity. Yes, that's what compelled him to do it. The affliction had plagued Draco since age eleven and there was a fair amount of evidence it affected plenty of other people as well. So. It was that then, that caused him to reach for Potter and actually hug him.

He froze against Draco's arms, quite clearly just as shocked by this behaviour as Draco was himself.
He was still shaking slightly and Draco's heart rate picked up to a pace where he thought it was
likely he might shake too. They'd never so much as exchanged a handshake before! Morbidly, the
closest they'd come was whilst on a broom escaping Fiendfyre. And Malfoys, as a rule, did not hug.
Which was a pity, Potter actually smelled quite nice.

His senses returned at that. Blushing, Draco sprang back from the Boy Wonder and refused to meet
his eye as he straightened his robes and, quite calmly Draco thought, tried to exit the room as fast as
his legs would carry him. But before he'd taken three steps, a hand flew out, clutching him by the
wrist and spinning him round to face a gobsmacked Potter.

"What the fuck was that?!"

"Pity. Doesn't feel good, does it?"

"That wasn't pity that was just batshit fucking insane!"

"So glad I could give you a taste of your own medicine."

"Wow, get over yourself, Malfoy! I don't pity you — I nothing you."

"Sure, that's why you were crying over me in the stands today."

"God, you're impossible! Even Myrtle must've got sick of your whining!"

"Shut the fuck up, Potter!"

"Fucking make me!"

So Draco deployed the only manoeuvre that seemed guaranteed to shut him up one hundred percent.
He surged forward once more, meaning to simply hug the bastard again, to shut him up as before.
But somehow — and again, Potter Insanity had to be the culprit — Draco's lips found Potter's and
crushed them against each other in a heated kiss.

Potter balked at the attack of Draco's mouth on his and froze up once again, and Draco, still not quite
sure how he'd gotten into this situation, braced himself for the inevitable hex that was heading his
way. But hardly ten breathless seconds later Potter surprised the seven hells out of Draco by tilting
his head, deepening the kiss - Circe, that was his tongue — and apparently deciding he was going to
give back as good as he got!

Having started this himself, Draco was now completely fucking lost!

This was insane. This was ridiculous! They fought, that was what they did, not...not this. The kiss
had morphed into a frenzy of tongues, teeth and hands. But Draco couldn't bring himself to stop, it
would feel too much like surrender. And then it dawned on him: this was a fight!

It was all out war, and neither of them was giving an inch. It was a furious competition over who
could grab rougher, pull firmer, bite harder. He was surprised they'd not drawn blood yet. They were
pushing each other against every available surface so forcefully they would surely both be a mural of
bruises the next day. But as they tumbled on to the bed the next move seemed to be who could pin
the other down, and keep him down, whilst still continuing their onslaught of each other's mouths.

Draco's back slammed into the lumpy mattress, his limbs put completely out of action by Potter's
weight and hands which were pinning his wrists above his head while they both panted heavily.
Heat radiated headily between them, and Draco's head swam as Potter regarded him with hooded,
darkened eyes. A fresh flash of desire coursed up Draco's body.
Well, pinned he may be, but he would give himself this one victory: Potter had indeed stayed shut up.

And from his current position there was at least one element of power he still had. He caught his legs around the back of Potter's and pulled them out from under him, bringing his hips down flush against Draco's own, and yes, there was the sharp intake of breath he was looking for. The move had demonstrated to Potter quite clearly that Malfoy was armed and ready for battle.

Potter's eyes widened before he emitted a growl - an honest to Merlin growl - before simultaneously devouring Draco's lips once more and moving a hand down to take firm hold of his erection. Gods, he was bold! His hand started rubbing along Draco, the friction between cloth and skin electric, and it elicited a string of highly embarrassing noises from his throat, most of them getting lost within their kiss.

Draco tangled his free hand in Potter's unruly mane and yanked hard, separating their lips and Potter's hand stilled as they looked at each other, grey versus green.

~ // ~

Pain prickled across Harry's scalp and for a split second both of them seemed to contemplate the overall badness of this idea. Until, it seemed, they both decided...fuck it. They catalysed into motion simultaneously, hands clawing at clothes, tongues battling, bodies writhing and grinding against each other and, honestly, it was brilliant.

It was a glorious reprieve from thinking! All feeling. Just being able to let loose and go wild. And if bloody Malfoy was the person with whom he could go wild, then so be it. It felt good to let the anger and lust consume him instead of the weighty dread and anxiety that normally filled his days. As bizarre as the situation was, it seemed so right that fury, competition and passion had brought both he and Malfoy to this point.

Whatever this was revealing to Harry about his orientation, let alone his taste and standards, he chose to ignore in favour of reaching deftly inside Malfoy's boxers (one of the few articles of clothing still on) to get a better handful of his enemy. Another litan of filth filled the air as Malfoy's hips bucked into Harry's fist, making him smirk in satisfaction.

He knew in this moment that he had the power to take Malfoy apart. And he was going to damn well do it. His mission objective now: to get Malfoy as wrecked and debauched as possible.

~ // ~

The look Potter was giving him right now was downright sinful, like he was about to commit every filthy act he could think of upon Draco. And odds are...Draco would like it. Damn, he was in so much trouble. For oh so many reasons. Half formed flashes of long repressed schoolboy fantasies whirred through his mind as he lay under Potter at his mercy.

But then Potter surprised him greatly again by rolling them so that Draco was now straddling Potter's hips! Any confusion he held about what this meant evaporated as soon as Potter shuffled, wrapped his legs around Draco's waist and ground their boxer clad erections together while biting a scorching mark onto the crook of Draco's neck.

Gasping, heart racing, Draco scrambled to remove their underwear along with the shirt still hanging from his shoulders, and, once they were totally divested, Potter reached down taking both of them in one slightly calloused hand.
Draco’s brain short circuited at that moment.

Hot, steely flesh against flesh made his blood boil and Potter's hand slid them firmly together in sure, glorious movements. It was the single hottest experience in Draco's entire life so far! He'd barely had a chance to scratch the surface of his sexuality before control of his life had been summarily ripped from him. All he'd had were those hastily stifled daydreams that had got less vague and more...Potter-y as his Hogwarts years wore on. But he'd stamped down on them right away, knowing just how wrong they were. So wrong but...persistent.

And now here he was, hard and leaking, with that deep, pleasurable ache spreading from the base of his spine and Potter's flushed face below his. Damn it all if this was wrong! He was sexually frustrated, he was eighteen, and he was free for the first time in his life! No Dark Lord, no father to control him, he could do whatever the fuck he wanted. And he wanted to do Potter. He dipped his head to capture that kiss ravaged mouth again, sliding his tongue against Potter's and thrusting his hips into the channel created by Potter's fist and the length of his hard, hot penis.

Potter moaned, sending a frisson of desire through Draco, and he felt the inevitable end approach just that little bit faster. But suddenly, Potter's hand stilled, left its place on their cocks and he pushed Draco up and away from him. Draco sat back on his haunches, a little confused and a lot horny, frustrated at the sudden absence of Potter's body and talented hand.

Without saying a word though, Potter shifted, crawled over to the edge of the bed and retrieved something from the jumble of clothes on the floor. His wand. Draco flinched internally, ever so slightly at the sight (he couldn't help it, it was seven years of conditioning to be wary of Potter brandishing a wand) but next thing he knew, his right palm was full of a sheer, smooth liquid and Potter — good God — Potter had shifted onto all fours in front of Draco, baring himself and looking delectable.

"What..." Draco trailed off, feeling stunned and embarrassingly slow witted, although in his defense his blood was currently not pooled in his brain.

"What do you think?" growled Potter, seductively.

Draco hesitated, hardly believing what this meant, what was going to happen. His inaction caused Potter to throw a challenging glare over his shoulder. Heat blazed in his eyes.

"Scared Malfoy?"

"You wish, Potter."

~ // ~

There was a burn, that was for sure, and it did feel very, very weird. But Harry let Malfoy keep going, breathed and tried to make himself relax, resisting the urge to push him back out. In the back of his mind Harry was inordinately grateful that he'd had enough sense to cast a non-verbal Scourgify on himself before they began. As he was worked open with two digits the burn began to lessen, and it began to feel less weird, more...ok-ish.

That was until Malfoy scissored his fingers and hit something that made it far from okay — it was explosive! He flinched and gasped at the unexpected starburst of pleasure and, as the sensations continued, he scrunched his eyes shut and his breaths quickened as he clutched the edges of the bed.

This continued for a few minutes, Malfoy running his left hand all over Harry's back and buttocks, sometimes roughly scraping his nails across the flesh as if he physically couldn't stop himself from
touching; it felt so good. Wait, that was slightly different, had he added another finger? Probably, but it didn't matter as they started to brush again and again against that something which made him moan quietly...well, quietly to begin with.

Apparently these noises were exactly what Malfoy wanted to hear, as he whispered a barely audible "fuck" and leant over Harry's back kissing and biting every bit of exposed skin that he could. The hand inside him sped up which elicited louder groans from his lips.

"Okay...okay, I'm ready," he bit out thickly.

~ // ~

Draco still couldn't quite believe this was actually, really happening, even as he slowly removed his fingers and positioned himself behind Potter. He'd been painfully hard the whole time and it had taken every ounce of self control not to just begin working himself as he had Potter writhing and moaning on all fours. But hopefully his restraint had paid off, and he could enjoy this to the fullest.

After taking himself in hand and coating himself in the remaining lubricant, he rested the head of his cock against Potter's entrance and took a breath before slowly, agonisingly slowly pushing forward until he was just inside. Potter's hand flew back and rested on his thigh which Draco took to mean 'stop, wait', which he did.

The tight heat enveloping him was intoxicating, but more so was the mere idea that he was inside Harry fucking Potter, the Boy Who Lived to cause Draco problems. The Saviour was on his knees and Draco was taking him.

It was a heady feeling, but he had to rein in that particular thought otherwise he'd lose it within seconds and that was just too mortifying to contemplate. True, he didn't like Potter, but he still wanted to make this good, because he was a Malfoy, which meant he must excel in all things! Plus, he wasn't about to embarrass himself in front of Potter (okay, technically, behind him), if he did, this was less likely to happen again.

Potter gave his leg a squeeze then let go, which was the go ahead he'd been waiting for. Again, very slowly he started to inch himself inside, after going in a tiny bit he would draw out and slowly insert a little more of himself on the next thrust. It seemed to be the right technique because after a short while Potter began pushing back onto him.

After a few, controlled minutes, Draco was fully sheathed and both boys were panting, apparently quite as overwhelmed as each other. Draco initiated a smooth rhythm, not too fast, not too slow and Potter lowered his head to the mattress with a groan, a sheen of sweat glinting on his muscled back.

It was sensational! Tight, hot, willing flesh encasing him and a symphony of wonderful gasps and moans escaping from the boy beneath him made it almost perfect. Almost. He wanted more, more of that glorious expanse of skin. He wanted to be touching Potter in as many places as possible.

Breaking his rhythm he leaned forward, snaked his arms around Potter's chest and lifted him, so that he was sat back on Draco's lap, held in his embrace. Then he began rocking his hips into him again and the change in position meant that something was different because Potter actually yelled out, a shiver running through his body.

Oh yes, more of that please.

Draco repeated his movements and Potter cried out again, before seeming to melt into him, panting and groaning loudly, his hips grinding down in tandem with Draco's own. The sounds were the
sexiest thing he'd ever heard! One of Potter's hands swung up to grip tightly in his hair, while the other seared bruising marks into Draco's hip as they rocked steadily against each other. He couldn't go very fast in this position though, and his feet were starting to cramp up slightly. He stuck with it though, if only to hear more of those noises, until he could no longer control the urge to just pound into Potter, to claim him.

"Potter," whispered Draco, panting heavily, "on your back."

Obediently, Potter raised himself off Draco and dropped back onto the bed, knees bent and falling open. For the first time Draco got a good look at the whole of him and he had to admit, albeit sullenly, that he was pretty much perfect. The smooth skin, the muscle tone, the nipples, the trail of dark hair leading to a gorgeous cock. Yes, he was fucking perfect. The bastard. Like he didn't have enough going for him already! Like he wasn't already the bloody saviour of the sodding world!

But Potter was looking at Draco slightly confusedly, lips parted, brow pinched above those bright green eyes, rendered darker by lust-blown pupils. Really, it was just unfair how pretty he was, and Draco leaned in, kissing Potter forcefully, and biting his lower lip as a small punishment for being this damn gorgeous. Hands buried themselves in Draco's hair and pulled him close, before hot breath tickled his ear as Potter's low, almost unrecognisably husky voice whispered, "Fuck me."

Draco nearly came right then.

~ // ~

He didn't care how desperate he sounded, Harry needed more, right now! He'd already gone so far he wasn't going to worry too much about retaining dignity at this point. No, he was just going to get what he wanted. And he wanted Malfoy back inside him. Now.

At his words, Malfoy had looked like he might well explode, and Harry smirked. It was exactly what he'd wanted, but even better than anticipated, to see the normally composed git look so flushed and shocked. Malfoy pushed into him once more and the slight burn was back, but not for long as in this position the magic spot inside him was being hit on almost every thrust! Harry's head fell back. "Oh, God!"

Malfoy hoisted Harry's legs up over his shoulders and took a firm hold of his hips, pausing just a little, before pounding into him with a punishing rhythm. Stars were bursting behind Harry's eyelids, one hand fisting in the sheets, the other swinging up to provide leverage against the headboard, as the tight knot of pleasure started to build rapidly.

Grunting breathily, Malfoy leaned down, bending Harry almost in half, and plundered his mouth again, his tongue pushing roughly against Harry’s as the sound of skin against skin and the squeaking and banging of the bed echoed off the walls. Malfoy kissed his way down the column of Harry's neck, nipping down to his pulse point where he latched on, sucking a painful mark into his skin. The sting of that possessive move shot straight to Harry's dick.

There were some loud noises emitting from him, but he didn't give two shits about keeping quiet — this was far too incredible to be quiet about! The delicious pounding seemed to go on forever, all the while building and building the white hot pressure in his groin.

Harry's eyes flew open as he felt a long fingered, slicked up hand wrap around his leaking erection and rasped out a cry as it started jerking him powerfully in time with the fierce thrusts of Malfoy's hips. Five, six, seven tugs, and then...

His heart leapt to his throat where it proceeded to stop beating, hanging him in stasis for a glorious
few seconds as everything whited out—then the waves of visceral ecstasy began crashing over him, again and again, causing his body to buck and tense and spasm. Malfoy's hand did not still, nor did his hips as Harry's orgasm kept going, winding him like a gut punch. In a dim periphery of his awareness he noted the warm splashes of his release hitting his chest and coating his dick.

But...it still just kept on going! His pulse thumped loudly in his ears and Harry felt in serious danger of passing out. He opened his mouth to say this but all that came out was a series of guttural vowels, all ability to form coherent words —or even just consonants— apparently lost. But just as everything was becoming too much, too sensitive, Malfoy's hips faltered and then stilled as his usually haughty features screwed up at his own fierce climax.

Malfoy let go of Harry's hips and slumped forward, bracing his arms either side of Harry's head whilst his aftershocks rippled then died down. Their heavy breaths mingled between them, catching the rapidly cooling liquid on Harry's chest. Malfoy had his eyes shut and didn't seem about to move, so Harry took a good long look at him.

He was flushed, sweaty, dishevelled and looking totally un-Malfoy like. His usually sleek hair was all over the place, and Harry couldn't help feeling smug; he did that. And it suited him. Much better than his usual snooty, over-polished look anyway.

Mission successful.

Harry dropped his head back with a small sigh; damn he was wrecked, he felt like he could sleep for days! Malfoy shifted himself and suddenly Harry felt bereft as he slid out and collapsed beside him on the bed.

"Fuuuuck," was all Draco sighed out after a short silence, before he rolled over to the edge of the bed. For a confusing moment, Harry thought he was going to leave — confusing because he couldn't quite tell whether he actually wanted Malfoy to leave now or not — but then he was rolling back with Harry's own wand in hand and cast a quick but efficient Scourgify on them both, before dropping it on the bedside table. Malfoy didn't seem about to hex him...

As Harry was rapidly falling prey to the exhaustion that clung to his bones, he decided that Malfoy could do whatever the hell he wanted, Harry was just going to enjoy the spent, achey bliss he was floating in and go to sleep. Mind wonderfully, beautifully blank, and body utterly devoid of tension, he mumbled out a brief "Thanks" before he was out like a light.

~ // ~

Potter was unconscious! He'd just fallen asleep...just like that. In Draco's presence! He couldn't help feeling the Chosen Oaf was getting sloppy if he was just letting his guard down like this in front of a known...well, not enemy anymore perhaps, but, antagonist at least, even if they had just...well.

But, if he were honest with himself, Draco was only just clinging to consciousness as well, and maybe he had been a bit rougher on Potter than he'd intended, no wonder the guy had just passed out. Feeling rather smug about this, Draco rolled onto his back and let the heady thrall of post-coital sleep envelop him.

He was out in less than a minute.

~ // ~

Harry enjoyed his first night without nightmares since the Battle of Hogwarts.

He awoke warm and sated the next morning to an empty bed —unsurprising— and a note left on the
pillow beside him—more surprising. He reached over, muscles twinging at the effort, arse predictably sore, and picked up the folded note.

Neat cursive script adorned the scrap of parchment, which simply read:

_Floo; East Wing Fireplace, Malfoy Manor._

~DM
Well...that answered a few questions about last night, but raised a whole lot more. Harry rolled to get out of bed and felt all his muscles groan in protest along with a sharper pain shoot up from his rear and he flopped back down.

Damn Malfoy, of course he'd caused Harry to overdo it. But he definitely hadn't been complaining at the time and, despite a hearty surge of confusion with a fair dose of panic, he couldn't seem to find regret within the swirling mess in his head.

So, apparently boys. Boys were a thing he liked. Or, at least, Malfoy was a thing he...no, not liked, that wasn't right, just...enjoyed sleeping with. Apparently. Holy crap, his first time had been with a boy. Did that make him gay? He didn't think so, he'd fancied Cho, and there was Ginny too, and—Uh oh, Ginny. What should he say to her? What could he say to her? Could he say anything to anyone?! He was spiraling...

Choosing to ignore this cacophonous riot clanging around his head in favour of finding some food to appease his growling stomach, he sat up, wincing slightly and dressed, then made his way down to the bar.

The rest of his day passed in a slight haze, going about his business, getting back to Grimmauld Place somewhat distracted, with the note from Malfoy burning a hole in his pocket. An owl he recognised as being from Hermione arriving around midsday brought him out of his reverie, she suggested that Harry meet her and Ron to have dinner together, if he was feeling up to it after the trials.

His immediate instinct was to decline, holding on the to solitude he'd been cultivating so carefully for the last few months. It wasn't like he hadn't seen his friends at all, of course he had, but he'd still spent the majority of his time avoiding probing questions and inquiries into his mental state.

On the other hand however, he actually felt less jittery and anxious than he normally did. He wondered whether working out some physical tension had helped calm his nerves some. And it would get him out of his house, but...he paused for a moment, hesitant, quill ready to pen a response.

Would they be able to tell what he'd done, that something was different? Would they sense that Harry was both no longer a virgin but also...that it'd been with a guy. And not just any guy, Malfoy! Ex Death Eater and enemy and all round twat, except for when he was scorching passionate kisses into Harry's sk—NO!

No! No, he was being stupid, there was no way for them to tell any of this stuff and Harry would bet his left testicle that Malfoy did not gossip with Ron or Hermione. He pondered a moment on what their reactions would likely be. Nothing good, that was for damn sure. He didn't imagine that Hermione would care about sexuality, but Ron...and then there was the specifics of who he'd been with. He couldn't see how either of them would be okay with that. Was Harry even okay with it? He thought so, maybe, but it didn't matter.

Last night had been an anomaly, something that had flared to life out of the blue and burned up just as fast, bizarre and inexplicable, because Harry did not intend to spend any more time around Draco Malfoy. Nope, he was going to continue living as he had been and try to forget the way his body had tingled at being touched and filled, how he had been able to lose his inhibitions and totally let go, or how Malfoy had pounded him ruthlessly into the mattress, hand fisted around his di—
Maybe this would take a bit more active repression than he'd thought.

Mentally telling himself to suck it up (and desperately trying ignore the images that put into his mind) he replied to Hermione that yes, he'd love to see them for dinner, just let him know a time and a place. Patting the owl gently before it took off, and feeling a twinge of grief for Hedwig, Harry turned his attention back to the task he'd prioritised for the week — getting Grimmauld place not only livable, but also less depressing than a graveyard.

Four hours later Harry was starting to realise several things;

One, this house might be beyond saving and he should probably just bulldoze the fucking thing.

Two, every time he moved, various parts of his anatomy would give him very clear, achy (but not unpleasant) reminders of his activities the night before, which led to vivid flashbacks and minutes spent staring at a wall and even more minutes waiting for things to settle down.

Three, point two kept bringing his thoughts forcibly back to the scrap of parchment with a certain floo address on it.

Points two and three together especially were making it nigh on impossible to make any headway with the house. Harry glanced at the imposing marble fireplace in the drawing room, fingers playing with the tiny note still in his right jeans pocket.

He could...what? What would he say? He was pretty sure he knew why Malfoy had left his address and he'd bet, not only his left testicle but also a few galleons, that it had nothing to do with talking. Which was good, he supposed. Wasn't it? Was it...?

He scrunched the note up in his fist, but didn't throw it into the grate, simply turned on his heel and strode downstairs to find himself a drink. Well, half a day without anxiety was still pretty good. Better than most.

He had discovered the calming effects of firewhiskey after a particularly brutal night when he'd awoken from a vivid nightmare in which Voldemort had not died, but simply laughed at a powerless Harry and mowed down all his friends in front of him. Unable to force himself unconscious again Harry’d found a few bottles inside an ancient and dusty drinks cabinet, revealed after the cabinet was the victim of one of Harry's attempts to vent his frustration by kicking things.

He didn't drink every day, just the very bad ones, and since he had all of zero tolerance built up, he could never handle more than two glasses. That was normally enough to at least douse him into an uneasy sleep. Today he only had a small glass to calm his nerves and take the edge off the increasing desire to grab a handful of Floo powder and say the words on that note.

~ // ~

Draco scolded himself for the fiftieth time that afternoon after his eyes flashed over to the fireplace for the fifty first time (he could rationalise that just once was forgivable). He felt like a complete idiot, sat waiting, sipping tea, pretending he wasn't actually waiting at all. But the charade wasn't achieving anything other than making Draco thoroughly sick of tea.

When had the proud Malfoy heir turned into a pathetic teenage girl?! It hadn't even been twenty four hours yet. Plus, Potter wasn't going to show up, that had never even been a possibility, so why Draco bothered to leave that note or was waiting was beyond him.

Well, no, not completely beyond him. After the whirlwind of totally unexpected yet utterly mind blowing sex, Draco's endorphin–drunk brain had been adamant that either of them would be foolish
to pass up indulging in it again, whatever their history. It had nothing to do with allegiances or wars or past indiscretions, just the fact that it had felt in-fucking-credible and Draco had summoned up his courage and left a way for Potter to take advantage of this.

A courage which had quickly shrivelled and morphed into a flourishing paranoia that either Potter would show up simply to curse him soundly, or not show up at all. Draco couldn't quite decide which was worse.

He took another sip of his tepid tea, then scolded himself. Fifty two.

~ // ~

"Harry!" He was engulfed in a mass of arms, freckles and bushy brown hair. "Oh, it's so good to see you."

"Good call on a muggle place mate, rumour has it that Skeeter's wanting to snag you for an interview about the Malfoy trial."

Harry became acutely aware of the dull ache in his behind and felt a flush creep up his face. "How come?"

"Probably because it's so high profile, isn't it," supplied Ron. "Plus she can spin in something about you and Malfoy at school too. Bet that'd make the article more juicy, although she'd hardly need to exaggerate anything there." Harry coughed uncomfortably.

His request to stick to muggle London had been a surprise to no one, since the wizard press had been hounding Harry non stop since May. He was inordinately grateful that they had not been allowed in the Ministry for the duration of the Death Eater trials and also that his home address was still protected by the _Fidelius_ charm.

As they found a table Harry twitched at his collar compulsively. He'd dressed very carefully before leaving the house, after spying a conspicuous dark purple mark on the junction between his neck and shoulder whilst wandering past his grubby bathroom mirror.

There was no mistaking it for anything else. It was a hickey.

A fucking love bite and he didn't have any bruise remover. He was woefully bad at healing spells and wasn't about to turn himself orange or something by accident before meeting up with his two best friends. So, he'd settled for a high collar shirt and done it up one more button than he normally would (especially in July, damn he was toasty), and simply _prayed_ that it wouldn't be exposed during dinner. He was entirely _not_ ready for that conversation.

He probably should have it with someone at some point but...oh, hey look, breadsticks!

"You're looking well 'ermione," he fluffed through a mouthful of crunchy crumbs.

"Been taking etiquette lessons from Ron, have you?"

Hermione quirked her eyebrow, smirking at both of them as Ron flushed pink and pouted, "'M better nowadays."

"Yes dear," Hermione said quietly, patting his arm with a soft smile on her face. Harry couldn't help but laugh, he had missed this. Hermione turned her smile on him. "You're looking well too, better than the last time we saw you definitely," she said, casting a light glance over him. Harry turned the marked up side of his neck away a fraction in what he hoped was an inconspicuous manner, and
smiled back. It wasn't a very common occurrence these days and his face still felt slightly tight each time he did — especially if it was a smile for a Prophet reporter or group of well wishers.

"Really?" He asked.

"Yes," Hermione replied sincerely, "You do. Maybe having the trials finally out of the way has taken some of the pressure off, I know how difficult it's been for you."

"Maybe it's spending some time out of that mausoleum of a house," interjected Ron. "Seriously, Harry, you can't keep living there, I know it was Sirius' house and all but it's as dismal as the dungeons!"

"Well, that won't matter for too much longer, will it," said Hermione, shortly.

"It won't?" Harry asked, puzzled.

"Well, we'll be getting our Hogwarts owls soon, won't we? And then you'll be back in a dormitory for most of the year."

Harry simply blinked at her. This was the first he was hearing about any of this.

"Have you even been opening your post, Harry? For heaven's sake, this was why we wanted to see you last week, every student from our year was sent an owl saying that there will be a special Eighth Year for us if we'd like to return, so that we can officially complete our NEWTs."

Harry's thoughts drifted back to the teetering pile of unopened letters currently sitting on his kitchen counter and supposed there could possibly be a letter from Hogwarts in there somewhere.

But the thought of going back to the place he'd known as home was at once both tempting and terrifying. His beloved Hogwarts had been so badly hurt in the battle, it surely would still be under repairs and full of excruciating reminders of what horrors had occurred there less than three months ago. Just the idea made his blood run cold for a moment.

He considered telling Ron and Hermione about his daily struggles with his anxiety, about how difficult he had found reliving the memories for justice to be done. About how he roamed his house permanently braced for attack, for something to come hurtling at him from the shadows, or to receive word that someone else he loved had died. He could tell them, but...

Despite his cheery demeanour, Harry knew that Ron was still having a hard time dealing with Fred's death. Harry would catch moments in which his friend's eyes would drift away and they would fill with grief, pain and unshed tears. It was a feeling all too familiar to Harry. Hermione was helping Ron though. She would make sure to keep him busy and offer him comfort, even though she herself was having a hard time of it.

Her parents were still in Australia, missing the memories of their daughter. Hermione had been excused this little Obliviating indiscretion by the Ministry on account of her being instrumental in defeating Voldemort but she was having a harder time wading through the red tape to travel there and reverse it. With the Ministry still pulling itself back together, weeding out the last of the Dark wizards and sympathisers, getting the paperwork to allow Hermione to get her parents back was taking, in Harry's opinion, an inexcusably long time.

No, they had their own burdens to bear. They'd been right alongside Harry for most of this and were likely struggling as much as he was, and he didn't hear them complaining about it. He didn't need to burden them with his weakness.
"Won't it be good to get back to classes again," said Hermione with a wistful look on her face. Ron rolled his eyes.

"Honestly, you'd think the worst thing about defeating a genocidal maniac was that we hadn't been getting homework on it," he sighed.

Harry grinned as a waiter arrived to take their orders.

~ // ~

Life without his wand was HELL.

The better part of his last decade having been spent learning and using spells and charms (and jinxes) for most everyday situations, Draco now found himself utterly unprepared for life without magic. Life as practically — he shuddered — a muggle.


Breakages: Reparo. Dirt: Scourgify!

But now he felt...he was just so...

Impotent.

And left with little else to do all day but wallow and dwell over his current predicament —he had forced himself to put down the tea and stop watching the fireplace— Draco had taken to attempting wandless magic. A dangerous endeavour and one which had led to the accidental implosion of an antique lamp. He'd felt about five years old again as he hid the remnants from his mother.

Draco had almost given up hoping that his wand would be returned at all and was seriously considering seeing if he could buy a new one. He doubted, however, that any wandmaker would have dealings with him or his family anymore, especially not Ollivander. A nauseating wave of guilt rolled through him at that, and he sank back into the chair he'd been occupying for most of the day.

As interminable as this was, he deserved it. Merlin, he surely deserved worse. He felt angry at how he'd been seduced into being a pawn for so many self-interested bastards. Self interested or insane bastards! It'd been so fun for a while. Fun, until...

No. No matter. He would do his penance, yes, but rehashing things that were in the past would do neither him nor anyone else any good. Being future oriented was the only way to keep himself sane, and he had more pressing current issues to deal with.

Namely that he had slept with Harry Potter. And, hell's bells, if that didn't simultaneously excite and horrify him. The last thing his damaged family reputation needed now was a scandal from having a...one of those as the sole remaining heir.

Draco's stomach sank. Gods, he was one of those wasn't he? He'd enjoyed it...he'd more than enjoyed it, and had just been very lucky that their medicine cabinet had a decent stock of Arnica Amble's Brilliant Bruise Remover to hide the evidence of just how hard Potter bit. He'd be done for if anyone found out.

But...he couldn't stop thinking about it, or wanting it to happen again, which was dangerous. He shouldn't have left that note, despite the increasingly prominent rebellious streak within him being delighted that he'd done it; consequences be damned! He tamped down on that by reminding himself
he had certain responsibilities as not only the sole heir, but also now as the man of the house.

Ugh, why did Potter have to ruin everything?! Even his new life after he'd escaped his old one. What even could he do to restore the family name?

If he were honest with himself, he knew. He didn't want to, but he knew. He swallowed.

Get married. That was the obvious one, and within the pureblood families most heirs got married fairly soon after school, so it wouldn't be unusual at his age. Draco sighed, his stomach sinking into his shoes. He should probably start looking at potential pureblood brides, although the list was drastically whittled down. He needed to secure the Malfoy dynasty, and that was going to be no easy feat.

The thought of wading through meetings with girls and their parents and the accompanying social manoeuvring and politics made his skin itch, so Draco decided a nice long shower was needed. He headed to the bathroom, casting only the briefest of glances at the empty fireplace as he did.

~ // ~

When he got home Harry had summoned his letter out of the pile of mail, given that it threatened to avalanche whenever he so much as walked near it. Sure enough, he'd been invited back to finish his formal education and despite the rumours he'd heard that Kingsley was ready to offer him a trainee Auror position right away, Harry wasn't ready to face the rigours of the wizarding workforce just yet. Mostly he wasn't ready to face the press or the people. At least up at Hogwarts he was afforded some degree of privacy, if not anonymity.

It was dark outside. Lights were glowing in his neighbours houses and the shouts and laughs of merry partygoers filtered in through the open windows. They were out, enjoying their weekend, celebrating their freedom, not haunting a dark house alone like him. He was alive dammit! Against all the odds he was still here, so why couldn't he enjoy the life he had snatched back from fate? Why was it so damned hard these days?

Maybe he needed to work against this, work against the paranoia and the worry and actually do things before over thinking them, like he used to...like he'd done yesterday. There'd been no thinking involved then and he'd felt fantastic, felt free, at least for a while.

So, without contemplating it any more Harry strode to the mantle, grabbed a fistful of glittering powder and stepped into the grate, saying clearly, "East Wing fireplace, Malfoy Manor." He was whisked away in a flurry of swirling colour.

Harry stepped lightly onto the marble hearth, his feet disturbing tiny clouds of ash but otherwise making no indication of his presence. It wasn't early by any means but it was not so late as to confirm undoubtedly that Malfoy would be in bed. Still, the parlour into which he had emerged was completely dark, any remnants of summer sunlight snuffed out (by heavy drapes or magic he couldn't tell) and Harry was starting to feel reticent about his impulsive decision to floo over. The smell of the mansion permeated his senses, unpleasantly familiar. He could hear distant creaks, a faint rushing.

The dungeons below this house were this dark, he knew from first hand experience. So dark, and dangerous. They'd all been trapped...he'd heard the screaming...felt the fear...

As he stood there the darkness squeezed oppressively around him. Vivid flashes of green light, knives flashing, lifeless faces. A silver hand gripping his throat...squeezing...choking. His breath wasn't coming, air wasn't filling his lungs! His insides were lurching, was the floor moving? The rushing grew louder and filled his ears punctuated by the screams of people he couldn't save.
Muffled shouts.

Then a blinding whiteness.

"Potter!"

A hand clamped on his shoulder and shook him hard.

Harry's vision slowly drew the now lit room into focus, along with the figure standing before him. He'd not even noticed anyone approaching but had automatically raised his wand at the intruder anyway.

"Potter, put that thing down would you?! What the hell is wrong?"

Harry realised too late that he was still standing in the elegant parlour, but he was pointing his wand straight at a shocked looking Malfoy. His senses whirred back into life and he began to put the pieces of what just happened together. Faltingly he lowered his arm, heart thrumming, gasping heavily. This was humiliating.

He'd had another episode. A wave of dizziness hit him hard and he swayed slightly. Normally they happened in the privacy of his own home, one of the many reasons he chose to spend the majority of his time there. But he hadn't been able to control this one and he'd just gone to pieces in front of Malfoy. Damn it.

"Sorry," he murmured, taking measured breaths and hastily stowing his wand with shaking hands.

"What just happened," asked Malfoy, looking apprehensive. Harry flushed and felt his stomach coil in embarrassment.

"Uh, it's...it's nothing I just get, er, sometimes, these...er," he was babbling, his addled brain finding words elusive. It wasn't until then Harry noticed that Malfoy was in a dark blue monogrammed bathrobe, his hair still damp. So that was where he'd been. "Can—can we just ignore this happened?"

"It's hard to ignore getting a wand pointed at you when you're not wearing underpants." Harry felt his cheeks redden and his eyes flicked briefly downward involuntarily.

"Sorry," he mumbled again. "I've been getting these...these 'episodes' since the battle. I guess they're like panic attacks, I get flashes of stuff that happened and everything gets out of focus and I sometimes forget where I am." Harry hated how shaky his voice sounded but the anxiety fizzing in his abdomen was lessening fairly swiftly now.

"Yeah, you'd completely zoned out there. But after what you told me yesterday, I'm hardly surprised. Do the rest of the Golden Trio know about these 'episodes'?"

"I—the what?"

"The Golden Trio. Didn't you know that's what the public calls you, Weasley, and Granger? The Prophet picked up on it a few weeks back and seems to be in common parlance now. I would've thought you'd have heard it by now." Harry's eyes widened.

"No. I mean, no I hadn't heard it and no, they don't know about..." Harry waved his hand vaguely at himself. He continued to ease down his heart rate with steady inhalations.

"I'm supposing then they probably don't know about...last night either?" Malfoy was probing and
Harry could tell he was worried, probably about the likelihood of getting cursed by Ron or smacked by Hermione. Or vice versa. Harry's mouth twitched at the humour of both those possible situations, but shook his head. Malfoy visibly unclenched.

"Hmmm, how many secrets do you keep from them I wonder?" A smirk twisted the corner of Malfoy's mouth and the familiar antagonistic gleam lit his eyes. Bizarrely, his old smarmy drawl was actually...calming. It made Harry feel like he was in well trod territory, like he knew what to do, and that was heaps better than floundering in fear. "Do they know you bat for the other team? Do they know you like taking it up th—"

"I don't even know which team I bat for, Malfoy. It's not like I've had much opportunity to find out yet," Harry interrupted, bristling. Malfoy had slinked gradually nearer during their chat and stood challengingly close now, Harry could see a flash of pale chest through the top of his robe, and heat flared up his whole body. "What about you? Did you know you liked boys?"

"Hmmm, I'm not sure I do..." Malfoy slid his hands up to the lapels of Harry's jacket and a thrill rushed through him. "I think I need to try it some more before I can say for certain."

"Really? After the other night, you're not sure?"

"Maybe you're not quite as good as you think you are..." needled Malfoy, provoking Harry to square up. Barely two inches separated them now, all set jaws and steely glares, the tension hanging like a taut wire between them.

"Maybe you need reminding." And Harry drove him forcefully back by the shoulders into the nearest wall and crashed his mouth onto Malfoy's, the tension snapping.

Malfoy groaned into the kiss and brought his hands roughly up around Harry's shoulders, pressing them more closely together. Harry moved his knee to slot between Malfoy's legs and thrust gently forward and up coaxing out anotherplaintiff groan. The bulge resting on Harry's thigh was growing harder by the second and his own jeans were, too, becoming increasingly snug.

As his erection was reaching a point of near pain in it's confines Malfoy's hand grasped him firmly through the fabric. The almost pain burst into some actual pain but simultaneously a hot, heady surge of pleasure. He was unable to stifle his gasp, and Malfoy looked smug. No, no, it was too early for that. Malfoy hadn't got the upper hand just yet.

Harry swung both Malfoy's arms up against the wall, securing him there, open to him and practically powerless. It was a good look on him, Harry thought. Time to have some fun.

~ // ~

Draco had apparently forgotten quickly just how wicked Potter's tongue was, but he was being re-educated thoroughly. In fact, Draco thought it likely that he might come just from Potter kissing him intensely, his tongue sliding roughly against his own, their hips rutting slightly.

But he wanted to touch. He wanted to touch so badly, now that he knew what lay beneath Potter's atrocious muggle attire. A Seeker's lean–muscled, toned torso, a round, tight arse and a perfect package, just waiting for him to have them all. Draco struggled against Potter's pinning grip, but he was too strong. An unexpected thrill shot straight through him. He wriggled again and was gripped tighter, making his cock throb. This was an...interesting development.

"You can't use your hands Potter, what a waste," Draco lamented breathily as his as yet untouched erection experienced another pleasurable pulse.
"You're right," Potter said, retrieving his wand lightning fast and conjuring ropes to bind Draco into place against the wall (an even more interesting development), before sinking to his knees in front of him.

_Oh._

Draco gasped as Potter delicately pulled apart his robe, he could not quite believe what he was seeing, his mind simply boggled. Potter looked up and Draco's face must have reflected exactly how stunned he was because Potter actually smiled at him and chuckled, "But I don't need them."

As if to prove his point, Potter anchored both of his hands in the material at Draco's hips, securing the loose robe against the wall too, and fully exposing Draco's heated arousal. He then leaned in, looking slightly reverent, and ghosted a breath over the end of Draco's cock which twitched at the feather light sensation. Draco thought he caught a flicker of hesitation cast across Potter's features, but that soon became irrelevant as Potter advanced forward and actually took the crown of Draco's penis into his hot, hot mouth — and sucked.

_Holy hell_ was that just the most incredible feeling! He let out a shuddering breath he didn't realise he'd been holding and marvelled at the situation he was in. He was unarmed, bound, mostly naked and entirely at the mercy of Harry fucking Potter...and he'd never been more turned on in his life. Probably it also had something to do with the fact that he was receiving his first ever blow job, and he now knew what all the fuss was about. This felt heavenly!

From what had been said, Draco doubted Potter had done this before but he did _not_ lack for enthusiasm or...gusto. Potter's wild, black nest of hair was moving rhythmically back and forth, but never taking him very deep, and Draco was struggling not to thrust further into his willing mouth. This struggle intensified when Potter started doing _something_ with his tongue that sent urgent tingles shooting down his legs.

"P–Potter," he moaned out, "better slow down there." Draco was increasingly aware of his balls drawing up and his muscles tightening. With an obscene popping sound, Potter drew off him, casting his unnaturally green eyes upwards and they glittered. Dear gods, he looked stunning; mouth wet, red, and used, cheeks pink and hair looking so eminently touchable. But he couldn't touch, which was frustrating, and Draco's moist flesh was cooling rapidly.

"I have a perfectly serviceable bed in the next room, you know," he said, trying not to sound completely gone. Harry answered him by boldly licking a stripe from root to tip, moving his hands over Draco's thighs and trailing his fingers over what exposed flesh he could. His legs, his stomach, his balls, just behind them...

Draco shuddered, clenching his legs slightly at the unfamiliar touch, for the first time since he'd been tied up he began to feel slightly nervous. Potter looked up before adding a little more pressure to his perineum. Whilst it felt odd and new, it was also exciting with a definite flavour of 'anything you can do, I can do better'.

If Potter could take it, Draco could take it.

Gulping, still meeting Potter's eyes, Draco nodded once, spread his legs a little further and Potter got the hint. His hands lowered and, after a brief shuffle, a cool tingle spread through from Draco's arse in the familiar manner of a cleaning charm. How considerate, Draco thought, before a suddenly slick finger resumed it's previous place.

"Jeez, that's cold, Potter!"
"Don't be so precious, it'll warm up soon," Potter murmured against his sensitive penis and slid his finger smoothly back between Draco's cheeks, gliding gently over his entrance. Bright, new sensations tremored through him at the touch, and after running back and forth over his pucker muscle several times the finger applied steady pressure to it. Draco was pretty sure it wasn't going to go in. "Relax," whispered Potter.

Draco consciously tried to relax his muscles and then suddenly, just like that, Potter's digit had slipped past his ring and into him up to the second knuckle. He knew it was only a finger, just one, but it felt huge! How on earth had Potter taken Draco's whole dick?! Draco had a new respect for Potter's arse, not that he didn't respect the hell out of it already, fine specimen that it was.

Being distracted from the slight burn inside by Potter's mouth outside, Draco breathed through the utterly weird feeling of being breached whilst Potter's tongue resumed that thing it was doing a minute ago. Increasing the depth in small pushes Potter gradually got his entire finger inside Draco and, despite the bizarre sensation of it exiting him, every time it pushed back in it sent with it a surge of desire.

As the penetration sped up, each surge became more urgent, igniting in Draco a desperate longing to be more filled, more stretched. He could no longer control the need to thrust his hips and attempt to push down on Potter's hand. As he undulated, the change of angle sent an overwhelming burst of pleasure up through his body, the unexpectedness of it causing his knees to buckle! He was grateful for the ropes holding him up.

"Ah!"

Potter hummed around Draco's cock and became more exploratory, moving his finger across Draco's inner walls, finally striking the same goldmine as before, spreading a burning, all-consuming fire throughout him and rocketing Draco towards his orgasm dangerously fast through repeated stroking and sucking. Almost too fast.

"I'm—Potter, I'm coming—ngh!"

In the nick of time Potter pulled off, but received several thick, white stripes across his cheek and chin as Draco came spectacularly, clenching around the digit still inside him with Potter using his free hand to firmly jerk Draco through his climax. It was incredible; now he knew what Potter had enjoyed so much last night. Fuck!

As he shakily came down from his orgasm high Draco sagged against his restraints, feeling as structurally sound as cooked spaghetti. He was ashamed to admit to being so primal but the sight of his release marking up Potter's face was insanely erotic. Knowing no one else had claimed Potter this way...Merlin's beard he was thinking like a Neanderthal.

Potter stood, panting slightly and swiped his thumb through the sticky mess on his cheek and into his mouth, actually tasting it, before casting a cool, tingly Scourgify over them both. He braced his arm on the wall before vanishing the ropes holding Draco up which was fairly prescient of him since Draco pretty much collapsed into Potter's arms once freed.

~ // ~

Damn it, Harry was out of breath and as hard as rock! Who knew giving pleasure would feel nearly as good as receiving it? He had not expected every smell, taste, sound that Malfoy made to be such a turn on; but it really had been and now he was uncomfortably wound up and still imprisoned in his trousers.
Malfoy was draped over him, his hands winding into Harry's hair as he panted, catching the shell of Harry's ear. It was sending tingles down him and erupting his skin into goosebumps, so Harry dragged open mouth kisses from Malfoy's ear down the elegant lines of his neck. Harry wanted to kiss him, however he wasn't sure Malfoy would want to make out with him again until maybe he'd brushed his teeth, but he really hadn't been able to resist his curiosity — he'd wanted to know what Malfoy tasted like. Salty, musky and bitter as it turned out...and sexy. He'd tasted sexy. Next time, Harry decided, he wouldn't pull off.

Harry bit down gently, raking his teeth over the milky white skin that tasted of fresh, expensive soap. At this point Malfoy seized him fiercely by the hair and brought their lips together, snogging him senseless, seemingly determined to chase down his own taste in Harry's mouth with his tongue. Harry moaned, but even before he could fully get into it, Malfoy stepped back, fisted his hand in Harry's collar and —despite wobbling a bit— all out dragged him into the next room, which housed a large, ornate four poster king size bed.

"The clothes: off," commanded Malfoy, nearly ripping open Harry's fly. The relief was immense as his cock sprang free. Aided by the blonde, he was disrobed in seconds and then flung onto the springy mattress by a feral looking Malfoy, who sloughed off his robe then climbed between Harry's knees and looked him up and down like he was a five course meal. He closed in hungrily.

Harry's eyes bugged out as he watched his hard, aching cock disappear smoothly between Draco's lips. *Fuck.* He gulped in air as Malfoy's head rose slowly, dragging his tongue up Harry's shaft and down again. Malfoy cast a smouldering look up his body and then, without missing a beat, hollowed his cheeks and just went to town.

Harry cried out, flinging his head back into the plush pillow, plunging his hands into Draco's silky soft hair and holding on tight.

He wasn't intending to force his head at all, but Malfoy placed his hand atop Harry's and very deliberately guided it to move him up and down, clearly indicating that this was exactly what he wanted. Malfoy had placed his other fist around the base of Harry's dick to presumably prevent him from going too deep and choking, so Harry, not quite believing his luck, began working Malfoy upon his member — tentatively at first, but growing more frantic by the second.

He was fucking Malfoy's face. Actually *fucking Malfoy's face.* Never could he have ever imagined something feeling this sexy and he wanted to keep it going forever. But the tempting, tingling edges of his orgasm were already drawing him in. He probably should be embarrassed at how fast he was there, but he'd been *this close* to coming in his jeans whilst blowing Malfoy, so it was pretty fucking impressive he'd lasted this long! Plus he was *fucking Draco Malfoy's face!*

Too soon he was pulling Malfoy's head up and off before a sweeping rush of cold prickles shot through his extremities and he jerked, spurring his release all over his stomach and Malfoy's hand. The thudding waves of his climax pummelled him and he shuddered as Malfoy milked him dry then, spent, he sank into the bed, ready to just fall unconscious like this.

He felt Malfoy's weight shift off the bed and heard him rummaging, probably for something to clean them up. Sure, enough he returned with Harry's wand and magicked away the evidence of his orgasm before falling onto the bed beside him with a sigh. Harry's head was filled with a dull thrumming and nothing else.

Nothing else. It was bliss.

They lay side by side together in silence, their heavy breathing the only noise filling the lavish bedroom. Harry was beginning to drift off, entombed in the comfy silk sheets and his post–orgasmic
haze. And so he did, sinking into a peaceful doze, for how long he wasn't sure, but it didn't feel like that long before he was awoken by the insistent nagging of his full bladder.

It took him a second to register why it was so hard to move; aside from his limbs feeling like lead, there was also a heavy, warm body plastered across his chest and a shock of platinum blonde hair directly under his chin. Harry almost laughed — Draco Malfoy was snuggling him! He tried to shift the sleeping git as gently as possible but as soon as he stirred, Malfoy blinked open a bleary eye.

"Didn't take you for a cuddler," Harry muttered quietly, and Draco sprang off him looking heartily embarrassed in the dim light. Before he could comment, Harry asked, "Where's the loo?"

"Just round that corner to the left."

Harry clambered out of the bed and ambled to the toilet. After he'd finished, he returned and flopped back down again onto the gloriously comfortable bed. Malfoy was half sitting and Harry wasn't sure if they would just drift back off to sleep, which he really wanted to do, or if he was expected to make conversation.

"Your bed's a darn sight more comfy than mine, or any bed I've been in for that matter," he said, and then a thought struck him. "I wonder where we'll all be sleeping at Hogwarts when we go back. Do you think we'll still be in our house dorms?"

"What?"

"For Eighth Year. I didn't even find my invitation letter until this evening, but there probably won't be room for us in the usual dormitories now I think about it."

Immediately, Malfoy stiffened up beside him, before abruptly swinging his legs out of the bed, pulling pyjamas from a drawer and beginning to dress himself.

"I didn't receive an invitation back," he scowled darkly. "Hardly surprising though," he added quietly in clipped tones.

"Oh," was all Harry could manage. His stomach was doing some unusual twisty things at this information. Malfoy wouldn't be coming back with them. That was surprising. And irritating. Despite his ambivalence towards Malfoy, Harry couldn't help feeling that it was incredibly unfair to deny him his education, the opportunity for him to lead a normal life once his suspended sentence was complete. Surely spending his sentence at Hogwarts would be the safest place for him to do it, under the supervision of teachers and other Eighth Years. He opened his mouth to say something to this effect, but...

"You should go." Malfoy was standing at the edge of the bed, but looking staunchly away from Harry, who was still lying naked and uncovered on the silk sheets.

"Oh, er, right," faltered Harry, suddenly feeling a lot more self conscious. He dressed in silence, the awkward atmosphere getting steadily more oppressive, until he stepped up to the fireplace, still feeling jarred at the sudden change in dynamic. He dared a glance up at Malfoy who was now fiddling with something on his desk.

"I'll, er, I'll see you around?" Harry ventured, letting the question hang in the air. But Malfoy simply waved an imperious hand in dismissal, without looking up. "Right," Harry bit out sourly, fucked out bliss evaporating, before he started up the floo and stepped into the fire. For a split second he thought he saw the blonde head look up, an expression of distress upon the pointed face, but it was soon gone in a swirl of veridian flame and ash.
It was Friday afternoon, and he was standing alone in Ron's bedroom feeling almost as tired as he had the previous week. Harry had spent at least forty minutes at the Ministry that Monday convincing Kingsley of his argument; namely that Draco Malfoy should be invited to take his Eighth Year like the other witches and wizards his age.

He wasn't proud of it, but Harry had kind of assumed that his words would carry a bit more weight after the war. During their discussion it had been heavily implied that the return of Malfoy's wand (in safe keeping at the ministry since Harry had handed it over) was being delayed pretty much indefinitely, as some form of protracted punishment. Knowing how vulnerable Harry had felt at the loss of his own wand, he reasoned that, at the very least, readmittance to Hogwarts would mean Draco could have it back sooner.

Harry shook his head slightly. He really needed to stop thinking of Malfoy as 'Draco'. That was just wrong.

He had decided to head into London again almost immediately after being dismissed by Malfoy on Saturday night. Pissed as he was at the obnoxious farewell, Harry was determined to make sure that Malfoy had the same opportunity that the rest of his classmates did; the possibility of a normal future. It seemed criminally negligent —not to mention hypocritical— of the Ministry to try and deny Malfoy this after deeming he avoid Azkaban, stating that "he had so much life left to live and should not be condemned for his actions as a manipulated and desperate young man."

He had even penned a letter to Professor McGonagall on Tuesday asking if it would be okay for Malfoy to come back if Harry took full responsibility for him whilst there. Retrospectively, this probably hadn't been the wisest thing to offer, but he'd done it now, so he'd follow through if need be. Harry was nothing if not a man of his word.

Eventually, he'd been successful in convincing the Minister for Magic that he was right and a rather surprised letter back from the headmistress informed him that she, too, was amenable to this plan. Another arrangement he'd suggested was that Harry himself should be the one to return Malfoy's wand to him on September the first, given the fickle nature of wands and allegiances. Kingsley seemed to agree that it was safer to do it this way too, to try and ensure that it recognised Malfoy as it's master once more.

The last few days had been spent continuing his battle with Grimmauld Place, organising his unavoidable trip to the burrow, and keeping his thoughts off a certain blonde wanker who was making it difficult to decide if he wanted to see him again or not.

He wanted to tell Malfoy what he'd done, that he was getting another shot at school, but he knew exactly how that would go down, just where his 'pity' —as Malfoy would see it— would get him. Besides, Harry trusted Kingsley, yes, but he still didn't completely trust the Ministry to stay true to their word; and the last thing he wanted to do was get Draco's— Malfoy's hopes up only to be dashed again.

Plus, he was annoyed at Malfoy for a different reason. Harry had woken up in a sweat each day with morning glories akin to a damn flagpole. Whilst this happened normally sometimes (he was a teenage boy after all) it just didn't normally happen this frequently or relentlessly. The culprit could only be the incredibly detailed dreams he'd been having each night. A refreshing change from the nightmares to be sure but...they all starred a very specific pale, blonde person doing incredibly dirty things which inevitably meant Harry spent the morning sorting himself out, wishing it wasn't just him and his
hand. He must have wanked more in the last week than he had in the past decade.

A creak from the doorway caused Harry's gut to lurch in panic, and he turned quickly only to see Ginny leaning against the doorframe looking at him, her red hair glowing slightly in the late afternoon sun. His gut unclenched, although not all that much. He knew the look on her face, it was a look that clearly conveyed that they were going to have a talk, and Harry steeled himself. He owed her this much at the very least.

"It's good to see you. Finally." She sounded hurt and tired.

"I've been," he swallowed, "it's been...difficult. Seeing everyone."

"I know." They stood in silence for a while before Ginny sighed heavily and looked at the floor. "It's never going to be the same, is it?"

"No," Harry admitted, feeling overpoweringly guilty. "Gin, I'm not alright. After everything...I can't be what you want me to be."

"I just want you to be around, Harry!" She stalked closer with a pleading look in her eyes. "I just want you to talk to me again, please, let me– let me help? We're all not okay, Harry, my brother is dead and—" Ginny's eyes welled with tears as she choked on the words.

"I'm sorry," he said softly, and he meant it. "I'm sorry, Gin."

Harry moved and slid his arms about her shoulders in as comforting a way as he could. He stroked her fiery red hair and tried to reconcile hurting this amazing woman with having to be honest. "I'm sorry that I haven't been around, I can only promise to try more. But," he moved back to look her in the eye and was grateful to see she was not crying, "I can't be your boyfriend. Everything's different now. I'm different."

She gazed at him with clear, blue eyes. "I can tell. We never really had a chance, did we?"

Harry looked at her sadly and she stoically nodded her head. God, he loved her bravery, her strength in the face of everything. He wished he had that strength. He wished he was in love with her as he once had been. He wished a lot of things in that moment, and it was almost enough to make him lean forward and kiss her, tell her that it could all be good again and that they could be happy together.

But it would be short lived comfort. And he knew it wouldn't help.

The truth was, Harry didn't feel capable of love as he was right now. Every day was a new battle and the battlefield was no place for love to blossom, he was too busy trying to keep on living. And Ginny deserved better than a shell of a person who couldn't return her feelings in equal measure. What he was doing with Draco, it was nothing to do with love and everything to do with escape.

He could keep telling himself that. It kept him sane.

They stood for a few more long moments, until a voice echoed up the stairs.

"Harry, come on, the food's ready," Ron bellowed, interrupting the awkward silence stretching between them. So with one last resigned look at each other, they both made their way down to the party waiting in the garden to celebrate Harry's eighteenth birthday. He felt a hundred.

~ // ~

It had been almost a week since Draco had waved Potter off after unceremoniously turfing him out
of bed. Six excruciatingly long, introspective days. He had been so close to sending an owl to
apologise, but this traitorously un–Slytherin urge had been quashed with frequent reminders that,
even if he did square things with Potter, they could not keep doing...whatever it was they were
doing. Potter would be at Hogwarts and Draco would be here, scrambling around to clean up a
reputation thoroughly caked in mud.

So instead, he sat with his mother, discussing potential candidates to be the next Mrs Malfoy. It felt
almost like putting on an old set of chains. He wasn't free, he'd been deluding himself.

He was still trapped.

Trapped as Draco Malfoy, with everything that entailed and that was something he could never
escape. If he wasn't performing ghastly duties for a Dark Lord he was performing less ghastly but
still unpleasant duties for his family, his bloodline. Such as getting married to a pureblood witch and
producing an heir. Really, the only time he had ever felt free was with Potter.

That realisation hit him like a stampeding Erumpent to the face!

Oh bloody, sodding, wanking, buggering, shitting, fucking hell!

What was wrong with him?! He shouldn't want Potter, couldn't have him and...and...he didn't even
like the bastard! As if Potter would even consider anything other than a clandestine shag with Draco
anyway, especially after how Draco had dismissed him last time.

He tried to cling on to some of the vehement dislike he'd had of Potter throughout school, something
grounding; but it was difficult to hold onto that too much when the git had not only saved his life
and, you know, the world, but then proceeded to blow Draco's mind in bed. Twice. He ran his hands
into his hair desperately. How had his life become this messed up even without the bloody Dark
Lord to—

A sharp tapping broke him out of his world shattering panic, and he looked up at the window it was
coming from.

Draco's jaw fell open as the handsome tawny owl perched upon his window sill with an
unmistakable, thick, green inked letter attached to its leg. He could only gawp. No, they must have
sent it to the wrong address, or this was some clerical oversight. The bird tapped its beak impatiently
against the glass and he finally came round enough to let the creature in.

Removing the letter and opening it, Draco read the first few lines disbelievingly, before sinking into
his chair, unsure whether he wanted to laugh or cry. He was going back. Actually, really going back
to Hogwarts.

It was going to be a double edged sword for sure, but there was little hope for a future career if he
failed to gain his higher qualifications. He would just have to take the good with the bad, or in other
words, the inevitable backlash from the other students and possibly teachers — Draco would need to
keep his wits about him. Idly he wondered how many other Slytherins would be going back, and
then decided he'd check by sending a couple of owls to Greg, Pansy and Blaise.

~ // ~

Harry was recuperating from his conversation with Ginny, his birthday lunch and all the noise of the
Burrow, at home. He was glad to have been with people and not alone yesterday, but it had been
trying. Another reminder as to how much he valued quiet time to himself these days.

That morning he'd slept in late and been roused from vivid dreams (including a Ginny–shaped figure
blasting a dark thunder cloud at him, before it swept him up to the top of an infinitely tall tower from which he'd fallen, fallen down down down into a blinding white light) by an owl rapping at his bedroom window.

He'd found an additional small note attached to his Hogwarts letter, which had been written by Professor McGonagall. It had been a simple statement of thanks for his actions of the past year, his sacrifices and her approval that he was returning to the castle. All this said without ceremony, as was her way. At the close of the missive were a few sentences that lightened Harry's heart somewhat.

'Please do remember Harry, that events like these take their toll, as I'm sure you're well aware. This does not, and will never mean that you are weak, nor are you alone. I will be organising a support group for students affected by the conflict, of which I hope you will take advantage, should you feel the need. 

With Kindest Regards,

Minerva McGonagall'

He'd felt a surge of affection for the headmistress for the gesture, it meant a lot knowing that she had his back. And so he'd set about stripping the dank wallpaper from the room he had chosen as his bedroom with renewed vigour, feeling slightly less apprehensive about going back to a place so steeped in emotion for him.

One thought did keep niggling at the back of his mind though, as he chiselled and scraped away at the walls, and that thought was of Malfoy. Had he received his letter that morning like Harry? Probably. He should have. The Minister had given his word, no sense worrying about it. Best just go about his day as planned...

But he needed to know for sure, so Harry headed downstairs to his fireplace.

If he happened to pause by a mirror on the way down to fix his hair, then run back upstairs to change into a fresh shirt, it was just becuase he didn't need Malfoy bitching about his appearance, and had nothing to do with impressing him. At all. None whatsoever.

He paused, gave his underarms a brief sniff...then hurried upstairs to take a quick shower.

~ // ~

Draco's fireplace roared.

"You can't just keep showing up without warning, a precursory owl is customary," he lashed out. Potter didn't even look surprised. His eyes flicked over to Draco's desk, upon which his Hogwarts letter still lay open. Potter walked over and picked it up.

"What's this? I thought you said—"

"They must've decided I'd be less trouble up in Scotland. A whole school to keep tabs on me frees up a few DMLE employees, doesn't it? Anything to save the Ministry a few galleons."

"This is great though, right? You get to come back," Potter said, looking up at him with warm eyes. "Obviously someone thinks you're worth giving a chance."

"Maybe, still the whole Death Eater thing though, isn't there?" He said, trying to be realistic and temper his inner excitement at the fact that Potter seemed genuinely pleased he'd be returning to school with him in a month.
"But this is still good news, Malfoy," Potter smiled at him and Draco foolishly felt his stomach fluttering and his mouth twitching. He pulled himself back and made his face impassive. A moment passed. "Well, I better get goi—"

"Wait," Draco interjected before he could stop himself. Potter turned those emerald eyes on him and Draco felt himself fall a fraction further. "You could stay...for a bit I mean," and he cast a glance back to his bedroom door, just to make sure Potter really got the message.

The smile he got in return was inflammatory. "Thought you'd never ask." And the next moment he was swept up in Potter's strong arms, warm mouth and wicked tongue.

As it turned out, they didn't quite make it to the bedroom. The blue sofa by the fireplace had been more immediate, and as it turned out, a rather convenient height to be bent over. It was in this position that Draco found himself, feeling very excited but also incredibly apprehensive.

Potter was working one slick finger into him again, but this one a prelude to so much more, and it was this that was making Draco more than a little nervous. Of course, he'd enjoyed himself thoroughly the week before but he couldn't quite wrap his head around the idea of Potter having him. How would he even fit?

This concern was blown clean out of the water by Potter's finger then curving into that fantastic cluster of nerves again and making Draco immensely relieved there was a sturdy surface beneath him. He groaned deeply. Damn it felt good!

"I'm adding another," Potter murmured behind him and Draco's pulse quickened, he swallowed. Suddenly the intrusion felt impossibly big and the previously low level burn ratcheted up another eight notches. Draco hissed through his teeth as his muscles clenched involuntarily around Potter's thick fingers and he struggled to stop his body from forcing them out.

"Christ, how did you make this look so easy?" He grunted as Potter's hand pushed forward slightly.

"Just try and relax, breathe through it," Potter practically purred, sounding much closer than expected. His low voice resonated through Draco, sending a delicious shiver straight to his core. Potter's confident tone and smooth voice helped him to relax, loosen up and accommodate the additional digit. After some minor thrusts the overwhelming burn started to shift into a background hum and even though he still felt insanely full, it was, with each subsequent thrust, beginning to feel like...not quite enough.

Their movements steadily became more forceful. Draco's head bowed down and his eyes shut tight against the increasing sensation. There may be privacy wards in his door but he was still trying to minimise the embarrassing noises threatening to fall from his lips, and he endeavoured to breathe through his nose. As Potter increased the speed of the hand pumping into Draco he crooked those fingers again and sent shockwaves ricocheting through him. The humiliating cry was out of his mouth before he could stop it, but fuck it was incredible!

Mid groan, Potter surprised him by sliding his free hand around and running his thick, strong fingers over Draco's buttocks, sack and shaft. His previously flagging erection perked up noticeably and Draco's head was beginning to swim a little.

~ // ~

Merlin's beard, Draco was tighter than Harry could ever have anticipated! Yet again he worried that he might hurt Malfoy, but judging by the responses he was getting now, two fingers were starting to
hit the spot.

Maybe he'd loosen up a bit if Harry distracted him, and he knew just how to do that. He slid his left hand down the pale curve of Malfoy's arse, roughly across his milky inner thigh and then up to the coarse blonde hairs around his balls. He gave them a slight squeeze, rolling them in his palm when this seemed to be well received. Harry moved his attention to Malfoy's neglected dick, sliding his fingers up the shaft and grazing the sensitive head, not putting any pressure on it to give Malfoy the relief he wanted, simply because the shuddering and gasping this elicited was just too enjoyable. And maybe Harry was enjoying teasing him just a bit. It was Malfoy after all.

Once again, what rose to the surface of Harry's mind was just how bizarre a situation they were in. Less than four months prior they had been mortal enemies, adversaries for seven years, and now...but the weird thing was, it didn't feel weird! It didn't feel strange or uncomfortable or awkward, it just felt good. Really good. Like, really, insanely good!

He had not stopped the gentle pulsing of his fingers inside Malfoy, who was starting to squirm. Harry decided he'd be kind and finally stopped his teasingly light touches and closed his fist firmly around Malfoy's erection. It pulsed steadily in his palm and Harry marvelled at the rush of power and arousal his position gave him. Not for the first time, the idea of just how tight Draco would feel around his cock made Harry shiver in anticipation.

He jerked firmly and smoothly in a rhythmic counterpoint to the penetration of his digits and Malfoy let out a high pitched moan as he clawed at the sofa. Okay, time to see if Draco might actually be able to take him, time to add finger number three. Surprisingly, it only took a few minutes to comfortably accommodate a third finger inside Draco, and only a short while after that found him pushing back against Harry's hand practically begging.

"Please," Malfoy groaned, muffled against the sofa, "please!"

"Okay," Harry breathed, and his left hand whipped back to clumsily remove his pants.

This was actually going to happen! He didn't withdraw his fingers from Malfoy until the last second, not until he'd lubed up and lined up, completely ready to go. As soon as he'd slowly slipped his hand out of Draco, Harry rubbed the blunt head of his cock against the slick, pink muscle and then pushed forward. There was more resistance than he'd anticipated, even after stretching Malfoy as much as he had, and the head slipped forward over Malfoy's entrance. Hoping that he wouldn't hurt him, Harry urged forward with a bit more force and Malfoy began to open up for him, his tip finally sinking in and the unbelievably tight heat of Malfoy's channel enveloped him.

Harry choked back a grunt as the vice–like pressure around his erection forced his eyes shut. He heard a hissing groan emit from Malfoy and felt the muscles around him flutter.

"Fuck! Malfoy, relax."

"I'm trying." Malfoy gasped out, supporting himself more securely on his hands. "It's...it feels bigger than I expected." He hitched a knee up onto the arm of the sofa and spread himself slightly further.

Pride swelled up through Harry and he tried to keep his voice free of any smugness "Are you okay for me to...go in a bit more?" There was a pause.

"Mm–hmm," Malfoy took a few deep breaths and Harry ran a hand over his lower back and the globes of his buttocks. The contoured expanse of Draco's bare back was flexing with each breath and Harry was stunned by just how beautiful he found him. Of course, he'd always known objectively that Draco was attractive but since seeing him like this, stripped back and human, Harry
had realised just how stunning he was without all that armour on.

Fuck, and there it was again. *Draco.*

Harry leaned down as far as he could and placed a kiss in the centre of Draco's back, followed by a gentle nip, before he inched forward minutely with his hips. It was slow going. The overwhelming tightness was so tempting to just thrust into and taking it this slow was excruciating! But he resisted. He rocked into him in measured movements caressing and stroking as much exposed flesh as he could reach.

"Are you okay?" Whispered Harry, when another gentle push caused Malfoy to hiss through his teeth.

"Yeah," he grunted, none too reassuringly, "you could get a move on, though. Any time this year." Fine, if he wanted Harry to move that was exactly what he'd do. Holding back wasn't exactly getting any easier.

So, even though not fully seated yet, Harry drew out his length slowly and then sank back into that warm waiting hole. Draco tensed and let out a cry that might be pleasure, pain, a mix of both, Harry couldn't tell. But since he'd been the one to ask Harry to move, he'd keep going until he was told to stop.

And so he continued, pulling out almost all the way and then slowly but firmly thrusting back into Draco, landing a little deeper each time he did. He could see the arms supporting Malfoy beginning to shake, and he was breathing in shallow gasps. His back was flushing pink and Harry was hit with the overwhelming urge to see that flush in his face, to see what expressions he'd pull as he fell apart.

And then Harry's eyes fell on the writing desk.

Harry withdrew himself carefully which caused Malfoy to make a small noise of protest, but in answer Harry pulled him into a standing position, caged his arms around Malfoy's lithe torso and held him close, bumping Harry's slick, throbbing erection against the globes of his arse.

"Potter what are yo–aaaah," he gasped as Harry bit a possessive mark into the curve of his neck, before manhandling him over to the desk, turning him around and hoisting his hips up onto the edge of the wooden table. Through it all Draco just seemed to hold an expression of slight befuddlement.

Harry caught his lips in a deep, slow, dirty kiss, running his fingers up and down Draco's body. He groaned into Harry's mouth as Harry smoothly encircled Malfoy's achingly hard dick and gave it several even strokes. He then pressed a hand to his firm chest and pushed him back onto the desk so Harry could hook his arms beneath his knees, exposing Draco's entrance again. Yes, the desk was just the right height, this would be much better.

Raising one pale leg up to rest on his shoulders, he aligned himself and glanced his sensitive glans over the reddened, slightly puffy muscle before sinking much more easily into Malfoy, who grunted, then gasped as Harry drove into him, endeavouring to hit the magic spot he'd already teased so much earlier. Harry adjusted his angle slightly, starting lower, aiming upwards and — bingo! There it was. Draco arched off the desk, cock leaking against his stomach, chest flushed and his eyes closed as he vocalised a string of noises that could have been words, but really weren't.

Ruthlessly, Harry fucked into the incredible tightness that was Draco, finally giving himself over to the unimaginable sensations coursing through him, now that he knew full well that Draco was enjoying himself as much as he should be. Internally, he wondered quite where he'd pulled all that self control from! The constricting drag of Malfoy's inner walls was hot and wet and wonderful, each
pull and push only increasing the rapture.

Despite Harry's earlier worries, Draco's body was just swallowing him up now, eagerly tightening around him each time Harry hit his prostate. A small pool of precome had gathered under Draco's navel and Harry could see his hands gripping the edges of the desk like a vice, knuckles white, teeth biting into his bottom lip as his back arched a bit more. He was so sexy like this, his head jerking a little each time they collided from the force of Harry's thrusts. Harry wanted to etch the expression on Draco's face right now into his memory forever.

Fuck, he was getting close, each pounding strike getting him nearer to his climax. He wanted to make Draco come. He wanted to fuck him through it. But he couldn't reach and didn't want to drop Malfoy's legs and risk upsetting the angle.

"M-Malfoy," he panted out, "touch yourself."

As commanded, one shaky hand detached from the table and came to grasp Draco's flushed penis, instigating shaky, uneven jerks which nonetheless seemed to do the trick. In fewer movements than Harry anticipated Draco was arching, clenching and exploding, thick white strips painting his torso as he cried out loud enough for Harry to panic momentarily that someone (Narcissa) might hear them.

But he couldn't keep a hold of that worry as Malfoy tightened around him, another wave of his orgasm hitting him. He seemed lost in pleasure, just riding the bliss of it, and Harry teetered for the briefest millisecond on the precipice before tumbling into oblivion himself, stuttering in his rhythm and releasing in bursts deep into Malfoy. He was aware of making noise, although what kind he couldn't tell.

The thundering, pulsing ecstasy was eked out almost exponentially it seemed by the clenching and unclenching of Malfoy's body and Harry stood, his knees like jelly, his hips faltering as his orgasm finally faded out.

They stayed like that for at least half a minute, unmoving, just breathing, panting. As Harry softened, he slipped out and couldn't help but see the residue of his climax on the both of them. Oh Christ. The knowledge that he'd not only fucked, but come inside Draco Malfoy was doing screwy things to his brain, so he decided to find his wand and clean up the problem.

After the hygienics had been performed, Harry offered Malfoy an arm off the desk and over to the couch, which turned out to be a smart move as his knees wobbled dangerously when he stood. They both collapsed onto the plush cushions, still starkers, lying lengthways and pressed, chest to chest against each other. He remembered Malfoy's cuddling from the last time too, and smiled faintly. It was just an unexpectedly intimate trait from such a generally cold person.

Harry was half expecting to be given the boot. Last time hadn't exactly ended well, but Malfoy seemed in no hurry to move either of them. Harry still had his wand in his hand and it rested loosely in his grip on his stomach. Draco was draped half over him and shivered slightly, little goosebumps popping up on his arms. Without saying a word he took a hold of Harry's wand and summoned a blanket over to them, then set the fire crackling in the grate.

Malfoy twirled the wood in his hands thoughtfully, then seemed to pause before sending a hazy spray of small, glowing orbs into the air above them. They hovered and shimmered almost hypnotically, the brightness pulsing slightly in sync with the heartbeat Harry could feel against his ribs. The whole situation lulled him into a pleasant stupor.

"S'pretty," he mumbled into Malfoy's hair. Another silence.
"You really have no problem with me using your wand, do you?" Malfoy asked, sounding amazed. "Should I?" Harry inquired, rousing a bit.

"Well, it's rather personal," said Malfoy, still twirling Harry's wand in his long fingers. "Plus, I could do anything with it."

"I know you won't hex me," said Harry immediately. Malfoy glanced up and raised his eyebrows, the haughty look somewhat undercut by his current nudity and sex hair.

"Really? You know that. Even though I've done it countless times in the past."

"Well, not to be indelicate but you kind of can't, not without being sent to Azkaban."

Malfoy flinched at the mention of the prison and, Harry realised too late, his father's current home. Oh great, he was ballsing this up as badly as last time!

"Do you want to hex me?" He asked, smiling, trying to lighten the mood. Malfoy snorted.

"Of course I do, you're still you."

"Well thanks."

"Oh come on, if it makes you feel any better I don't want to use any fatal ones."

"Yeah, sure, that makes me feel a ton better," Harry deadpanned back.

Malfoy let out an involuntary chuckle, and the difference it made on his pale face was quite striking. It was an entirely different effect than his usual sneer. He looked almost likeable. Harry couldn't help but smile at that, at Malfoy with his layers stripped back (literally and figuratively). Harry joined in with the laughing and just like that the tension was broken.

The rest of their evening passed in an almost unrecognisable amiability, trading tasteless jokes and blowjobs, and not until Harry left for home early the next morning, after unintentionally nodding off at about eleven, did he realise that he'd just spent hours—an entire night—with Draco Malfoy and...enjoyed it.

They'd had . . . fun. Harry had been relaxed and comfortable and—as Jesus Christ on a bike—happy. This could mean only one thing.

He was clearly a lot more messed up than he'd previously thought.

~ // ~

Draco was buzzing.

As bizarre as being nice to Potter seemed in theory, in practice it had actually been fairly easy, especially when they could be in their own little, admittedly weird bubble. Draco knew it'd been at least two years since he'd felt this relaxed, elated even. Trying to rein in the giddy smile he couldn't seem to keep off his face he skipped down to the sitting room to find his mother composing a letter at the antique writing desk. He had a sneaking suspicion of what that letter entailed which pulled the smile from him a little. At the sound of his entrance she turned in her chair.

"Draco, I'm glad you're here, I wanted to let you know that I'm approaching the Greengrasses about an arrangement," she said with a wry smile. "I thought that Astoria, or at a pinch Daphne, could be a suitable match. As far as I remember the girls are tolerable." Draco cringed internally.
"Actually mother, I received my Hogwarts letter yesterday. I've been invited back to complete my exams given the...incomplete nature of last year."

"Oh, Draco, that's splendid! I didn't think— well, it's unexpected but still wonderful." She did look genuinely pleased and he relaxed a little.

"So you won't be needing to send that letter after all."

"Hmm? Well, it can't hurt to get ahead of the game now."

Draco looked puzzled. "But...I'm going back to school. At the very least gaining my NEWTs will get me a foot in the door after graduating, and then I'll be needing to concentrate on my career—"

"Draco," and Narcissa's tone had an almost apologetic finality to it, "it will only be one year after you return from school until your father gets back." Draco paled. "And by that point we need to have regained what reputation we can within the circle to negate any impact his return might have. We cannot afford to stop working on this, dear, and we cannot afford anything to jeopardise what tenuous station we still hold."

Draco's stomach promptly fell into his shoes.

What he was doing with Potter— no, just what he was was a threat to everything.

She was right after all, his mother was rarely wrong. Shagging Potter was wrong. Being a poof was wrong. Being this way he'd never be accepted into the upper echelons of wizard society, or even just society in general. Christ, he'd be disowned by his family immediately or they'd all be put out in the cold. And even if they did disown him they'd still be humiliated by the disgusting freak of a son they'd borne.

Draco felt shame, dread, and resignation well up within him at the prospect of everything he had to do. All of his previous happiness ebbed away. He nodded simply at his mother before beating a swift retreat and, after returning to his room, he collapsed into his desk chair.

Unbidden, images of their activities on the desk the previous evening bombarded him and he closed his eyes, trying not to dwell. He reached for ink and parchment. There was no point delaying the inevitable.

God, how should he phrase this? How did one say exactly, 'Yes, even though I surprisingly did not want to punch your face in last time we shagged, I must put the kibosh on our sexcapades because I now have to pretend not to be a bender and marry some pureblood priss to squirt out a sprog. All this because my father is a spineless bastard who bound us to a psychopath. Hope you're not too peeved. Bye.'

...bollocks. This was going to be difficult.

~ // ~

Harry had woken up feeling pretty damn good. He'd slept well, avoided nightmares and had a scrumptious breakfast served to him by Kreacher. He'd redoubled his efforts on his bedroom walls, feeling more energised than he had in a long time. He'd even caught himself smiling inanely a few times and humming to himself.

He wasn't panicking as much about Malfoy, about what it meant. So, Harry was a little bit...gay. So what? It's not like he had any parents to disappoint, although he was sure that had Lily and James been alive, they would have supported him no matter what. He still didn't think he was ready to talk
about it to Ron and Hermione though, but what did it matter? They had each other to find solace in and if Harry found that with Malfoy, well, it didn't concern them. He'd had fun, he was doing better. For the first time in a long time, it had been a good day.

_Had_ been.

It had been a good day before a sleek, haughty looking eagle owl had rapped at his bedroom window carrying a letter. A letter that he was now reading, feeling his good mood evaporate like a puddle in the desert.

_Potter,_

_I have come to the realisation – possibly a little late – that our current arrangement, such as it is, is foolish and not maintainable. This was inadvisable from the off, and I can't imagine it will do either of us any good to continue._

_There are certain things that are expected of me. I have certain responsibilities and standards to uphold, which means that I must ask you not to visit again. I will trust to your nature that you will respect this request, and I would rather not have to change the warding on the manor._

_I think it goes without saying that keeping this quiet is for the best for both of us. I'm sure you understand._

~ DM

Harry couldn't quite put his finger on how he felt at that moment.

Disappointed? Yes. Brushed off? Quite a sodding bit. But the overriding feeling creeping through him and bubbling beneath his skin was anger. He was angry that Draco was yet again playing a part set out for him by other people! Letting them control his life, after Harry had worked so hard to give Draco control of it back!! He lashed out a kick at the trunk situated at the foot of his bed and immediately regretted it. His toes throbbed as his anger subsided and a new emotion took its place. Resignation.

He was done. Just done saving people! He'd been doing practically nothing else for so many years and, no, he was just done with it. What could he possibly do to help? And how well did he even know Malfoy anyway? Sure, they'd had sex a few times and talked a bit but that didn't mean he had any say on the guy's life! Harry flumped back down onto his bed trying to soothe his wounded pride.

As daft as it was he couldn't keep the errant thoughts of _'now I have nothing to distract me from my life',_ _'did I say something wrong?',_ and _'was I not good in bed?'_ from swirling around his head. He mentally shook himself. Come on, Potter, this wasn't a relationship, hell, it wasn't even a friendship! It was...it had been...

Well, it had been a short but bizarre chapter in Harry's life. It spoke volumes that it had not been quite as bizarre as some others, he mused. But still, a chapter that had revealed certain things to Harry about himself which he was not sure he would have cottoned on to otherwise.

Unsure of what he should write, still quite hurt, Harry pulled himself from the bed, grabbed a quill. After hovering it over the paper for a solid minute he sighed and simply penned;

_I understand. See you in September then. — HP_

He tried to convince himself that his deflated mood and lack of desire to do anything for the rest of
the day was down to hunger. Or tiredness. Just not the letter.

He was getting pretty good at lying to himself.
Draco carefully, almost obsessively, folded the last sock into his large, precisely packed school trunk and ran his eyes briefly around his room before closing the lid and clunking the latches and padlock shut.

So, this was it. His last year at school. He'd barely given it a thought before last month, resigned to the mangled future left to him in the wake of the Dark Lord's insanity. And even now, as he stood preparing to head into London, Draco couldn't wrap his mind around the reality of returning as a student; not as a spy or a minion or a lackey. Just as a wizard trying to pass his exams.

He huffed a small incredulous laugh. After the life or death nature of his last two years worth of decisions the idea of his biggest worry being what grade he'd get in his NEWTs seemed hilariously trivial!

But maybe that was what he needed, to be a teenager again. To let things be trivial, at least before he stepped into the role of husband and father. Maybe if he let things be trivial then he'd be able to close his eyes and not see the faces of people he'd had to hurt or let be hurt. But he wouldn't get off too easy, he reminded himself.

He was hated.

Draco daren't walk into Diagon Ally. Even when he'd followed Potter after the trials the looks that followed him had been a mix of surprised and murderous and he was pretty damn sure it was just the fact those people were caught off guard that had kept Draco safe. If he just went there to shop he knew what would happen. He'd be cursed, possibly killed. And he was feeling that that may be a legitimate fear even at Hogwarts.

A small, very un–Slytherin-y part of him almost welcomed this reaction as a form of punishment for his crimes. Yes, the Ministry had given him a suspended sentence, kept his wand from him, sent Aurors to check on them but...that was kind of it. The family had to pay reparations too but, it just all seemed so...inadequate.

This wasn't punishment. Not like he deserved.

But thinking like this would get him nowhere! Guilt and remorse and self-castigation were unbecoming of a Malfoy and a Slytherin. Best to bury it, pull his socks up and prepare for the worst. A thought scratched at the back of his mind, quietly wondering if Potter would care if he saw Draco being attacked by a righteously angry mob. Would he...?

No.

That was buried. Done.

Girding himself he dragged his trunk out of his rooms and downstairs, trying to contain the nervous
roiling of his innards.

~ // ~

You know, Harry never thought that being able to see thestrals would be the thing that made him feel like he didn't stand out anymore, but it was. Most of the students saw them now. Not just a sad, select few. The upper school students slowed en mass as they approached the carriages and Harry felt the susurration of shock rippling through the crowd.

That had been the first impact of being back. The next had been the sight of the castle.

He didn't know quite what he'd been expecting but seeing the grand structure mostly put together only still with the occasional gaping wound in her side was harder to stomach than he'd anticipated. But before he could really digest how he felt they were traipsing up the stone steps and into the magnificent entrance hall, the giant hourglasses repaired and glistening full of gems again. He smiled a little as Ron clapped him warmly on the shoulder.

"Mr Potter!" A crisp, familiar voice that made him feel like he was in trouble cut above the kerfuffle. Professor McGonagall stood to the side of the hall with Draco Malfoy by her side, indicating for him to come over and join them. He'd been expecting this, hell, he'd organised it, but it was still a swift elbow to the nads to see him standing there looking all...Malfoy. He turned to Ron and Hermione, hoping he wasn't blushing.

"I'll be there in a minute, just need to do the wand thing," he said apologetically. Ron scowled over at Malfoy.

"Watch yourself," he offered gruffly.

"Oh, Ron, come on," Hermione huffed with a mixture of exasperation and impatience, and she moved them both into the Great Hall as Harry turned the other way and met up with his headteacher.

"It's good to see you looking so well," McGonagall said earnestly, casting her eyes over them, "both of you. Now, if you'll come along we shall see that Mr Malfoy's wand gets back to him with the minimum of bother." And she swept a short way down a side corridor and into an empty classroom. They followed, Draco still avoiding eye contact with Harry as they did so. Oh well.

As they entered the room the headmistress ushered them in briskly, asked Harry to get out the Hawthorn wand and instructed them to stand facing one another. She cleared her throat.

"Potter, you simply say 'I do' at the appropriate juncture. Understand?" He blushed but nodded. "Then we'll begin. Harry Potter do you relinquish ownership of this wand into the possession of Draco Malfoy from this time forth?" Harry felt a tiny bit uncomfortable, she was intoning it like a marriage ceremony.

"I do," he said and then handed the wand over to Malfoy, careful not to brush their fingers together.

"Alright then," said McGonagall, briskly, "Shall we head back up to the feast?"

"That's it?" asked both Harry and Malfoy together. They caught each other's eyes then both quickly looked away again.

"Should be. Mr Malfoy, would you care to transfigure your hat into a raven and then back again?"

Malfoy swept is hat from his head, raised his wand, cast, and it smoothly transformed into a sleek, black raven before reverting easily into its original pointed shape.
"All seems to be in working order to me, now come along you two, we don't want to miss the Sorting." And she swept from the room, leaving Harry and Malfoy alone for the first time since, well...

"Thanks," Malfoy muttered stiltedly, "for my wand."

"You're welcome," replied Harry, equally awkward.

They both stood still facing each other, neither making a move to leave the room, and with each passing second the tension grew thicker. This would end no place good. Harry just desperately tried not to dwell on the fact that he knew what Malfoy looked like naked. And aroused. And climaxing — Damn, it wasn't working.

"Well, I'm starving, going to headuptothehallnowbye," he rattled of quickly before practically running out of the room, attempting to calm himself. His libido was easily managed however as soon as he entered the room in which it had all ended.

The Great Hall.

A flood of memories and emotions overwhelmed him for a second but he tried to stay present, digging his thumb nail into his palm to stay in the moment and not get swept away.

The night sky was clear overhead, and the familiar smell of food, twinkling of candlelight on goblets and house flags went some way to dispelling the image of bodies, blood and fighting from Harry's mind. Still, it was with heavy feet that he made his way over to the Gryffindor table, trying to keep his heart rate down and his breathing even. The staring hadn't gone away either, no school year for Harry would be complete without it, but it felt slightly different now. Or maybe he was just different. He concentrated on the Sorting to distract himself from the fact that he was mere feet away from where Lupin and Tonks had lain.

Once the new First Years had been sorted, McGonagall had proceeded to reassert why she was one of Harry's favourite teachers ever by giving a somber but uplifting speech which left no one in any doubt of what kind of school year this was to be. Her words had been about forgiveness, acceptance, and she pointedly welcomed back everyone, casting a warm gaze over every single house table. She continued to say that bullying towards anyone, regardless of past allegiances, family or House, would be dealt with most severely. This year was about moving forward in a better world, a world they could shape into one of tolerance and kindness, moving out of the shadows of the past.

Harry clapped so hard his hands stung.

It turned out they were led to the new Eighth Year common room and dormitories by McGonagall too, who took them along the ground floor to a wide alcove flanked by two suits of armour. Each with an arm raised holding up their long shields next to each other. As they all gathered in the corridor McGonagall clearly spoke the password (Interhouse Unity) and they filed in through the double doors that appeared as the metal figures swung in their shields.

"This is your Eighth Year common room. The rules are the same as in your previous dorms, with the exception that, since you are all of age, you will have no curfew. However," her voice took on a frostily serious tone, "we will be holding each and every one of you to the highest standard of behaviour during your extra year. The younger students at this school hold you in great esteem, they idolise you for your exploits during the last year." Harry sensed a few students shifting uncomfortably and he would be willing to bet those were the Slytherins.

"Please don't let yourselves, those students, or the school down," she gazed around the gathered
students and a warmth bloomed in her eyes. "I am delighted to see all of you back again. I for one am looking forward to the next year with great anticipation. The sleeping arrangements are posted on the notice board, I wish you all a good night." And with that McGonagall swept imperiously from the common room, shutting the door behind her.

Chatter broke out and Harry quickly made his way to the large notice board. His stomach flipped a bit as he spotted Malfoy's name on the paper, but it was placed next to Blaise Zabini's. His own, thankfully, was next to Ron's, with their room name — the Phoenix Room. Suddenly desperate for quiet Harry hurried to the sleeping quarters, ignoring the flash of blonde in his peripheral vision, and threw himself onto his bed.

~ // ~

Draco breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that Potter was rooming with the weasel. There was a small, conflicted part of him that had worried they might be roomed together – and it couldn't decide whether to scream at the idea or scream for the idea. But it was a non issue, so he could put that potential freak-out minefield aside.

That night, as he settled into his new bed, hangings drawn, his thoughts drifted—as they invariably did when he was in bed at night—to Potter. He felt his dick harden and he sighed. That should not be an automatic response. Well, it wasn't going to go away on its own, so he slid his hand down past the waistband of his pyjamas and wrapped his hand around his semi.

He started slowly, loosely moving his wrist up and down, just teasing himself until he was fully hard. For about five seconds he considered attempting to get off without thinking about that Gryffindor tosser, until he remembered that he'd not actually been able to do that since July, so gave in and mentally conjured up his favourite image of Potter's body. A great snapshot from their first encounter; On his back, legs bent, face flushed, and looking just stunning as Draco rammed into him.

He started slowly, loosely moving his wrist up and down, just teasing himself until he was fully hard. For about five seconds he considered attempting to get off without thinking about that Gryffindor tosser, until he remembered that he'd not actually been able to do that since July, so gave in and mentally conjured up his favourite image of Potter's body. A great snapshot from their first encounter; On his back, legs bent, face flushed, and looking just stunning as Draco rammed into him.

He gripped himself tighter and timed his jerks with his memory's thrusts, pretending that the pressure of his hand was the wet heat of Potter's arse, although nothing could feel as good as that. His erection throbbed as he recalled with piercing accuracy the strangled moans and cries that Potter made as he got fucked, Merlin those were just the most incredible sounds. He'd dragged a fair few noises out of Draco himself, and the recollections of how he'd felt being filled by Potter's hardness spun him even closer to his orgasm.

His fist sped up, heat rushed through him and he flew towards that glorious release with varied flashes of toned muscles, dark hair and a perfect, hard cock running through his head. His three encounters with Potter had given him more than enough wonderfully filthy material to work with but the thing that sent him over the edge, the fucking thing was Potter's smile.

His wide, warm, toothy grin that made his eyes sparkle and slight dimples stand out on his lightly stubbled cheeks; that lit up his face like a torch and erased the lines of worry, making him look youthful and vibrant and beautiful. God, that fucking smile!

Draco came hard with a moan that did not sound suspiciously like 'Harry' and flumped back onto his duvet.

It was going to be a very long year...

Lessons started and life progressed absurdly normally. School was just...school. No life or death, no battles, just teachers and students, pranks and meals and homework. Slightly out of the norm were his Ministry Prior Incantato checks every two weeks, but they were brief-ish and mostly painless; just some grey nameless Ministry employee sitting across from him reviewing each and every dull
spell he'd cast over the fortnight to make sure they were all on the list of approved spellwork for ex-
Death Eaters.

Every time Potter crossed his path—which was every Potions, Transfigurations, Charms and
Defense class—Draco strove for haughtily indifferent. He had assumed that acting like it never
happened might drive Potter a little crazy (he was a hothead after all). And, it was certainly driving
one of them crazy, it just didn't seem to be Potter.

Of course it wasn't bloody Potter. Potter was going about his life just fine, as if their whole worlds
hadn't been tipped askew by three breathtaking nights. He was going to class and eating his meals
and talking to his friends as if...as if nothing was different! As if none of it had happened.

Which is what Draco had asked for, of course.

Draco tried to keep his eyes from following Potter around, he really did, but they seemed to find it a
physical impossibility not to notice when a dark haired, loping, green eyed idiot walked into the
room. He was furious with himself—this was the fireplace fiasco all over again—and he vowed to
keep his eyes from wandering and his focus on his school work.

It was a particularly dull Wednesday evening that found Draco in the Eighth Year common room
leaning over a frustratingly tough bit of Transfigurations homework, putting in as much effort as he
could to keep his eyes away from the group of people gathered in front of the fire.

Gentle noise was drifting from the throng as they chatted amiably about Merlin knows what, and he
caught himself recognising the throaty laugh of a certain someone, and it shot right to the centre of
him. He hardly ever heard that laugh anymore, in fact really the only other time he'd heard it recently
was. Well. Draco's eyes were uncontrollably ripped up from the parchment and trained on Ha—
Potter.

He was sitting on the rug, leaning against an overstuffed sofa, all lithe, long limbs and messed up
hair, laughing deeply at something Thomas had said. There were at least seven of them lounging
about over there (including the Patil twins and Finch-Fletchly) but Thomas was sitting by the side of
Potter. They were laughing. And smiling. And Thomas was clapping Harry on the shoulder with his
hand. Which was lingering. *Lingering.*

Draco's eyes narrowed as he watched that hand like a hawk, but still it didn't move. It stayed there,
just resting on Harry's shoulder like it had a *right* to be there. The shoulder on which, Draco
remembered with a sneer, he had once sunk his teeth into and left a bruising purple mark that must
surely have stayed for days, directly underneath where Thomas' stupid fingers were placed. He
smirked to himself.

Then realised exactly what he was doing.

Draco forced his attention back to an essay that wasn't going to write itself and tried vainly to pretend
that his ridiculous possessive episode hadn't just happened. And when he'd finally managed to finish
the full fourteen inches that McGonagall had insisted they write, he kept his eyes downcast,
staunchly away from the cluster of students still talking and giggling. He heard Potter's laugh again.

A small pang shot through him. He'd made Potter laugh. They'd actually laughed a fair bit the last
time they'd been together. Mostly at off colour jokes about the Dark Lord and the war, the types of
jokes Draco knew they would never dare tell to anyone else, for fear of them causing upset. But it
had been cathartic for both of them, and given what they'd said and *done* to each other over the
years, there was no fear of being too offensive.
It was like they gave themselves permission to just say whatever the hell they needed to and not worry, which he couldn't imagine having with anyone else. But Potter might have that with somebody else. He probably would have it all with someone else.

Draco shook himself as he made his way back to his bedroom. This was exactly the sort of thing he shouldn't dwell upon. It hurt. It hurt and Draco wasn't used to this particular type of pain. It was so much harder than hating the bastard. Yes, hate, he knew how to do that, he knew how it felt and how powerful it was. He could drown out all of his pathetic fantasies by remembering just what a self righteous, arrogant, hero complex-y, martyring twat Potter was. A flirtatious twat too.

Because he was all of those things. And Draco hated him. He really did.

~ // ~

Harry's nightmares were back to raging full force half the nights, making him feel less than rested by morning. Almost worse though, were the other half of the nights. The wet dreams. The exceptionally vivid, highly realistic, utterly pornographic wet dreams.

He'd woken up, more times than he cared to remember, face down in the pillow, humping the mattress, painfully hard and panting out a certain name. Sometimes he'd awake to an uncomfortable damp patch and try to surreptitiously spell it away without Ron noticing. He just thanked the heavens that Ron was a heavy sleeper.

Harry's restless nights, combined with the constant presence of people was causing him to struggle. He missed the restorative isolation he'd had over the summer. He knew there was help available, McGonagall's support group had been running since the second week of term, but he couldn't bring himself to go. He didn't want to hear about everyone else's pain just to feel guilty about his own.

All in all, he wasn't doing so great.

He knew of three things that could make him feel calmer. Firewhiskey, isolation and, bizarre as it was, Draco. And he couldn't have any of those. He'd gone to see if the Room of Requirement might be somewhere he could find solitude, but once he'd summoned the familiar door there was no way he could open it. It materialised, blackened, charred and smoking around the edges. The familiar acrid smell of that magical smoke caused Harry to gag as he remembered the terrible events that had caused this damage. He couldn't go in. He didn't want to think about what he might find if he did.

And so he had tried wandering the castle and grounds. To their credit, Ron and Hermione let him be most of the time, but other students seemed intent upon talking to him, flirting with him, gushing at him about what a hero he was. And that was almost enough to keep him in his room permanently! He tried hanging about with the other Eighth Years. It was alright mostly; they'd all had enough of the war and were happy just to talk about other things, joke around and move on.

Why couldn't he move on? From the war, from Malfoy. From everything.

Moving on from Malfoy would be a lot easier if the gorgeous bastard wasn't in over half his classes. Harry had deliberately moved his seat in Potions so as not to be facing him, finding it damn hard not to let his gaze wander. Thursdays were difficult.

Today was a Thursday, and he was in the dungeons distractedly fumbling with his ingredients as his mind floated away traitorously to better times. To the afternoon he'd first got his mouth on Draco's—

Harry flinched and his heart raced as a loud bang echoed through the dungeon and filled one corner of the room in violet smoke. Right where Malfoy had been sitting.
Draco almost let a curse fly —and wouldn't that play well at his next Ministry check— when a hand caught his robes and dragged him into an empty classroom whilst he was on his way to the Great Hall for dinner. He squared for a fight until he saw the gormless green eyes that stared back at him, then he felt a different type of anger.

"What?!

"I just...I wanted to see if you were alright."

Draco fumed. The whole damn thing had been Potter's bloody faulty to begin with!

Potions had been its usual studious but reasonably fun affair until they'd been tasked with milking their Rancile Gungflies. It was tricky to get out the liquid without breaking off legs or wings, which should be kept out of the potion. Draco was having the usual problem with his eyes, where they resolutely refused to go more than two minutes without landing on Potter before they would go back to what it was they were supposed to be doing.

Potter's hair had been falling into his eyes, dampened by the steam from his cauldron, his brow furrowed slightly in concentration, biting ever so slightly at his bottom lip. It was distracting. Even more distracting was when Potter's fingers slipped and burst the whole Gungfly, splattering the front of his robes with its innards. Utterly mesmerising was Potter taking off his robes, loosening his tie and rolling up his shirt sleeves.

It was practically a strip tease. Not in the least appropriate for a school classroom! Draco could hardly be blamed therefore for missing the little bits of Gungfly leg that headed towards his cauldron in his own hands.

Draco was angry that he exploded a potion, angrier still that it was because Potter distracted him, and furious that Potter actually cared enough to check on him.

"Oh, sod off Potter, you had to drag me off to a darkened room to do that?" Potter blushed hotly.
"I'm walking and talking, you moron, it's pretty obvious that I'm fine."

"Your face looked like a blackberry, I was worried about you."

"You should probably continue to 'nothing' me, as you so politely put it."

"That was before— You're the one who sent that letter—"

"I'm not going to apologise," he snapped, straightening up and channelling all the anger he could when faced with Potter's bumbling. "What we did— it happened, but it's done. If you have a problem with that, tough."

At this Potter flinched slightly, but then gave Draco a sad smile.

"Draco, I understand. Even if I'm sorry it had to be like this," Potter said lightly.

"You're not...angry?" Draco had been kind of psyching himself up for a fight. His letter had been pretty damn cold, he knew that.

"No, I know what kind of pressure you're dealing with. It sucks. I...I hope we can still be...well, civil at least? Maybe even friends."
He looked genuinely disappointed and kindly sympathetic. That caused Draco to see red.

"Oh for fucks sake, why can't you just be angry at me Potter?!” Draco shoved him hard in the chest.

"Wh—why?!" Potter asked stumbling backwards, but not getting riled.

"Because...being understanding and gracious and kind and friendly are much fucking harder to deal with than you hating me!"

"But...I don't hate you," stated Potter simply, "So I can't really help it." He was giving Draco that look again...the soft one that roamed over his face, and landed on his lips before flicking up to his eyes again. The knot in Draco's chest that had been there for weeks loosened a fraction.

"Potter...I can't," Draco whispered, realising too late that he'd been staring at Potter's lips right back.

Potter's eyes wandered around the room, seemingly trying to look anywhere but at Draco. "Would it be easier not to talk to me? I could stay away as much as possible...make sure there's always other people arou—"

"Would you stop being so fucking thoughtful?!” Draco yelled, reaching the frayed end of his resolve. Potter's face clouded over, eyes back on Draco, looking for all the world like he'd just reached the end of his too. He was suddenly a bit intimidating.

"Fine," he bit out shortly and seized Draco hard by the shoulders, looking thunderous. "Fine," he said again, in a threatening growl, before kissing Draco fiercely.

The whole of Draco's body zinged into life! Potter bit his lips, sucking on them, hands running into his hair and twisting, reducing Draco to jelly in his arms. He was embarrassed to hear a mewling moan emit from his throat at Potter's onslaught as his hands clutched helplessly at his robes. Potter finally pulled off, panting slightly.

"This is me being thoughtless, Malfoy. Do you know how much fucking effort it takes to resist doing this?! I..." he breathed deeply, "I want you...but if you're still intent on playing your family's game, then yeah, I probably should steer clear of you." And with that he pushed himself off Draco, wheeled around and strode out of the classroom as fast as his legs would carry him.

Draco slumped down into a heap.

Damn.
Chapter 5

Steering clear of Malfoy didn't seem to be something the universe wanted him to do.

They were trapped together at the bottom of a moving staircase and had to wait in awkward silence as it slowly made it's way back round again. They were paired together in Charms, trying to avoid eye contact whilst also attempting to cast non–verbal Chattering Charms on each other, strong enough not to be thrown off. Due to a deficit of chairs in the library they were forced to sit next to each other in silence for nearly two hours whilst they waded through their insanely tough Transfigurations homework.

Those two hours had been...less than productive for Harry. Every time Malfoy shifted Harry caught a whiff of his expensive soap and the particular collection of potions he used on his hair. Harry remembered burying his face in that hair, tangling his fingers in it as Draco wrapped his lips around him, remembered it tickling his face as they fell asleep afterwards. Harry had been through a lot but this was a new, exquisite form of torture and it turned out being half hard for that long, sat next to the object of your desires was not conducive to academic pursuits.

During one Hogsmead trip, they'd bumped bodily into each other as Harry, Ron and Hermione had been turning the corner to the Three Broomsticks and Malfoy, Zabini, Parkinson and Goyle had been coming the other way. After the collision Harry could feel every point of contact burn as if Malfoy had been white hot metal, and their companions all seemed to freeze, apparently in anticipation of some sort of angry confrontation between the two former enemies.

But Harry couldn't be angry. Draco had looked at him for the first time in days and he was ashamed to admit it, but that felt wonderful. Harry just wanted to pull Draco back against him, wrap his arms around the bastard, sink into that exhilarating heat and not let go. A cold wave of sadness and longing overtook him then; he wouldn't be able to do that again. He'd already crossed a line, he had to rein it in.

He'd uttered a quick apology to Malfoy before simply walking around the four stunned Slytherins and heading into the pub, followed by a surprised Ron and a relieved Hermione. They'd not commented on it though, for which Harry was inordinately grateful.

That night in the common room, he debated with himself and decided that, even though he couldn't have Malfoy in that way anymore, it was clear that he was going to be unable to avoid him completely. Harry would just have to control himself – which he could do! He could. He had achieved much harder feats than this before, including but not limited to coming back from the fucking dead, so he was definitely capable of just being...friendly. And keeping his hands to himself. And he wouldn't even pine about it later.

~ // ~
The babble and chatter of the Great Hall faded behind him as Draco ambled towards the Eighth Year common room. He was in no hurry, there was only a large pile of homework waiting for him there. And he wasn't looking forward to spectating another evening of everybody laughing and having a good time. Being on the outside was chilly. Chillier since Potter had reminded him just what he was missing the other week.

Greg, Blaise and Pansy had reprimanded him for being too studious, for not having enough fun. But they weren't the ones with a sentence in Azkaban hanging over their heads or an overbearing, image obsessed mother. It was hard to lighten up with all of that weighing him down.

He'd received a letter from her telling him she'd invited Mr and Mrs Greengrass over for tea, during which they would surely start planning out his entire future. Easier to do when he wasn't there, of course. There had also been a message slipped into his bag, probably during last period. He was trying not to dwell, but it was hard to ignore a note saying 'Death Eater Murderer' on it. Well, term had been going almost four weeks, the calm had lasted longer than Draco had dared hope. Still, it stung and he felt even more despondent than usual.

As he glumly rounded a corner, Draco spotted a familiar figure headed in his direction. He could've sped up and walked ahead, he knew it. But after the letter, the note and the weeks of separation, Draco couldn't resist. He waited and Potter approached almost warily.

"Common room?" Draco asked, not meeting his eyes.

"Yeah," said Potter.

He knew he shouldn't do this, he really shouldn't, but he nodded, indicating that they should start walking. And so they did. They walked together to the common room because Draco'd had a really shitty day and he was weak and just wanted to be around someone he sort of liked (okay, liked quite a bit) and kind of trusted.

They fell into step beside each other, neither one attempting to increase the pace, seemingly content to just amble. Potter coughed awkwardly.

"Do you have a career interview with McGonagall scheduled yet?"

"Yes."

"Well," Potter pushed, "any thoughts on what you want to do?" Draco simply shrugged, feeling his stomach fall a little at the subject. "You want to become a professional shrugger?" He cast a withering glance at the twit. "I'm just curious what kind of job you—"

"Ugh, can we not, Potter?" Draco interrupted, "I have to put up with my mother asking me about it, I don't need you badgering me too." Plus he didn't want to see that sympathetic look on Potter's face again. They turned a corner and ended up walking just a little bit closer than before. Their shoulders brushed lightly but the corridor was deserted. Neither of them moved to widen the gap.

"Yeah, well I'm not your mum," Harry said airily. "You can tell me what you honestly want to do."

"It doesn't matter what I honestly want to do."

"Sure it does."

"Can't emphasise how much it really doesn't."

"Malfoy, come on, I'm sure you could get a job wherever you wanted. You've got a lot going for
"For the last fucking time, it doesn't fucking matter!"

Why no—"

"Because I'm buggered no matter what I do, Potter!" Draco exploded, halting in his tracks and whirling on his heel. "I'm an ex Death Eater, son of a Death Eater and a giant sodding poof on top of that! What exactly do I have going for me?!" His shouts echoed in the silence that followed.

Harry blinked in the face of Draco's outburst. "A great arse?" he supplied blankly.

Draco froze, exasperation outstripping frustration and bubbling over until he snorted loudly, then burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed and laughed until he wasn't aware of anything anymore. He didn't even know if Potter was still there or not, he just laughed. His sides ached, his eyes streamed and he was collapsed against a wall unable to control his hysterics.

As he began to get a hold of himself, Draco noticed that Potter had settled himself on the floor next to him, and was chuckling too.

"I've never seen anyone laugh like that," he mused, disbelievingly, "I thought I was going to have to take you to the hospital wing."

"You're ridiculous, do you know that?" Draco asked, wiping the tears from his face even as he continued to laugh gently.

Harry grinned then inclined his head, "I'm not wrong."

"So, I should hope the wizarding world leaves me and my family alone on account of my great, albeit bent, arse?"

"Well, I'd be willing to attest to its greatness on your behalf," Potter shot back.

"Utterly ridiculous, Potter." They both leaned against the stone grinning at each other, until their grins filtered into smiles. And then, Draco realised, they were just sitting side by side, staring at one another. He turned away quickly, breaking the spell.

"Well, we best be getting to the common room," he said briskly, hauling himself upright. After a moment's pause, ignoring the pestering voice in his head that said not to, he turned and offered his hand to Potter. He took it and Draco helped lift him to his feet.

Their hands remained clasped for a few seconds too long, but neither of them were making any moves to release them. Draco couldn't help but think back to that fateful day seven years prior when he'd offered his hand to Potter and been rejected. Not this time.

Unconsciously, Draco's fingers tightened on Harry's hand and immediately he felt an answering grip on his own. Potter moved a step closer and Draco held his breath. They were getting nearer now, he could see Harry's lips parting slightly...

"Harry!" Their hands shot apart like they'd been electrocuted as the shout came down the corridor followed by heavy footsteps. Weasley rounded the corner, barrelling towards them like a great, lumbering orangutan, all ginger hair and gangly arms; Gods, Draco despised him.

"Been looking for you," he panted, ignoring Draco entirely. "Me, Dean and Seamus were going to go flying and hoped you'd even out the numbers."
Harry glanced sidelong at Draco so fast he wasn't sure if Weasley even noticed.

"Actually Ron, I already said I'd help Draco with that Charms essay." He'd said no such thing. "Maybe next time?"

Weasley looked flabbergasted. His eyes pinged between Draco and Harry like they were on a pendulum.

"You're..." he trailed off, searching for something, before he straightened up, frowning. "Sure, okay. Next time." And he strode away again, casting a bewildered look over his shoulder as he left. Draco just stared at Potter.

"What?"

"You just blew off Quidditch. To study. With me."

"So? You're rubbish at Charms, just thought I'd help," he shrugged again, gracelessly. Draco's mind was whirring. If he was using this to try and...no, no they couldn't, no matter how good it would feel. Draco couldn't pull away again if that happened. He wasn't that strong.

"Potter, we can't—"

"Look, we're just studying! There'll be tons of people there, and I'll write a better essay too if I have someone to bounce ideas off. What's the harm?" Oh, nothing, just the potential for Draco to fall even more for him. But then Harry smiled at him. That fucking smile. "Be my study buddy?" he asked sheepishly.

Draco released his breath and couldn't contain the answering grin that spread across his own face. "Ridiculous," he chuckled, shaking his head. And they made their way to the common room side by side.

~ // ~

"Okay, the problem is your wand work is shoddy," Harry said demonstrating the movement again.

"Said the Veela to the Warlock," muttered Draco. They both snorted over their Charms text books at the desk they occupied in the corner of the common room.

There'd been some odd looks thrown their way as they'd sat down and Harry was trying to calm the nerves in his stomach at being seen out in public with Draco, it still felt risky even though they were only studying. It was made easier by the stream of funny comments Draco was making; his wit wasn't as refined as he liked to think, but it had at least improved over the last few years. They worked for a bit longer with no interruptions until...

"What's going on Draco?" Pansy Parkinson had sidled up to their table and stood, lips pursed, hands on hips, looking suspicious.


"I'm not the one who sucks at Charms," Harry rebuffed.

"Well I'm not the one who sucks at Potions."

"Whatever you say," Harry said airily before fake coughing loudly around the obvious words
Draco was wearing a very peculiar expression as he tried to look annoyed but also fight the smile that wanted to break out across his face. Rather like he was sucking on a sherbet lemon. Harry was pretty sure he was sporting a very similar one himself.

Pansy just looked between them, incredibly baffled. "Fine, whatever," she huffed, turning to leave.

After she had stalked off Draco muttered, "Pull yourself together, Potter," very unconvincingly.

"I will if you will." They both smirked, before turning back to their work.

That night as Harry swung his legs up into bed, he felt a bit lighter than he had in quite a while. As much as he dreaded going to sleep these days, he thought tonight might be one of those rare peaceful ones.

He heard Ron enter the room. Since rejecting his offer of Quidditch, Ron had been pretty quiet. He, Seamus and Dean had returned to the common room while Harry and Draco were still working but Ron hadn't come over. Harry got the feeling Ron was a bit pissed at him.

"Good game?" he asked lightly.

"Yeah," said Ron blankly, "It was alright." Well, he wasn't annoyed enough to stop talking to Harry but he was definitely off.

"Cool," he replied simply.

Ron sighed. "What's going on, Harry?" There it was. "What are you doing with that giant prat?"

"Nothing's going on, Ron," well that wasn't entirely true, but he'd had time to prepare an answer by now. "I'm just trying to do what McGonagall said. Fresh start and all that."

There was silence in which Ron stared at his hands.

"Well, you're on your own there mate," said Ron coldly, "I haven't forgotten what he did." And with that he climbed under the covers and turned over, away from Harry who felt his stomach grow cold. So much for a peaceful night. He laid down and initiated his familiar nightly battle with sleep.

The next week was at least better than the last, sleep–wise. Harry managed two whole nights without horrific nightmares and only one of those was taken up by embarrassing wet dreams. He couldn't be sure, but he thought he heard Ron muttering a Muffliato once he closed his curtains on a couple of nights. Harry couldn't blame him, if his track record was anything to go by Harry was probably crying out in his sleep. Or moaning. He fiercely wished he wasn't saying anything specific. Like a name.

He and Malfoy also studied together a few more times, despite Ron's sulkiness. Always in the common room or library and always with other people nearby. Not being alone with Malfoy was definitely a rule that still needed adhering to, the corridor had been a stupidly close call.

But it wasn't so bad. Spending time with Malfoy, even with other people around, was actually enjoyable and Harry thought he seemed...different. Not like a wholly new person –he was still snarky, smug and sarcastic– but he did seem to have changed.

Draco still made cutting jokes and dry witticisms but they were now made for Harry, not at his expense. Harry realised that it'd been months since he'd heard Malfoy make any kind of blood status
slur, and even though the insults still fell freely from his mouth when they spoke (Harry was always an idiot, twat, cretin or some variation thereof), they were now tinged with what Harry could only describe as affection. In other words he was still Malfoy. But...easier. They might even be able to pull off this just friends malarkey after all.

Hermione had elected to simply not to comment on the subject. She kept pulling her calculating face though, and that gave Harry the chills. When she wore that expression Harry feared for his every secret – as Ron had always said, she was far too smart for her own good. Or just too smart for everybody else's own good. He kept repeating to himself that there was no way she could know...

Harry woke abruptly in the middle of one night in October, cold and tense. The room was too quiet, he couldn't hear Ron's snoring. Getting up, he crept over to Ron's bed. It was empty. On the pillow was a note, scrawled in Ron's untidy hand.

'I can't stay, not after what you've done Harry. Don't look for me.'

A lead weight seemed to settle in Harry's gut. He spun and hurried out the door of their bedroom, looking for him. Noticing that all the other dormitory doors were open Harry peered inside. Every single bed was deserted. Something wasn't right, he started to panic.

Running into the common area he started calling for his friends but no one was answering! Where the hell were they? As he stood there a low rumbling shook the floor and a flash of light streaked across the sky outside. The floor shook again and he heard what sounded like explosions approaching through the castle. They were under attack again! He ran towards the double doors but before he could reach them they opened and a figure stepped in. A tall, dark, and handsome figure in Hogwarts school robes.

"You," Harry breathed, rooted to the floor, trembling.

"You didn't think you'd actually got me, did you?" Tom Riddle sneered as he stalked closer. Another explosion, louder this time.

"Wh–where is everyone?" Harry asked, his voice weak and shaking.

"They're dead, Harry. All dead. All because of you."

The raging roar of the battle drew closer, and Harry couldn't move as Riddle raised his wand...

~ // ~

Draco couldn't be sure, but it had sounded like that noise came from Potter's room. He was on his way to the lavatory in the midst of a sleepless night that not even a vigorous wank could bring to a close.

As he moved closer to the Phoenix Room he heard it again, louder this time; a desperate cry. Draco paused. Should he really do this? What if it was Weasley making that racket? How would he explain his breaking into their bedroom?

But then it sounded again and, no, that was definitely Potter's voice and the sound of it so scared twisted something uncomfortably in Draco's chest. He nudged the door open a crack. In the dim light he could see Harry through a gap in the hangings of his bed. He was thrashing, his face shining with sweat and a look of pure terror on his face. The thing in Draco's chest pulled tighter. Why the hell wasn't Weasley helping, the bastard?

He made his way quickly to Potter's bed and tried to rouse him.
"Potter. Potter—Harry. Wake up, you idiot, it's just a dream." His thrashing became wilder and Draco put his hands on Harry's shoulders to still him, and hopefully stop him from thwacking Draco in the ribs.

The contact woke Potter with a start! His eyes unfocused, he looked like he wasn't sure if Draco was real or not. His brow contracted.

"D–Draco?" he asked shakily.

"Yes, it's me," Draco said softly, "I'm here." Potter was clammy and cold, he'd sweated through his nightshirt. His eyes were wild as he glanced around the room as if expecting something to jump out of the shadows. "It's okay Potter, it was just a nightmare. You're okay," he rubbed Potter's shoulders absentmindedly.

"Why are you here?"

"I heard you through the door, how come Weasley isn't awake?"

"I...I think he put a charm around his bed so I wouldn't wake him up. This...happens a lot." He looked almost ashamed of his admission.

"How often?" Draco asked and Potter shifted, sitting up slightly and causing Draco's hands to drop from his shoulders. He immediately missed the contact, despite the sweat.

"Nearly every night. I keep seeing...keep seeing him." Harry took a shaky breath, "He's not gone. He's strong and I'm weak and powerless and I'm so terrified of losing the people I have left. I relive having to..." he trailed off and closed his eyes, his brow creasing. "I'm scared to go to sleep," he admitted quietly.

"I used to think you weren't scared of anything," Draco mused.

Harry opened his eyes and gawped at him. "Of course I'm scared of things. But now that the danger's gone I feel even more fucking afraid than ever and I don't know why!" he said frustratedly, putting his head in his hands. "Guess I must not be that brave after all."

"I was once told that real bravery isn't being unafraid in the face of danger. That it was feeling the fear and doing it anyway," Draco said flatly. "Maybe you're just feeling several years worth of scary shit catching up to you. Merlin knows you've been through enough to feel crappy about."

"You keep talking like this and I'm gonna start waiting for the Polyjuice to wear off, Hermione," Potter stiffened the second the joke fell out of his mouth, but Draco just let out a quiet laugh.

"Worry not, I think I've reached my supportive quota for the decade," he chuckled out. It'd be best to leave really, now that Potter had been saved from his nightmare.

As he stood the light from the hallway caught the wayward strands of Potter's hair, the long line of his neck and Draco paused. He didn't want to go. Would it really be so bad if they just lay together until they fell asleep? Oh, that was a dangerous line of thought. "Is there anything you can do that will help?"

Potter huffed, face still in his hands, "The only thing that ever helped was you."

He froze as if he just realised what came out of his mouth and Draco suddenly found it very hard to breathe.
Potter stared intently at the duvet and Draco fixed his eyes on the wall as the air stilled between them. The thought that being with him was the only thing that quieted Potter's mind caused Draco's chest to constrict more tightly. It was flattering, but it also made him feel guilty. Harry looked like shit, that nightmare must have been brutal, and Draco didn't know how he was still functioning if every night was like this!

It would be so easy, so easy just to lean forward and give Harry one more peaceful night...

"I... should be getting back to bed..." he forced out, letting his common sense do the talking. Stupid fucking common sense. Potter's shoulders slumped and Draco couldn't tell if that was from disappointment or relief.

"Okay..." breathed Harry, not meeting his eye. Draco turned to leave, ignoring the painfully strong pull to stay, only pausing as he reached the door.

"I..." he wasn't sure where he was going with this, only knew he wanted to drag out their time a little longer. "I hope you get some sleep."

"Night Malfoy," Potter muttered coldly as he pulled the covers up and turned onto his side, facing away. Draco's stomach dropped. This whole situation was so unbelievably beyond messed up. He slipped from the room as quickly as he could and went straight back to his own. As he sank down on the bed he cradled his head in his hands.

Fuck Potter. Fuck Potter for making him acknowledge he liked boys, fuck Potter for making him acknowledge he liked him. Fuck Potter for highlighting just how shitty Draco's life really was. Fuck Potter for being vulnerable. Fuck Potter for being Potter!

Fuck. Him.

But even as he settled down under his duvet, stoking the embers of ill will, a wave of cold swept over him as he recalled Potter's terrified, pale face. His rancour was doused immediately and he drifted fitfully off to sleep, wishing even more than he did most nights, that he could just curl up around Harry instead of trying to find reasons not to.

~ // ~

Harry got absolutely zero sleep after Malfoy's impromptu nightmare rescue. He did, however, play the situation out very differently in his head, over and over again, but each with the same conclusion: Draco and Harry entwined around each other, definitely not sleeping in separate rooms. He physically ached for the sweet release again, not to mention the blissfully deep sleep after.

Maybe he should take a trip to Madame Pomfrey and see if there was a safe long-term alternative to Dreamless Sleep. He'd take anything at this point really. Although he knew he'd fare better if he had somewhere to himself, a room of his own, but he thought that was less likely than finding a suitable potion. Also he didn't want McGonagall to find out just how much he was struggling – he'd push through. It was what he did.

Work. Distract. Push through. He could do this.

Hermione commented on his appearance the next day, tutting over the deep purple bags beneath his eyes – although this was nothing new. He just shrugged it off, mentioning nothing of his midnight rescuer. He shuddered to even think what Ron would say if he knew Draco had been in their room whilst he was asleep, and Harry definitely wasn't looking for another reason to clash with Ron over...
Draco.

Despite this their study dates became a regular thing, Harry aiding Draco in his Charms work and Draco berating Harry about his woeful Potions theory. People stopped being surprised at them quite quickly – although there was still some confused muttering – but even Ron's bad mood wore out pretty swiftly and he just settled for ignoring it.

A dark and stormy Friday evening found them huddled over their books once more, lively chatter filling the common room around them as they worked. Harry didn't need to study, really. Hell, Draco was well ahead in his work and he could definitely afford to take a Friday off, but neither of them had even brought up the possibility of not studying, missing the chance to spend time face to face.

It was still disconcerting that a face he now looked forward to seeing, made excuses to see, was one that had inspired loathing for so long. The world really had flipped on its axis. In his near constant sleep deprived state Harry found it difficult to remain focused these days. Or rather, his focus easily wandered. Right about now it had wandered to the strong line of Draco's jaw, the way it cut cleanly above his gorgeously defined neck, his gently bobbing Adam's apple...

"So," Draco cleared his throat, "have you been sleeping alright?" Harry jerked out of his reverie, feeling like he'd been caught with his hand in the biscuit tin. Oops. But then he saw how awkward Draco looked trying to sound nonchalant and laughed.

"My definition of alright or other people's definition of alright?"

"That well, hm?"

"Been worse I guess." It struck him how bizarre it was to hear Draco enquiring after his wellbeing. Just bizarre. "I, um, I might go and see Pomfrey, ask if there's anything I could take at night."

"Being on potions long term isn't ideal, Potter."

"Aw, it's sweet that you care," Harry grinned.

"Oh, shut up you tosspot," he said with a good natured shove. "Where's my copy of Advanced Charms?"

"Hmm? Other end of the table I think," he said distractedly, looking down at his essay, but before Draco had to get up he summoned it quickly into his left hand and the held it out for Malfoy to take. He didn't. Harry looked up. "What?"

"Did...did you just summon that wandlessly?! Draco hissed, looking deeply shocked.

"Oh," Harry said, surprised. He hadn't even noticed. "Uh, I just do it sometimes when I'm not thinking." Malfoy goggled. Not a look he wore often but it definitely had some comedic value.

"Only you could say that and I'd believe it, Potter."

"What do you mean?"

"Wandless Magic isn't common you dullard! People don't just do it by accident."

"Yes they do! Young kids do it all the time!"

"Yeah, explosions and other random stuff like blowing up aunts --yes, I did hear about that Potter-- but not exact spells that they can control! Wizards spend years trying to achieve that."
"Oh," said Harry simply and felt his face heat in embarrassment. He'd not even thought about it, for simple stuff like *Accio* it just seemed to come naturally. He'd light his wand from across the room if it was out of reach and occasionally summon things or warm his tea without a second thought.

He'd seen Dumbledore perform some wandless spells and he just assumed most people got the hang of a few, because he definitely wasn't as powerful a wizard as Dumbledore. Or Riddle. He'd heard of the effect of young Riddle using his immense power on his fellow orphans before he'd had a wand, before he even knew he was a wizard.

"Honestly, if you had as much awareness as you do power you wouldn't need help studying. Hell, you could take your NEWTs tomorrow," sighed Draco rolling his eyes. The clock in the corner of the room chimed and Draco jumped. "Shit, is it eight already?"

"Obviously."

"Bollocks, I'm going to be late for my Ministry checkup. If I get in trouble I'm blaming you," he said as he hurried out of the common room and Harry smiled.

"Noted," he called after Draco's retreating back. He considered for a moment Draco floating around the room, inflated like a giant beach ball, as Aunt Marge had once been. But, no. Not long ago that idea would have had merit, but not now.

~ // ~

An elbow wedged sharply into Draco's ribs as he strolled along the second floor corridor three days later.

"Excuse you," he remarked pointedly to the figure with the offending elbows.

"Death Eater scum," came the bitter reply. Draco was slowed down by a second figure moving in front of him which he recognised as Michael Corner. He turned to identify the first assailant who turned out to be Zacharias Smith. Oh, not those two knobheads. Just wonderful.

"Please, don't let me hold you up," Draco said as snidely as he could.

"We're where we should be. *You*, on the other hand, you shouldn't be here."

"You should be in Azkaban, *Death Eater*," sneered Corner, the look on his face pure disgust. Draco'd got quite used to that look since May, but it was never pleasant. He made to walk around but received a hard shove straight to his chest and he stumbled back feeling fury sweep up through himself. No, he couldn't react, couldn't retaliate, couldn't risk it all.

"I just want to go to the library gentleman," he said curtly, trying to keep a lid on his temper, which he could feel bubbling dangerously close to the surface.

"Don't want to step out of line, do you Draco? You'd be in an awful lot of trouble with the Ministry if you did," murmured Smith. Corner cast a wary glance down the corridor, checking that no one was around.

"You're not worth stepping out of line for, Smith. So, if you don't mind, I need to get to the library."

"That would involve you moving out of my way."

"You don't deserve to be free," it was growled with such poison that Draco wished more than ever a part of him didn't already believe that.
"Well, the Ministry seems to think I should be here," he said, willing himself to keep a level head.

"You're only here because Potter felt sorry for you!" Heat rushed to Draco's cheeks and he clenched his jaw. "It's disgusting, seeing a Death Eater war criminal walking around here when you haven't even paid for what you've done."

"If you think you're going to get me to break that easily you must be huffing fumes," he replied coldly, mustering all his venom, "I survived the Dark Lord in my house for a year, Smith. You're not that tough."

"Oh, yeah? Well let's see," and before Draco could fully realise what he was about to do, Smith had raised his wand to cast a jinx.

Draco ducked sideways and drew his own wand. Smith's next spell came quickly and he reacted with a non verbal shield charm. He'd been trying to keep his cool, he really had, but holding in that much anger meant that his Protego was magnified greatly and Smith and Corner were both knocked five feet through the air and onto their arses.

"Shit," Malfoy hissed. He turned away from the two prone bodies and got out of there before any more damage could be done.

That might have only been a shield charm but this result was surely breaking his parole, possibly even being classified as 'assault on fellow students'. He hurried down the corridor before the two boys could regain their footing and sequestered himself in the Common Room, hoping that the altercation would just be left at that.

But, sure enough, thirty minutes later Professor McGonagall appeared through the door, caught his eye and made a beckoning motion to him. His stomach dropped. As he approached her, she waylaid a passing Padma Patil.

"Miss Patil, would you please locate Mr Potter and send him to my office?"

"Yes Professor."

Draco was confused. Potter had nothing to do with this, he wasn't even there! But he couldn't quite unstick his jaw to ask about it as McGonagall led him through the castle up to the Headteacher's office. He sat across the desk from her, feeling his whole body grow cold with dread. They waited in silence, long enough for Draco to start to fidget (a behaviour he was not driven to often) when a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," the headmistress called.

Potter slinked into the room, almost like he was the one in trouble. He caught Draco's eye then quickly looked up at McGonagall.

"Take a seat please, Harry." He did so, taking the chair next to Draco. "Well, it seems there has been an incident involving Mr Malfoy here and two students who claim that he attacked them."

Potter's head snapped to look at Draco so fast he must have cricked his neck. He looked shocked but also a little...disappointed.

"I didn't attack them," Draco corrected quickly, more to Potter than to McGonagall. "They attacked me, they cornered me after dinner."

"And yet they ended up flat on their backs and you didn't?"
"It was just a shield charm! It was just a bit...amped up because they'd been goading me."

"Goading you in what way?" McGonagall asked shrewdly.

"They were calling me a Death Eater, saying I should be in prison, everything you'd expect," he listed off looking at the desk.

"I see," said the headmistress coldly.

"You can do a Prior Incantato to prove it," Draco said, trying not to sound desperate. Again, for reasons unknown, he looked just at Potter. "I swear I didn't attack anyone." Potter looked for all the world like he believed him, which made Draco feel a bit better.

"What do you think Mr Potter?"

"Um, who were the students?" he asked, finally looking away from Draco.

"Mr Smith and Mr Corner."

"Well, I think there's a lot of very angry people here who've been through hell and want to blame it all on someone. You can do the Prior Incantato but," he cast a quick glance at Draco, "I believe him."

Warm butterbeer seemed to be filling Draco up as he stared at Harry.

"That won't be necessary," said McGonagall, raising herself from her seat, "but I think I will be having another word with Messrs Smith and Corner, who seem to need a refresher on the speech I made not two months ago. You may go, but if anything of this sort happens again, either one of you come straight to me. Understood?"

"Yes Professor," said Harry. But Draco was still confused and had to ask.

"Why did you need Potter here anyway, Professor?"

"Since Mr Potter agreed to be responsible for you as part of the terms of his petition to get you back into Hogwarts, I thought it best he know of any potential incidents as they occur."

Draco turned to Harry, comprehension dawning and humiliation, resentment and guilt welling up within him. Harry looked as though he wished McGonagall hadn't answered.

"You...you begged for me?"

"No, that isn't what happened, I--"

"Boys," McGonagall cut across looking appraisingly at the both of them, "as important as this conversation undoubtedly is, I must ask that it is continued elsewhere. I do have work to do, and students to re-educate."

They excused themselves quickly and made in the direction of the common room. But Draco's temper wasn't going to hold out that long. He grabbed Potter's arm at the first supply closet they came to and he shoved the twit inside before he could protest. Once he'd closed and locked the door Draco rounded on a still slightly shocked looking Potter, glowering.

"Of all the opportunities you've had you didn't think to fucking mention that I'm only here because you felt sorry for me? Because you begged?!!" Draco bellowed, echoing what had been said to him
only an hour before. He was making no effort to hold in the rage that had been coursing through him since those troglodytes accosted him; their words had cut deeper than he wanted to admit.

"Jesus, Draco, that's not what happened!" Harry yelled back, "The Ministry was out of line, and I--"

"I don't want your pity!!!" Their loud voices clashed in the small space between them.

"It's not pity, you pretentious fucking bastard, I like you!" Harry yelled back. Draco's fuse snuffed out in a puff of surprise. Not words he'd ever expected to fall from Potter's mouth. Well, calling him bastard, yes, but not...

"Since when?"

"Since, I don't know, you stopped acting like a total twat and started acting like only three quarters of one? Besides, you deserve the same chance as all of us here. Voldemort ruined your life too." Draco flinched. "But now? Now I'm pissed because you're just deciding to live a lie for the rest of your life all for the sake of a family that got you marked, held you hostage and almost turned you into a murderer!"

"I wouldn't expect you to understand the importance of legacy Potter," Draco barked, steamrolling past the fact that Harry said he liked him. "The Malfoy name is centuries old -- I can't be the one to end it all! There's estates and customs and money and—"

"Fuck, Draco, do you even want any of that? You seem almost as miserable as you were last year!"

"Family comes first, Potter—"

"No, happiness comes first!!!"

"Why are you the only one that gives a shit, huh? Why is it you of all people that cares about my happiness?"

"Because I pulled you out of the fire, I kept you out of Azkaban. And I'll be damned if I'm gonna see you walk voluntarily into a different kind of prison!"

Draco stood reeling from the earnest righteousness pouring from Harry. He really did seem to believe every word. "I swear sometimes you're determined to out—Saint yourself, Potter. Nobody can be this good and honestly mean it."

"I do. And there are good things in this world Malfoy, sometimes you just have to fight for them. Fight even though it's hard."

Merlin, was Potter even real? Once upon a time trite, cringeworthy statements like this would've got Draco's blood boiling, but now...now he just sort of melted. Draco had been tired of fighting, but now, it seemed, he might have something worth fighting for. Some things really had changed. He levelled his stare into those unnaturally green eyes.

"Just...just for once think about how you see your future," Potter said quietly. "What do you want?"

What he wanted...

He wanted...

Draco couldn't have controlled what happened next. Couldn't have changed it if someone held a wand to his throat. Inevitably, inexorably he was pulled towards Potter, the one thing in his life
guaranteed to shake everything else up but remain constant himself. That was Potter, always at the eye of Draco's storms.

In perfect unison they wrapped around each other, melted into one and kissed. Kissed like it was the first time. Kissed with that powerful fire that underpinned everything they did, but now with a tenderness that Draco had never felt before. It was terrifying, intoxicating, but he pulled back a fraction, panting.

"I'm kind of afraid to get what I want," Draco breathed against Harry's lips, eyes still closed. It was easier admitting fear in the dark.

"Are you willing to fight for it?" he asked back, still utterly serious.

What Draco decided in the next split second would change the course of everything forever. But maybe things needed to change. In fact, with Harry around change seemed inevitable.

Draco nodded gently and looked up at him through his lashes. "If you'll help me."

In a flurry of movement Harry plastered him to the wall, face buried against his neck. He growled as he mauled Draco, turning frenzied as he said;

"Yes, you bloody idiot! Of course I'll help you." Draco gasped as he felt teeth scrape along the column of his throat.

"God, I think about this every-" kiss, "fucking-" bite, "day!" Harry ripped off his tie and threw it away, landing it on the edge of a high shelf. Draco's head was swimming, drunk on lust, fear, excitement, adrenaline, but not aware of anything outside of Potter biting the tendons of his neck, roughly undoing his belt and grinding up against him almost bruisingly. He knew he would never get enough of this.

They rutted animalistically against each other, legs slotted between thighs, the rough friction sending sparks up at each wild thrust. After weeks without, Draco felt like an addict finally getting a fix. He fiercely grabbed Harry's deliciously taut behind and ground them more firmly together, their hard-ons trapped between their bodies, both still straining against the fabric of their underwear. Their rough breaths filled the small cupboard as Draco began to feel his orgasm starting to build, even from something as simple as this, they'd not even got their pants off! But Potter had always been able to wind Draco up to a dangerous point, and sexually that seemed to count double.

"Don't make me give you up again," Harry breathed harshly against his neck and Draco clung to him even harder, fingers digging into his back. Panting, Draco turned his head to bite at the shell of Harry's ear.

"I won't, ngghh, I can't," he gasped. As he rocketed closer to his climax Draco's head fell back against the wall and Potter looked at him, his face a glorious flushed mess. Draco kept his eyes on Harry's, green rendered almost black from passion, and for the thousandth time Draco couldn't believe how Harry looked at him: without judgement. With pure want. Need.

Harry Potter needed him, wanted him and wasn't going to let him go. That feeling was the one that actually pushed him over, scorched through his veins and tore a cry from his throat as he came explosively in his restrictive underwear.

The intense punches of pleasure whited out his vision, he was barely aware of Harry faltering against him and tensing up. That was until the strangled growl of Harry's release vibrated through his neck, then his whole body, each soundwave rippling through him relaying Potter's intense orgasm. It was
Draco’s head floated, his pulse loud in his ears as he sagged between the wall of Harry’s body and the actual wall behind him. He ran his hand idly through the back of Harry’s hair, catching the untameable strands between his fingers. Gently, he pulled Harry’s head forward and they shared a tender, breathless kiss. All sweetness, no urgency and it was so new it made Draco, if possible, even more dazed.

Yes, his family wanted him to be an upstanding citizen, a model pureblood, an old world gentleman. They needed him to fit a very certain mould. They needed him to be something he wasn't. But Harry...

Harry just needed him.
Draco practically floated through the next two days. He felt lighter than air. Everything became a thousand times funnier, easier to deal with, more enjoyable. The dirty looks he got from the student body he could just laugh off. Even food tasted better! How was that even possible? Well, it probably didn't hurt that Potter caught his eye from across the Hall at breakfast on Thursday and threw a surreptitious wink at him, which embarrassingly had the effect of turning Draco into a furnace of want until he could get to somewhere private and masturbate furiously before first period. He definitely wouldn't be informing Potter of that less than dignified moment.

His friends had commented on his upswing in mood, seeming frankly alarmed. He'd assured Blaise that he was normal, convinced Greg he was imagining it and told Pansy that he'd simply found a new range of French chocolates that improved his mood greatly and no, she couldn't have any. Idly he wondered if the other two thirds of the Golden Trio had any inkling of what was going on. He could only imagine their faces if they ever found out; now that would be a memory worthy of a penseive! But not yet.

They'd agreed that this was still just between the two of them for now, and Draco didn't mind. Merlin, he didn't even want to think about the threats he'd receive if this went public; he was hated quite enough already thank you very much! He didn't really want 'Trampled By Rabid Potter Fangirls' to be his epitaph after all.

And first he needed to tell his mother. In fact he had an awful lot of potentially life-ruining news to deliver to her, and he wasn't entirely sure how he could go about it. Just the thought of what her reaction might be (crying, guilt tripping, outright disownment) soured his good mood, and, stubbornly, he shoved those ideas away, boxing them up for any time that wasn't now. He’d enjoy the measure of freedom he had now, even if it was hidden.

Besides, this way, it was just theirs. Something that they decided upon, their choice, not influenced or threatened by anyone else. And so what if they were each other's dirty little secret? It felt pretty damn great to Draco.

That evening he and Harry took their regular study session to the Library. The holidays and end of term exams were coming up, which meant that every table was in use, they were sharing theirs with a couple of annoyingly inquisitive Fifth Years. This meant that they couldn't talk, and due to the frequent curious looks the Fifth Years gave them, they also had to rein in their ridiculous smiles which constantly threatened to break the surface whenever he and Harry locked eyes. He resented
the little pipsqueaks for that. But Draco had an idea.

He felt immensely childish as he nudged Potter's knee, slipping him a note underneath the desk. Harry showed as much subtlety as he normally did (read: none) receiving and unfolding the note and Draco almost slapped a palm to his face in exasperation. He instead levelled a look over to him and raised his eyebrows in a meaningful way. Potter had the decency to look abashed and proceeded to be a bit more discreet.

The note simply read; '*Meet me at Historical Tomes in two minutes*'

Potter nodded minutely and Draco made a show of marking the page in his book before wandering off casually into one of the least-used far corners of the Library. On his way he noted where the closest people were (not close) and stood between the dusty stacks, waiting for Potter and getting increasingly tingly.

Draco heard shuffling footsteps approaching behind him. "What are we–" came Potter's hushed voice a second later, but he was unable to finish on account of Draco grabbing and spinning him around against the nearest bookshelf.

"What do you think?" Draco asked breathily before he fused his lips with Harry's.

They pressed together eagerly, their hands tangling in robes and hair. It had been too long. Well, it had been two days, but that was far too long in Draco's opinion. Harry moaned quietly against Draco's mouth and pushed his hips forward. Draco felt a hardening bulge beneath Potter's school trousers. Circe, that was too tempting. But they were still in the library! A bit of making out they could probably get away with, but anything more... He growled in frustration. "I miss...having you...in a bed," he said in between kisses.

"So...find...one," replied Harry's equally busy mouth.

Draco broke off to catch his breath. "And how do you propose I do that?"

"I dunno," said Harry, voice muffled as he kissed into Draco's neck, "aren't Slytherins supposed to be resourceful?"

"Amongst many other things." Draco sighed as Potter's tongue laved it's way up to his jaw and a hand thoroughly acquainted itself with his right buttock, and he couldn't stop himself from asking something that had been on his mind for a while. "What boys did you fool around with before?"

"Huh?" Harry's ridiculous hair stuck out at all angles as he raised his head.

"Well, I know about the Wea– the...youngest Weasley. But there must have been some boys you experimented with too." His mind pinged back to the common room. "Was it Thomas?"

"What the-? No! I mean, I kissed Cho once but that was in fifth year."

"Oh come on, you didn't learn all those moves with a girl."

"There's not- there hasn't," Harry sighed, "you're the only bloke I've been with."

"Really?" he asked, still not quite believing, "where did you learn that lubrication spell then?"

Harry blushed a little, but chuckled. "Fred and George shared it with us one summer. Ron got all embarrassed because he cast it wrong and stained his sheets."
"Oh, eugh! Don't ever make me think about the Weasel masturbating ever again, Potter!"

Harry snorted. "Okay. But, you know," he said, becoming more serious again, "you're actually the only person I've ever slept with, at all." There was a beat of silence. Draco couldn't pretend not to be shocked by this revelation. He'd thought surely with the Weaselette...but he rallied himself.

"Lucky you," he attempted to drawl, but a long look from Harry sapped his put on bravado. "The...situation is the same for me," he admitted, honestly. Potter didn't say anything in response, simply tipped Draco's chin up to kiss him tenderly. He'd never admit to Potter how warmth bloomed inside him at that moment, he wasn't getting that ammunition.

Draco broke away, "So you're sure nothing ever happened with Thomas?"

Potter gave an enormous, dramatic eyeroll. "For crying out– I'm not even going to dignify that with an answer," he sighed, exasperated.

"Alright, I'll believe that I don't need to leave a flobberworm under his pillow," Draco said. He received an eyebrow raise in return and grinned.

But he remembered the hand on Potter's shoulder and the overly warm smile. So, whilst slipping his tongue into Harry's mouth, he loosened his garish red and gold tie and unbuttoned his shirt. After exposing the shoulder on which the errant hand had strayed Draco kissed his way down to it, down to where his original love bite had been. Kissed it gently, sweetly – then bit down and sucked with intent. There was a sharp intake of breath, then a deep moan from Potter which vibrated down to his toes.

He adored the slightly salty tang of Harry's skin on his tongue, so he did it again, moving to just below his clavicle. Draco thrilled to see the blotchy purple blossom beneath Harry's skin, making a stamp and marking him as taken. No matter whose hand lay on top of Potter's shirt there, beneath would be proof of who he belonged to.

Slytherins were resourceful, yes. Resourceful, sly and apparently more than a bit possessive. Or at least this one was.

Without thinking, lost in his masterpiece of hickeys on Harry's chest, neck and shoulders, he moved a hand down to stroke at the straining hardness between Harry's legs. He heard Potter's breathing speed up and a hushed moan leave his lips. So Draco worked his hand harder on Potter's cock through his trousers, trying desperately to find some relief of his own by grinding his hard-on against Potter's thigh. Draco was swept away in a torrent of desire, pulse racing as he stroked firmer and bit harder, adoring the way Potter's hands dragged themselves over his body, and wrenched at his hair.

But he was dredged from his magnum opus when he heard the squeak of wheels and clacking footsteps approach a few shelves away. He straightened up quickly. Eyes widening in panic, they both frantically tugged at their clothes and managed to make themselves minimally presentable just as the footsteps were about to reach them.

Madame Pince swept into the aisle like the great, overgrown, cock-blocking vulture that she was, pushing a trolley of books and narrowing her eyes as she surveyed them. Draco tried to look nonchalant as he browsed the rows of boring old volumes. He knew they were both still red lipped, Draco's hair was uncharacteristically haphazard and Potter's tie was askew but at least their robes covered their hard-ons and they were a respectable foot apart.

Draco hoped that Pince would be gone quickly but she proceeded to slowly shelve the books with all the haste of a glacier. His arousal wilted and in its place bubbled unbelievable frustration. Merlin's
balls, he felt like strangling something! After a painfully awkward minute Draco let out an irritated
breath and muttered to Potter, "I'm going back to the table." He heard Harry follow him and as they
reached the desk that still held their books and quills, he was relieved to see it was now vacated.

They slumped into their chairs, Harry looking as put out as Draco felt.

"That woman is more effective than a cold shower," Draco snarled angrily.

"More effective than a Blast Ended Skrewt!" agreed Harry.

"We couldn't even hold hands in this place if we wanted to," Draco huffed irritably.

"...You want to hold hands?" Potter asked with an unreadable expression.

"I'm not a girl nor am I twelve, Potter. I can think of far better things to do with my hands, I was just
bemoaning the lack of privacy and over abundance of busybodies here. Come on, this is a lost
cause," he said, pushing away his parchment, "let's head back to the common room."

Draco pinched the bridge of his nose. This was getting frustrating. Irritatingly, ridiculously frustrating
and if he had to keep seeing and talking to and smelling Potter without being able to have
him Draco might actually start punching holes in the recently repaired stonework.

He took a few deep breaths to calm himself. He was smart, he could come up with a solution to their
privacy problem. He was smart, but more importantly, he was devious.

And, as they packed up their half finished work and left the Library, he started hatching a plan.

~ // ~

Harry ached down to his toes in that splendid way that only an intense Quidditch session could illicit.
He had felt guilty for brushing Ron off the other week, and he wanted to make sure his other friends
didn't think he was ignoring them. So, out they had gone to the empty pitch, an assortment of the
Seventh and Eighth years to play on what was probably to be one of the last pleasant days that year.
Hermione and a couple of others who didn't fly had come out to watch, clutching mugs of hot
chocolate.

The group had included many of the old Gryffindor lineup. After their talk over the summer Harry
had worried that hanging out with Ginny would be awkward, but he was immensely glad that
actually, it was much the same as before. With a small pang he had noted Draco's absence, almost
certainly through deliberate lack of invitation. A sliver of defensiveness squirmed through his gut,
offended on Draco's behalf.

Harry had heard through other students about the particularly unpleasant detentions with Filch that
Smith and Corner had been given by McGonagall, and he smiled. It served those plonkers right. He
knew better than most that Draco had been on the wrong side of things and had, at best, a 'colourful'
past, but that didn't excuse attacking someone you knew could do nothing back. Besides, Harry
seemed to be one of the only people who was recognising just how much Draco had changed, how
much he was trying.

He'd not complained once about his punishments, hadn't missed a single ministry check, had joined
in with the efforts made by students during their free periods to help repair the castle despite the looks
he got. The previous week he had spied Draco helping Professor McGonagall tidy her classroom
after it had been splattered in what Harry could only assume were peacock feathers and
watermelons! Later that day when they'd studied together Harry waited for him to mention it, to
maybe bemoan the task, but he didn't.
Harry knew through his work with the Ministry that most of the Malfoy fortune had been paid into reparations to the victims of the war, and Draco hadn't brought that up either, to Harry's knowledge. The old Draco would have balked at the idea of helping redress his wrongs, would have railed against the loss of family money – but not any more. He still had a snobbish streak a mile wide sometimes but Draco now had at least one attribute the old one didn't: contrition. And if everybody else was going to willingly ignore that, then it was them that weren't trying enough, in Harry's opinion.

As the windswept group trudged their way up to the castle, Harry made the decision to very openly ask Malfoy to join them for the next game. The satisfaction of a good fly had also been a balm after their rude interruption in the Library, so he could only imagine how tense Draco was.

Back in their room, Harry and Ron changed into some warmer, less sweaty clothes for the evening. As fun as flying had been, Harry was decidedly ripe. He pulled off his top and rummaged in his trunk for his warm, snuggly Weasly jumper.

"What are those?" Ron asked, pointing at Harry's chest as he stood to put on his sweatshirt.

"What?"

"Harry, are those love bites?" Harry flashed cold.

"No--"

"They totally are!" Ron exclaimed, "I thought you and Ginny were over?"

"They're not from Ginny," Harry said quickly, his stomach contents curdling.

"You never told me you had a new girlfriend!" He sounded disappointed. Harry was going to kill Malfoy.

No, he hadn't exactly been complaining at the time, the exquisite pleasure-pain of it combined with how desperately Draco had wanted to mark him had been a massive turn on in the moment. The fact that he was being enthusiastically claimed had seemed to tap into his more primal urges so, no, he'd not been thinking with his upstairs brain. If he had he might have remembered to get rid of the incriminating blotches.

"I– I want to keep it quiet, Ron, okay?" he asked urgently. "It's not really serious and I don't want to..." he trailed off lamely.

"Yeah, I've got it mate, I won't say anything but can I at least know who it is?"

"No," said Harry shortly.

"Crikey, whoever it is, she's got some teeth on her." Harry's gut twisted into little knots. Not a she, Ron, definitely not a she.

A weak, "Yeah," was all he managed to force out.

~ // ~

Two days after the Library debacle Draco had paid a very smug looking Blaise to vacate their room (the Hippogryff Room, and yes, Draco saw the irony in that – very funny McGonagall) from after dinner until ten thirty that Thursday. After making that decision he'd slipped Harry another note, this time under his pillow the night before, stating the plan.
He knew exactly what it looked like to Blaise, but he didn't care. They'd be able to have a few solid hours to themselves and Blaise knew better than to pry, knowing he'd never get Draco to answer. He didn't know what Harry's alibi was going to be, but he was too excited to give much of a fuck about that either. In fact, his excitement was such that the butterflies in his stomach were apparently attempting to morris dance their way to freedom up through Draco's oesophagus. Which was ridiculous because it was unlikely they'd be doing anything technically new...

But it kind of felt new. This whole 'we're in this together for real' thing was incredibly new. And it frightened the Earl Grey piss out of him. He actually had Harry Potter. He was allowed to want, allowed to have and allowed to be sure he'd still have him by morning. He felt like the luckiest person in Hogwarts right now. Which was incredible given that he was also the person most likely to be murdered in Hogwarts right now. A title he was pretty sure he'd stolen from Potter, but then, Potter couldn't have everything.

He restraightened his already made bed nervously.

The door opened with a creak and Draco turned, expecting to see Harry, but the room was empty. As the door swung shut again, apparently of it's own accord, Draco put two and two together and smiled lightly.

"Very sneaky," he drawled.

"Thanks," replied Harry's disembodied voice. Draco heard a rustle and, with a jolt, felt a hand caress his shoulders.

"I do hope you're planning to take that cloak off at some point." He felt the disembodied, cloak-clad hands stroke up his sides. Goosebumps erupted in their wake.

"Eventually," came the reply from behind him. But Draco was feeling impatient, he'd waited long enough and he wanted to make the most of this really rather overpriced time alone.

Draco spun around, secured his fist in some smooth material and pulled. Harry's face materialised out of nowhere sporting a goofy smile, his thick, black, unmanageable hair extra ruffled after being under the cloak. Draco sank his hand into it and pulled Harry within a hair's breadth of his lips, then paused.

"That's better," he said, before flicking his tongue along the plump expanse of Harry's bottom lip. Draco moved forward and captured the same lip between his teeth and pulled back gently. Harry groaned. Releasing his prey, Draco leaned back to look into Harry's eyes. Yes, this definitely felt different.

It struck him in that moment though, as a loud set of footsteps thunked outside, that, different though it may feel, it was still a secret and he hadn't locked the door. He drew his wand, cast *colloportus* and, for good measure, summoned the chair in front of it too, then placed his wand on the bedside table.

"You trying to stop people getting in or me getting out?" Harry asked.

"Why, do you want to leave?"

"Not in the slightest," he smiled.

"Good, because I've been half hard all day thinking about this," muttered Draco as he threw the rest of the cloak onto the floor and wound his arms around Harry's waist. "Thank Merlin, Blaise likes money more than gossip."
As they stood there, arms braced around each other, Draco remembered the surprise he'd prepared over the past few days just for tonight. "So," he began, running his hands down to the small of Harry's back, "I've been doing a bit of research."

"You have?" asked Potter, his face falling comically, "On what? And should I be worried?"

"As useful as your lubrication charm is, I've found it's perfect counterpart." Potter just looked confused. "It's a preparation charm, to stretch you out. And," he looked down, trying to will away his blush, "I've run a little practical trial too."

"Where did you find it? I doubt there's anything like that in the Library."

"Well, let's just say I used a fake name for the purchase of these particular magazines!" said Draco, raising his eyebrows.

"And you...practiced it already? On yourself?" Potter really was slow sometimes, endearing bastard.

"Who else was I going to try it on?" said Draco, snidely.

"And it worked?"

"Of course it worked, I'm brilliant." He smirked up at the incredulous expression on Harry's face.

"I will still never know how you manage to fit through doors with the size of that head."

"You sure you don't want to stroke my ego and watch it get bigger?" he drawled out with a salacious wink.

"How the fuck do I like you this much?" Harry marvelled.

"And how much is that, Potter?" asked Draco hesitantly after a beat of silence.

"A rather scary amount, actually," Harry admitted.

"Scary for you or for me?"

"Both, I think."

The silence between them hung heavy, and Draco felt a well of fear open up within him. This was getting into serious territory. Yes, they'd agreed they were going to keep doing...whatever this was and that they were going to fight together for Draco's freedom but the Malfoy household wasn't exactly an emotionally open place, and Death Eaters weren't famous for being warm and fuzzy either, so to Draco none of this really came all that easily. He was much better at flirting, at fighting, at fucking. As the quiet dragged on he felt the compulsive need to lighten the mood again.

"I always imagined that you'd have a really tiny dick," he blurted, startling Potter. He cringed inwardly at himself; if he jammed his foot in his mouth any further he'd need to polish his own arse.

"Well, I wished you had a tiny dick," he barrelled on, "that would've made the rest of your perfectness more tolerable." Draco didn't want to think about the colour his cheeks might be.

"I'm...sorry to disappoint you?" Harry said, scrunching up his face. That painfully attractive face with those bewitching eyes. Draco reached up to slide those hideous spectacles off Potter's nose to take the whole thing in, uninterrupted. No wonder he'd been unable to banish Potter from his thoughts for so many years.

"No one has a right to be as noble as you and look like that," he sighed, "It's not fair!"
"Oh come on, I know you've seen your own reflection," scoffed Potter. "How am I meant to concentrate when you saunter around here looking like a fucking model?!

Draco was taken aback by the vehemence of Harry's statement and then, ducked his head to hide his blush. "Shut up, Potter," he muttered through a repressed smile.

Christ, they'd just paid each other actual compliments. Not, you know, nicely, but probably as well as the two of them could ever manage.

When he dared to look up Harry was smiling. He ran a large hand up to the back of Draco's neck and grazed his short nails just behind his ear. His smile turned a little more predatory before he leaned in, close to Draco's ear.

"Make me," he purred in a voice of melted chocolate, echoing that sultry day in London they'd shared all those months ago.

A ripple of excitement shot up from the soles of his feet. He swayed in to caress his lips against Potter's, feeling the arms around his waist tighten. Being held so securely reminded him there was something else he wanted to ask as well, but after their 'compliments' moment, he wasn't sure he could take any more embarrassment. So for the moment, he just kissed the green eyed fool. Draco moved their mouths together, unhurried but hungry. Dipping his tongue to brush against Harry's teeth, he noted that he tasted like hot chocolate.

Potter's tongue replied to Draco's by intertwining and then sucking slightly on it. Their hands had not been idle meanwhile; Draco was simultaneously marvelling at how soft that catastrophic mess of ebony hair was and dragging the tips of his fingers just below the waistband at the back of Potter's criminally baggy jeans. Arses like his shouldn't be obscured by that much fabric.

Potter was running both hands under his shirt, over the skin of his back, creating goosebumps and pebbling Draco's nipples, even though his touch was far from direct. Draco's mind was hazy as he pulled away from the fantastic kisses.

"Harry, would you..." he breathed.

"What?"

"Would you...tie me up?"

Potter had the decency not to mock, or maybe he was just too turned on to mock, because all he did was nod, eyes wide, and push Draco back towards Blaise's bed.

"Whoa whoa, wrong bunk. I might have had to specifically promise Blaise I wouldn't have sex on his bed to get the room this evening."

"Why would he make you promise that?"

"Because you don't ask for your bedroom to be empty unless you're fucking someone in it, dimwit."

"Fine," shrugged Harry unconcerned, securing his grip on Draco, spinning him and almost carrying him over to Draco's actual bed. Draco felt the thrill of being manhandled like he weighed almost nothing (which, okay he wasn't exactly a heavyweight, but he was still tall) and hated himself a little for finding the macho side of Potter so damn sexy.

They stopped as the back of Draco's knees hit the mattress and he let himself fall back, leaving Potter looming over him. In the same move he'd used the first time they'd fucked, Harry pinned both of
Draco’s wrists above his head with one large hand. This time though, he gently ran the fingers of his other hand down Draco’s face and neck, tracing the contours of his collar bone and stopping at his left nipple to gently trace circles around it through his shirt. Draco squirmed. Then his shirt was being unbuttoned, slowly, one after the other until it was spread open.

The garment was pulled off over his arms before they were pinned again, even more firmly. His trousers were next, Harry taking care to drag his nails over the rough fabric, teasing with the barest trace of pressure that did nothing to quench and everything to ignite. Draco marvelled at how different it felt for them to take their time to do this. Clothes weren't being ripped hastily from bodies. Hands were mapping and exploring, lips were pressing gently on exposed flesh, ropes were being wound arou–

Oh, ropes were winding around his wrists!

Harry raised himself from where he'd been tongueing Draco's nipples, apparently multitasking like a pro with his wand, to whisper, "So, you said you used that preparation charm?"

"Yeah," Draco whispered back, tugging experimentally on the ropes now binding his wrists – gratifyingly they didn't budge. At some point he should probably dig a little into why he found being bound and at the mercy of his ex-arch rival so fucking sexy, but now was not that time. But of course it might just be Potter. Draco could admit by this point that his obsession in school might have led him to finding just about anything the bastard did arousing.

Harry leaned back on his haunches and achingly slowly removed his own shirt and undoing the button on his trousers. The strip tease went no further though, as Harry leaned in back down to Draco’s sensitive neck.

"Is it still in effect?" he asked, huskily.

"Sh–should be," Draco moaned as Harry pincered a lobe between his teeth.

A simple "Good," was all he got back before he was rolled like a ragdoll onto his front by Potter's strong arms. There was a shuffle of trousers being removed before a cleaning charm swept up him – he wouldn't bother telling Potter he'd already done one – and he felt the weight of Harry's body press him into the mattress, not so much as to cut off his air, but enough to totally trap him.

The heat of Harry's arousal against his backside made his stomach flutter in anticipation as it slid teasingly between his cheeks. Draco's dick, almost at full mast, gave a hearty throbb trapped underneath him. Soft lips kissed across his shoulders, meandered down his back and grazed the curve at the top of his buttocks. Draco was breathing pretty hard now, the anticipation might kill him. He wiggled into the bed slightly to get a bit of friction where it was sorely needed.

But those firm hands hiked Draco's hips up off the bed before he could work up any kind of rhythm, he grunted, a little frustrated.

"There's teasing and then there's being a– haah!" Cool breath played over him, in a place he'd never been breathed on before, breaking his complaint off in a gasp. "Potter, what are you doing?"

In response Harry ran a fingertip over his puckered hole in a touch so gentle it felt almost ghostly.

"I want to do that with my tongue. Can I?" Draco's brain imploded a little. Okay, a lot. He had no idea this was something Potter would suggest, or wanted to do, hell, he'd only just read about it in his dodgy magazines. The only thought he'd had then was that it probably couldn't feel all that superb, maybe a little weird, but now his curiosity (and libido) overcame him.
"Okay," he agreed.

The first touch of Harry's slightly rough tongue lit up Draco's entire nervous system. It was almost as light a touch as his finger had given, but was quickly followed by another more confident caress. Then came firmer licks, twirling swirls and broad strokes which stole the breath from him. Potter got more confident in his ministrations, kissing and nipping now, varying his approach so, even if this'd not been the first time, Draco would still not know what to expect next.

When a slightly firmer push actually drove Harry's tongue inside, Draco groaned. Okay, this was definitely better than he'd anticipated but it just made him need even more than ever to have a different part of Harry inside him. Ignoring the bit of him that wanted to let Harry keep doing this forever Draco willed his mouth to form words.

"H-Harry, need you in...now." It was shaky and barely coherent, but successfully words.

Thankfully Potter got the message and, even more thankfully, he actually did what he was told for once. Not a moment later he was slicked up and Harry's hot, blunt cockhead was resting up against his entrance. Time to see just how effective that charm had been!

Very effective as it turned out. Harry slid into Draco smooth and easy, and when Harry's hips hit his arse Draco let out a sigh. Gods, that felt so fucking good! He still felt stretched, still had that heat deep within, still felt unbelievably full of Harry but there was no sharp pain, no resistance to work past. Gentle hands smoothed over his sides.

"You okay?" Harry asked carefully.

"Spectacular," Draco replied, massively grateful he'd regained his grasp of the polysyllabic. To reinforce just how spectacular he felt, Draco drew forward and then thrust back making the hands on his side clamp down. With a shuddering breath Harry then began to rock his own hips and Draco dropped his head forward to ride out the fantastic feeling of being taken.

The pace was steady, easy, positively laid back for them. Harry seemed to be revelling in the fact that they could take their time, keeping a slower tempo and pressing his hands and lips over Draco's back slowly and thoroughly. Draco took the opportunity to simply fall into an almost trancelike state of euphoria. The steady, warming pressure within him was almost like ghosting the periphery of a climax, just toying with the edges of it but never having to dive off the end and put a stop to the bliss.

Harry pushed Draco's hips down with one particularly deep thrust until he was flat to the mattress, his arms stretched above his head. The rungs of his headboard were conveniently placed for him to grip as Harry bore down onto him, increasing his speed ever so slightly. He breathed into Draco's hair as he ground deep into him. Oh, this angle! This...this was...an angle worth exploiting to the fullest!

Draco had managed to keep the embarrassing noises to a minimum so far, but as he opened his mouth speak, an errant groan escaped him. He tried again, this time releasing a breathy, undignified kind of whine which he would scold himself for making later, he was sure. The steady pounding of his body was growing the heady pleasure bubble within him, each thrust making him ache for more.

"Faster," he moaned into the mattress.

Harry's hips sped up, his breath too, as their lovemaking made the smooth transition from sweet to intense – which was perfect. They rutted and gasped, Draco's hands straining against their bonds above his head. Unable to do much else with them he desperately clutched at the rungs of the headboard as Harry pounded on relentlessly. The bed creaked loudly in protest.
He was leaking copiously onto the bed and, miraculously, without a hand on him, Draco felt his orgasm start to close in. Different from the normal kind but just as potent, burning through him like Gubraithian Fire. It swelled and grew and Draco's head swam with the waves of pleasure that wracked him each time Potter nailed his prostate.

The friction between his body and the mattress felt good, but it wasn't quite Harry's hand. But, even as he considered begging him to touch, Harry ran his nails hard down the centre of Draco's back at the same time he struck a few, beautiful, deep thrusts at the perfect angle and that was it; he was catapulted over the finish line without a single touch to his throbbing dick.

He moaned like a whore the whole time and his body juddered and spasmed as he covered the sheets with his semen. It continued mercilessly, a hot, boiling constant pressure and Draco was shaking as he kept coming, even though he came dry. Harry's hips finally faltered.

"Holy shit, did you just–?"

"Uh huh," Draco panted out, breathily, colours dancing behind the lids of his eyes, face pressed into the mattress.

"Oh, fuck," Harry all but whimpered before he clutched Draco's hips, rolled them sideways and proceeded to fuck Draco onto him in brutal fashion. This punishing assault on his highly sensitised body lasted less than half a minute before Harry let out a strangled cry into the pillow and released himself deep into Draco. Draco felt the heat of his spend as Harry, softening now, slowly pulled out.

"I didn't even know that could happen," Potter marvelled after a minutes heavy breathing, waving his wand to vanish the ropes around Draco's wrists and again to clean up their stickiness.

"Neither did I!" Draco mumbled, truthfully, "I'm genuinely concerned it gave me brain damage though."

"Are you saying I literally fucked your brains out?" He could hear the cheeky smile in Potter's voice.

"Smug twat," he growled as he summoned all his energy and pushed Harry clean off the bed, laughing heartily at the undignified yelp he made as he hit the floor.

Harry climbed back on the bed, giving Draco a retaliatory pinch to the buttocks after which he fell onto Draco's chest, snuggling tightly up against him. Draco wasn't too proud to admit to himself that he adored holding Harry close after sex. His warm weight, his strong, safe arms, the way he still smelled so good just wrapped Draco up like a blanket and soothed his mind. It was easy to doze with a smile on his face, cocooned in everything Harry.

Not two hours later Draco's tempus charm went off, rousing them from their stupor. He took a moment to enjoy the feel of a naked Potter pressing against him, legs tangled under the warm sheets. Draco ran his palms over the soft skin of Harry's shoulders and took in his utterly relaxed expression. That was a rarity these days. In fact, it wasn't something Draco had ever been privy to much; They'd never exactly been a relaxing influence on each other before this summer. A lot of things had been completely different before this summer. And a lot of things had sucked.

He rubbed Harry's jaw gently with his thumb. "Come on, Scarhead, we've only got fifteen minutes before Blaise could come waltzing back in," he said quietly.

"Mnnngfrp," came the fabulously erudite reply. The petulant oik was wrapping his limbs even tighter round Draco, who couldn't suppress his indulgent smile. That he would end up actually having to force Harry Potter to leave his bed was still a novelty that did rather tickle his funny bone.
Eventually he chivvied his own personal limpet out of the bed, into some clothes – damn shame – and towards the door. He unlocked it and moved the chair away reluctantly. Draco didn't really want him to go. He wanted to stay wrapped up for the whole night feeling secure and knowing that Harry would sleep well too.

Heavens, that was sappy. But Draco justified that he still stewing in all of the post-sex feel-good ebullience, so much so that just as Potter pulled his cloak around his shoulders, Draco snagged his sleeve.


"What was that for?"

Draco raised a shoulder. "Because I want to," he smiled dopily, "Because I can."

Harry didn't end up leaving for a while. Not until they heard Blaise approach the door nearly twenty minutes later did he slip past the tall boy, invisible, as Draco affected his most convincing air of innocence from his bunk, into which he'd dived rather speedily, owing to his lack of clothes.

Blaise was having none of it. He merely arched one perfectly shaped eyebrow before casting an air freshening charm about the room, and inspecting his bedclothes for wrinkles. Draco pulled the hangings closed around him with a self-satisfied, "Goodnight, Blaise."

The disgruntled reply, "Maybe for some," caused his ridiculous smile to return full force, hidden safely behind the dark purple curtains. Oh yes, the evening had been worth every penny.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Kudos and comments mean more than you could imagine in helping to inspire and encourage :) xx
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

So, in true me fashion, this update has taken months - sorry about that. To be fair, my computer did delete the original 8k words and so this is a rewrite almost entirely from memory. I can't say I'm super happy with it but I'm not speedy at the best of times and that did NOT help with my pace. And if I keep tweaking it forever I'll NEVER finish. But, we are very close to the end now; as promised, this will! be! finished!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the next morning, and Harry was sat with his fellow Gryffindors eating breakfast, his head firmly planted in fantasy land. The strength of the glowy happiness filling Harry's chest made him partly convinced that he might actually be literally glowing in real life. He hoped not; it would attract awkward questions.

"Did you hear that Smith and Corner are still in detentions with Filch?" Ron asked, setting down his pumpkin juice.

"Hmm..." People were chatting away around him, but Harry wasn't really listening. He was daydreaming and trying not to gaze over to a certain person at the Slytherin table.

Before now he might have thrown over a wink, or caught Draco's eye. But given the state Harry's mind was in after the previous night, he was worried that he might accidentally get hard under the table if he did. Or that, if anyone noticed where he was looking, his face might display exactly what they'd been doing the night before, which was not something he fancied broadcasting over his eggs.

Because, the sex had been great, as always, but Draco had also been so...so sweet. Honestly, that goodnight kiss was flustering Harry almost more than anything else they'd done. He felt himself going warm again at the memory. And Draco's soft smile...

"I can't believe they're getting punished and that ferret's just walking around like nothing happened."

That got Harry's attention.

"That's because he didn't do anything," he said firmly. The words had fallen out of Harry's mouth before he could think to filter them into a friendlier tone. He'd sounded defensive.

"How do you know?" asked Ron. "You weren't there."

"Right, I wasn't," said Harry, trying to keep his voice measured, but feeling his temper rise, "but I know he wouldn't attack them."

"Oh yeah, because he's never done anything like that before." Ron's voice was dripping in sarcasm.

"He's got a suspended sentence and is getting his wand checked every two weeks by the Ministry. Do you really think he'd risk it all just to knock two idiots over? Besides," Harry tried not to shift in his seat, "he's different now."

"Why are you defending him? Look, I know you're on this whole post-war ex-Death Eater charity
thing, but you can't really believe he's miraculously not an arsehole anymore?"

"He's changed Ron, and if you're not willing to see it, that's not my fault!"

Half the Gryffindor table was looking at them now, not to mention a few Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws as well. Damn, he'd really not wanted to fight with Ron about this, especially not so publicly.

"Look just forget it, it's not important," he muttered as he dug back into his breakfast. Harry felt like shit even saying it. Draco was important to him, and he was beginning to realise just how much.

There was a short, awkward pause during which Harry focused solely on the food in front of him. Somebody coughed.

"You're looking better," said Hermione to him brightly, clearly trying into steer the conversation into more amicable territory.

"Am I?" asked Harry, sullenly stabbing his eggs.

"Yes. Ron said--" Ron huffed quietly, but Hermione ploughed on. "--well he mentioned that you'd not been sleeping so well in the dormitory, I was beginning to worry. But you're looking a lot less like a zombie now."

"Yeah there was a certain je ne sais...Inferi about you," Ginny chimed in tactlessly, twirling her spoon around.

"Charming!" Harry added indignantly, as conversation around them began to buzz again.

"Are you doing anything different?" Hermione asked.

"Um..." Oh just having a secret gay affair with my old arch rival, you know, nothing major. "Nope. Just getting more sleep, I guess."

"Well it's working, I'm glad to see you doing better." She smiled warmly at him.

He didn't like lying to Hermione. He didn't like lying to any of his friends, but he had absolutely no idea of how to go about telling Ron or Hermione something like this. It wasn't as if they'd be able to keep it a secret forever, he knew that, it's just...it was all still very new. It was best they got to grips with it themselves before they told people.

Or before the press got wind of it, Harry thought with an internal shudder; he could only imagine the kind of aneurysm Rita Skeeter would have if she found out about them. But he was worrying about things that had not happened. For now they still had their odd little bubble of privacy, which was a relief, even if it had an innate expiry date.

Harry sighed, his good mood having diminished greatly. He looked over to the sparsely populated Slytherin table and immediately caught sight of the glowing blonde head of Malfoy. Things had never been simple between them, and this was another clear example of that. Harry's gut twisted as he wished, more than anything, that his friends could see Draco the way he did. The way he deserved to be seen.

~ // ~

Harry was called into the Ministry mid-week. Ostensibly it was to talk with them about the rounding up of remaining Death Eaters, but Harry knew they also wanted to show that the Saviour was still on
their side. He was keenly aware that this was exactly what the old regime had tried to do, but given that Kingsley was a member of the Order, had signed off on Malfoy coming back to school and was also a damn good Minister for Magic so far, Harry figured it was the least he could do.

After a nice cup of tea with the Minister, Robards took him on a tour of the Auror Training Department, Harry trying not to cringe too hard at the incessant fawning that came his way from almost every Ministry employee they passed. He knew how keen they were to get him on board, it made sense after all, but he couldn't help wondering how keen they would be if they knew about him and Draco, and he felt a familiar prickling of nerves begin to creep up his spine.

As the walked, for the first time, Harry considered what this relationship might mean for his future. He'd not thought about the future for years. Before last year, he'd had no future beyond Voldemort, and after Him, well, just thinking about the future had caused Harry's brain to frazzle. So, he'd been stuck staunchly in the short term.

But now there was an element to his life that he'd never had to consider before. He knew what a lot of muggles thought of non-straight people – especially the Dursleys – but he didn't know what wizards were like. Judging by Draco's comments they might be even less progressive than muggles. But then Draco did come from the pureblood elite, pretty 'old-world' no matter how you looked at them, and surely with values to match.

Harry tried to ignore the ever increasing presence of worry starting to churn his stomach, making sweat prickle upon his brow, but it clearly had its hooks in him. As Robards continued to walk and talk, Harry's palms became sweatier, his head fuzzier, the sounds of the Head Auror growing more distant with each step taken. By the end of the tour nausea was heaping over him in waves and he could barely make eye contact with anyone. God, had it always been like this? Had it always been this terrifying?

Robards gave him a curious glance but Harry awkwardly made his excuses as soon as he could, before hurrying to the Atrium and the many marble fireplaces so that he could floo back to Hogwarts.

Once back in the castle, he abandoned the rest of the day's lessons and threw himself into bed, closing the hangings and attempting to just breathe deep in the half dark. But the dark was rent with flashes of green, of fire, of forests, and of pain. He dug his shaking fingers into his arm, wishing he'd not recently cut his nails, longing for any sharp, clear sensation to bring him back around! His chest ached, ached where the second fatal curse had struck him in that forest, and he rubbed at it until the pain cut slightly clearer than the panic.

Breathe! Breathe, he must breathe...

After what felt like forever, the worst of the surging emotion died down, the noisy pressure thrumming against his skull lessened, and he was able to cobble together cogent thought once more. Just.

This was bad. It was a wake-up call. He'd forgotten just how awful this could feel, how detached he became from reality, from his own body. How fucking scared he was. And on top of that, he was angry with himself – He'd been getting better! How unfair was it that it seemed he made one step forward and two fucking steps back.

As he lay restless, he entertained the notion of slipping into Draco's room, if only to lie in his bed and breathe in his scent. But Blaise could be there, and Ron would probably go looking for him if he didn't show up after a while. No, he needed to get a handle on this a different way, because he wouldn't always be able to crawl into Draco's arms or bed every time he felt shitty.
Then his mind brought up the letter he'd received before term started. There was the support group after all... He'd not been inclined to go at all, not with how much he craved isolation. But he didn't want more days like today, couldn't live with this constantly looming. He supposed he couldn't really discount it until he'd tried it. And this evening also happened to be one that the group would be meeting...

So Harry made up his mind and crawled, exhausted and shaking, out of bed. In a move that was pretty cowardly for a Gryffindor, Harry donned his invisibility cloak that night to go to the support group. He just wanted to see what it was like first, see if he found any balm in hearing that others struggled like him.

But...it was worse than he'd imagined.

Seeing Dennis Creevey's once lively, now palid face as he talked listlessly about his older brother was like a hundred needles to the chest. And when Parvati Patil, tears streaming down her face, described how Lavender had fought right until the end– that was too much. Harry had to escape.

Once he'd dashed from the room as silently as he could, Harry finally realised that there had been no Slytherin attendees. With bitterness he acknowledged that if any of them were to attend (with the possible exception of Blaise Zabini, who had been the Hogwarts equivalent of Switzerland during the war) they would likely be forced from the room by the murderous stares alone. So much for school unity, he thought sourly.

It was with a heavy heart and a full head that Harry sank into his mattress and lay still, morosely considering his options. As always they didn't seem fun. Eventually, he drifted into an uneasy doze, and managed at least a couple of hours sleep, although plagued with bad dreams.

The next morning, as he was on his way to breakfast with Ron and Hermione, Malfoy caught his eye from across the common room. He had an odd expression on his face as he gave a minute but meaningful nod towards the bathrooms.

Harry told his friends to go on without him, that he'd catch them up he just needed the loo, and made his way there. He quickly located the stall in which Draco waited and joined him, locking and silencing the door behind him.

Their eyes met and Harry felt a fraction of the tension he held in himself ease as they did. Draco's hand slid up to the back of Harry's neck and carded through the hair there, but he didn't lean in for a kiss like Harry was anticipating. Instead he looked at him searchingly for a while.

"Was the Ministry that bad?" That was not what Harry'd been expecting to come out of Draco's mouth. But he suddenly identified the unfamiliar expression on Draco's face: it was concern. Worry.

"Just tired," Harry said, not wishing to replay his relapse. He was treated to a shrewd look.

"Are...are the attacks getting worse?"

"I'm fine," said Harry, looking away automatically.

There was a derisive huff of laughter, so nostalgic that Harry half expected Malfoy to throw a jinx at him, but when Harry looked up Draco was smiling fondly, if not a little exasperated.

"That is a giant load of shit, Potter, and you know it," he said, surprisingly kindly. "I already know you're not fine, I've seen it. You don't have to pretend for me. You've 'earned the right to fucking cry', remember?"
Harry let out a breath and felt some weight shift off of him as he let Draco drag his fingers through his hair soothingly. Draco's reaction was exactly what he didn't know he needed and meant more than Harry could tell him.

"Yes. The ministry was bad," he muttered as Draco continued to pet his hair. "Nothing happened really, but I started panicking and when I got back I had an attack. And it's the worst one I've had in weeks, and I'm pissed because I thought I was getting better, and it's stupid and and annoying and I seriously want you to just kiss me now to take my mind off it?" Harry rambled to a stop.

Malfoy gave him a small smile, his eyes glinting as his fingers tightened in Harry's hair. "I can do that." And he did. He kissed Harry slow and sweet, quieting his mind like he knew nothing else could.

When Harry finally got down to the Great Hall, he made up his mind. It was time to shelve his pride and talk about this to someone other than Draco. It was time to see McGonagall.

~ // ~

Draco wanted to bang his head repeatedly on the desk in front of him. This was unequivocally, painstakingly, rump-rustlingly dull.

He got the feeling that the DMLE employees drew straws for the unappealing task of his bi-weekly Prior Incanto checks, and this week's sacrificial lamb was a doughy, grey cardiganned, grey-faced witch who had introduced herself tersely as Magda Lattimer. Lovely woman; exciting as porridge.

As his course load increased these checks took longer, and he knew none of them wanted to actually talk to the ex-Death Eater but that left him with little else to do as they went through their thorough replay. Draco was just in the midst of wondering if he actually needed to be present for this bollocks when the Ministry witch made a small choking sound. Brow furrowed, he looked up at her, only to see clearly what had caused her to choke. The icy pale green of the lubrication charm glowed at the wands' joined tips.

Draco tried not to blush. "Well it's not exactly a dark spell, is it?" A few beats passed. "I'm eighteen, you can't be that shocked!"

She seemed to compose herself after that and coughed, resuming her magical replay. Gods, if the wizarding world weren't judging him for one thing they were judging him for another. Like just being human, for instance.

If only they knew he'd used that spell with Potter, they'd change their tune pretty damn fast. Or accuse him of drugging Potter with a love potion. Yes, that seemed more likely; that way they could make Draco the villain and Saint Potter would remain the innocent victim. Would Harry stand up for him? Would he risk his sainthood for Draco...?

It was mortifying to admit that a large part of him wished Potter would do exactly that. The part of him that was apparently a complete sap and dreamed of grand, romantic gestures and happy ever afters. Draco was ashamed of that part of himself. It was the part that longed to shout things from rooftops. It was the part that whispered of commitment. Of the future...

And it was the part that was damned foolish. Draco knew they didn't stand a snowball's chance in hell of lasting that long. He was under no illusions. Potter was a noble, heroic, self-sacrificing prat with an adopted family of redheaded firebrands. And Draco...well, Draco knew what he was like. He was too tainted by his father and his past to be able to make Harry happy long term. He would
inevitably say or do something cruel to push Potter away, or let his twisted upbringing seep out into their interactions.

He shook himself. He had Harry now, so he'd enjoy what time they did have together, he wouldn't dwell on the what-ifs; so he snapped himself out of it to focus once again on the sour faced Ministry witch in front of him. The colour indicating the Lubricus spell flashed up again, Sourpuss glanced at him and he smirked devilishly at her; well, he might as well have some fun with this, he reasoned. But then the witch stopped abruptly as, after another flash, his wand glowed purple, emitting ghostly ropes: Incarcarus.

Oh, bollocks! It wasn't a dark spell per se, and it wasn't on the list of restricted ones but it was kind of hard to explain away innocently. And it was most definitely a bit too 'grey area' for Draco to risk messing around with right now. The thing was, Potter had been the one to cast it though, Draco had been the one bound up and helpless (and even in his current panic he still felt his dick twitch at the memory).

"I can explain," said Draco, more calmly than he felt.

"Indeed?" she asked, skeptically raising her eyebrows at him.

"It was...it was used on me by somebody else." Might as well go for the truth here.

"Really?" she said, even more disbelievingly. "And how exactly did they get the better of you with your own wand?"

"I let them," he admitted, and Draco felt his face flush hotly as he looked at the floor. "The next spells you're about to see may help corroborate this," he said, realising far too late that, fake name on the magazine subscription or no, the preparation spells would of course be seen by whatever Ministry flunky came to check his wand. Potter would fucking pay for this – Draco placed the blame of his preoccupation and lack of forethought squarely on Potter's shoulders. His broad, strong, biteable shoulders.

But, be it Draco's obvious embarrassment, or something else, the Ministry Issued Grump decided that she would probe no further into this issue and resumed her task with a tad more expedience than before, simply breezing past the bright pink Intus Discoperiet that flashed up. He supposed a lack of trouble reported from the school helped to reassure that he was, indeed, playing by the rules. So, within ten minutes he was out of the claustrophobic room and free again - free to find Potter and punish him thoroughly for his dunderheaded move.

"How did it go?" Potter was lounging in a thankfully empty common room, reading some Quidditch magazine, waiting for him.

"Oh, you know, fine. All fine," Draco said airily, stalking over to the couch. "She seemed quite interested by the stretching and lubrication charms," -Potter blushed- "but not as interested as she was with the fucking Incarcarus, you moron! Why did you use my wand for that?!"

"I–I didn't have my glasses on," Harry stated, gaping innocently. Draco could tell he was being genuine, he was too stupid to be lying about it, he probably hadn't even given a second thought to using Draco's wand, or the ramifications that might have. Draco huffed in exasperation. "I'm sorry," Harry continued.

"Trust me, Potter, if I get hauled in for an inquiry you are marching straight in there and explaining exactly what happened that night. In detail. Understood?" he threatened. Harry stifled a laugh.
"Got it," he said, smirking.

"Cretin," sighed Draco, as he leaned down for a goodnight snog.

~ // ~

The crisp November wind cut through their layers as Harry and Draco strolled down the grounds a few days later, the frosty grass crunching beneath their boots. Harry let a plume of breath mist the air before him and watched the swirls of vapour disperse in the breeze.

He'd wanted to get out of the castle, just to escape the walls of the place for a little bit. Ron and Hermione seemed eager to come with him when he'd voiced this thought, which was sweet but inconvenient; he saw them all day, he wanted to have some time alone. So, and he wasn't proud of it, he'd said he was going to visit Dumbledore's tomb. His best friends had immediately backed off, which was the desired effect, but Harry had felt guilty knowing that he probably wasn't going to go there. He knew he should at some point. He knew he also needed to go see McGonagall, but it was taking some time to work up to that apparently.

As he'd left the common room and approached the Entrance Hall, he'd spotted a familiar, slender blonde figure walking towards him, with its head bowed distractedly over a book. Harry had just enjoyed looking for a while, noting how Draco's long hair fell over his face in wispy white gold strands and how he bit his lip while concentrating. All thoughts of solitude forgotten, he had moved to intercept Malfoy, enjoying the look of surprise on his face when he'd finally glanced up from his textbook, and asked him to join Harry on his walk. When he agreed, Harry had felt his heart lighten a measure, and they made their way outside.

After traversing a fair amount of the lawn in silence, once they were a distance from the castle, Draco spoke.

"I've been thinking--"

"And I am suitably trepidatious," Harry cut in cheekily. He received a withering side-eye for his comment but then, in an impressive show of patience, Draco merely took a measured breath and began again. Harry smirked; he should be over it by now, but he still adored winding Malfoy up.

"I've been thinking about going to see Mother," said Draco, his voice slightly...off. "To talk to Mother," he concluded.

It took a few seconds for Harry to put two and two together, but when he did... "Oh," he breathed out, not knowing what else to say to this. The idea made his stomach lurch.

"Yes, 'oh'. But as you can imagine, I'm having some trouble deciding upon how best to bring it up, or how to phrase some of it."

They walked a bit further, rounding the bank of the lake, the edges of it starting to freeze in the late autumn.

"Well," ventured Harry after a while, striving desperately for nonchalant, "when it comes to us...I'm happy with the term...boyfriend. You know if you are," he added on hastily.

Harry held his breath. He knew Malfoy could have a bunch of antagonistic fun with this, but when he peeked sideways at him, he simply saw a slightly deeper blush appear on his already wind-pinked cheeks, before he said imperiously, "I think that is...an apt term."
Harry released his breath, warming from the inside out, despite the cold. Progress. Draco was his boyfriend. He allowed himself a small smile, before thinking further upon Draco's words.

"So you're planning to tell her face to face then? Not by owl or...?"

"It does rather feel like type of news one ought to give in person, and I don't think it can wait all that much longer. Mother has been in correspondence already with the Greengrasses about wedding me to one of their daughters," Draco shuddered out.

"What?!" Harry sputtered far too loudly as he halted in his tracks, stunned. Draco turned to look at him, almost surprised.

"That was one of the responsibilities I told you about in my letter," Draco explained way too calmly. "Marry a pureblood witch and produce an heir. According to Mother it's possibly the only thing that could detract from the negative impact of my father returning home in a year and a half. And distract from the whole Death Eater thing too, I suppose."

"That's...that..." Harry struggled for words above the indignation. He felt a rich swoop of jealousy at the thought of some faceless girl in a big white dress walking down the aisle towards Draco. But surely his mother wouldn't do that to him, he was still so young! Surely she wouldn't tie him down to a perfect stranger just for that. "But--" croaked Harry, "but you don't want to, right?"

"No," said Draco firmly, "and I'm sure as hell not bloody going to either."

He stared at Harry, his pale eyes set, but still with a deeply seated worry hidden in those grey depths. It was akin to the expression he'd worn at his trial. After his indignant ire subsided, Harry experienced a certain swell of pride at how determined Draco seemed despite his nerves. 'Feel the fear and do it anyway' ... he'd not been wrong, that was real courage.

He unstuck his feet and ushered them both back into a gentle walk. As they turned around a copse of trees that hid them from view of the castle, Harry acted on impulse; He reached out his hand and hooked his cold fingers around Malfoy's similarly icy ones. Draco's head snapped around to look at him, eyes wide.

"Not a word," Harry said, a bit embarrassed.

"Not sure I have any," Draco replied, sounding nonplussed.

"That's a first," Harry chortled.

"Watch it," Draco warned, "I'm sure I could find some choice ones." But even as he said it, he gave Harry's fingers a little squeeze before interlocking them and sliding their palms flush together. Harry could have lit the woods with the strength of his blush as they made their way, hand in hand, closer towards the Forest's edge; because, whilst it might have been one of the most innocent forms of contact they'd ever shared, it nevertheless felt like one of the most intimate.

The tense set of Malfoy's shoulders, however, was still noticeable.

"Are you nervous?" Harry asked.

"Like you wouldn't believe," breathed out Draco, staring straight ahead and sounding strained.

Harry could relate. His own nerves about how he would ever tell Ron, Hermione and the Weasleys were ugly and mounting. They were his family, but he couldn't imagine any of them being happy to learn about him and Malfoy. Even so, what Harry risked in telling them was mild in comparison to
Harry's thoughts returned to his disagreement with Ron over breakfast the previous week. Harry absolutely and to the core loved his friends but...he wasn't sure if this would ever be okay with them.

"I hear Weasley's none too pleased that I've not yet been carted off to Azkaban," Draco said with forced casualness, as if reading Harry's mind. "I heard Abbot and Macmillan talking about it," he offered by way of explanation. Harry didn't like his tone of voice. It sounded almost as if he was worried that Ron's opinion would change Harry's mind about all this. About him.

"Ron's just..." He didn't know what to say here, really.

"Ron is gonna take longer to come round to the idea of everyone in the castle being on the same team. He's pretty stuck in his ways in that regard," he said, diplomatically. "But you shouldn't pay attention to him about it, I don't! Smith and Corner attacked you for no good reason – like you had any say in what the Death Eaters did in the first place. I can't even imagine what it was like at home for y–"

"Don't," Draco bit out firmly cutting him off. He stopped walking abruptly. Their hands fell apart, and Harry turned to look at him, brows knitted. "Don't defend what I was."

"I'm just saying I–"

"No, don't do that! Yes, I was under a lot of pressure and yes, I was raised to think and act a certain way but I still had a choice, Potter. And I chose wrong." Draco gazed at him, looking sick.

"I wanted that Mark. And even after I finally saw reality I didn't look hard enough for alternatives when I had the chance, so I deserve anything those people want to throw at me." He gestured towards the castle. "I deserve worse."

Harry felt his stomach drop. "I don't think you're blameless, Draco. And taking responsibility is important, but can't you see that the fact that you'd even say that just proves how much you shouldn't be in Azkaban right now?!

Draco looked raw. Raw and guilty as Harry had never seen him look before. It was a totally alien sight to behold. Harry tentatively reached out to take Draco's hand again but Draco just clasped both of his own together anxiously.

"Harry I...I'm," he swallowed. "I'm sorry."

Harry blinked.

"For how I was before, and everything I did."

"You don't need to–"

"Yes, I do. Look, I publicly apologised and everything but I realised, I never actually apologised to you. And that's something– if this is going to work that's something I need to do. So. I'm sorry," he finished. He was earnestly meeting Harry's eyes to a fault now but looked drastically unsure of the reaction he might get.

Hearing apologies fall willingly from Draco's mouth hit Harry like a stunner. It was so radically different from how he'd known Draco to act that he was about to say something to that effect before he stopped himself. This was obviously costing Draco an awful lot to say, Harry couldn't imagine what it was doing to his legendary pride, so he wouldn't discourage the effort by making a glib
remark, especially not if it encouraged a bit more humility in the pompous git. Besides they might – no, would fight about other things at some point, so there would be need for this future apology practice.

Harry's mind flashed with visions of them arguing about washing up, holidays, about where furniture went or their families, and he realised with a start what this meant. He saw them living together. Saw this long term. Saw a future, in which Draco was an intrinsic part. His mouth went suddenly bone dry. He swallowed with difficulty.

Tenderly, Harry moved forward and cupped Draco's face in both of his hands.

"I forgive you," he said simply, his voice rough with emotion. He wouldn't tell Draco just how seriously he saw them together, how deeply he'd clearly fallen. Not just yet. He didn't want to scare Draco away, he was too raw. "And...thank you. That means a lot."

Draco let out a shaky breath, seeming to collapse a little under the weight of guilt he held upon his shoulders. Harry responded by wrapping him up in a warm embrace.

Draco shook slightly in his arms. It was hard to tell if he was crying or not, but Harry thought that if he'd earned the right to cry, the same most certainly went for Draco. He raised his head from where it had been buried against Harry's neck and gave him a genuine, if watery, smile.

"You're not planning on becoming immortal, world domination or the subjugation of an entire race are you?" he asked. "Because I really don't want to do that again."

"Does it count as immortal if I've already come back from the dead once?"

"You are a straight up freakshow, Potter, do you know that?"

"Well, I'm not sure I'd be that interesting if I were normal," Harry replied, only half joking. He didn't usually let this little insecurity wiggle its way up to the surface, but he'd be lying to himself if he didn't admit it bothered him sometimes. Draco tilted his head.

"I think you underestimate just how nice normal can be. Or how interesting you are without all the hero bollocks," he said straightforwardly.

"So...it's not the Saviour you want?"

"No. It's the speccy four-eyes with terrible hair and balls the size of Bournemouth that I want. And I want him to be my normal, boring boyfriend so we can do normal, boring, safe things together."

"I don't think you could be boring if you tried," muttered Harry, blushing.

"Fine, then we'll be Famous Convicted Criminal and Chosen One together!" declared Draco theatrically. Harry smiled.

"How about we're just Draco and Harry, hmm?" he said quietly. Draco looked at him, his grey eyes gleaming a pure silver in the moonlight, reflecting a shine of vulnerability.

"That I can do."

Harry felt his chest swell, and the ground almost shift beneath his feet. Everything had changed again. Well, everything and nothing. They were still the same as they'd been moments before, except wholly different now too. It was terrifying and exhilarating; like the first time he'd ridden a broomstick. Draco had been responsible for that too, he recalled.
Harry leaned in to press his lips softly to Draco's – whose own lips turned out to be fucking *glacial*.

"Okay, let's get up to the castle before we freeze this way," he murmured out against Draco's mouth.

"Worse ways to go," he heard Draco mutter sullenly as they uncoupled. But he still held Harry's hand until the last second, only dropping it when they left the cover of the trees.

It was as they ambled up the par-frozen grass to the front doors when it began to fully hit Harry the meaning to Draco's statements. He was telling Narcissa, and would be carving his own path from that point. The potential for them both was now unraveling itself and stretching off into the future. It was thrilling.

Not only that, but, Harry noted, it was the closest he'd been able to get to the Forest since being back at Hogwarts. He'd not thought on it, not panicked, nothing. Slow as it may feel, he really was making progress, even if he needed some help and still had a way to go. And he shouldn't let himself forget it.

They returned to the common room together, Harry forgetting to even care how it might look to Ron and Hermione, but his friends were nowhere to be seen. Harry and Draco made towards the sleeping quarters and Harry expected to find Ron in their room, but all he found there when he entered, was a short note.

'Gone to study with H. Don't wait up.'

Harry smirked at the note. He could make a guess that, in this context *studying* had nothing to do with textbooks of any kind...at least he hoped it didn't. However, this was Hermione...

He shuddered and banished all thoughts of that from his mind as he dashed down the corridor to where Draco stood by his own door. Hopefully they'd have a while longer with each other tonight.

~ // ~

Draco looked up at the sound of quick footsteps approaching. It was Harry, smiling almost shyly.

"I've got a free room," he said quietly, eyebrows lifting in a clear invitation. "But if you just want some time to yourself, I under--"

He cut off as Draco took his hand. It was brazen, anyone could walk into the corridor at this point, but Draco was feeling bold, almost recklessly so. He blamed Potter for stripping him down and leaving him emotional and weak. Right now he wanted Harry, needed him. And not just for sex, for...closeness.

He walked them down the short corridor to the Phoenix Room and they slipped in, closing the door behind them. They both shucked off their heavy cloaks and turned to each other.

Draco shivered slightly as he looked at Harry. He couldn't be the only one feeling a shift in equilibrium, could he? He stepped forward and slid his arms around Potter in a fashion reminiscent of the first time he'd hugged him the previous July. Instead of freezing though, this time Harry released a contented breath and wrapped his own arms around Draco securely.

They simply stood like that for a while, holding each other again. The distinct smell of everything Harry enveloped Draco, highlighted clean and crisp by the fresh air of the grounds. After a time, Harry inclined his head slightly and his breath caught on the shell of Draco's ear, sending small shivers running through him. Then Harry's hand travelled smoothly up his back to scratch gently in the hair at the base of his skull, and Draco could have purred.
Draco’s touch wandered further south, skirting the grooves of Potter’s lower back through his shirt, the two divots either side of his spine. Harry grazed his lips ever so gently over Draco’s earlobe. At the quick intake of breath Draco gave in response Harry moved his mouth downward, still gently, pressing the lightest kisses to the column of Draco’s throat. It was achingly sweet. So tender.

Draco melted.

He sank completely into Harry's body, his hands, his lips. He'd never felt so completely at ease with another person. Honestly, Potter could do anything to him now and Draco would probably allow it, like it, definitely have no ulterior motives to question. Was this trust? Like, what actual trust felt like? Not only trust but...support. It felt unconditional. Draco marvelled at the new experience. Something he'd clearly been missing his whole life but hadn't known to look for.

He wanted to thank Harry for giving it to him.

Draco pulled back with the words on his tongue, but confronted with Harry's bright green stare, he couldn't quite get them out. Vocalising things like this was not his forte. So, in lieu of the words, he leaned forwards. He rested their foreheads together, bumped their noses gently, and slowly, ever so slowly, he laid a kiss on the soft lips that parted for him.

Heady, prickling excitement swept over him, a wave of joyous, cloying euphoria as both their bodies and magic entwined. He could feel it static in the air, raising the hair on his arms, and held Harry all the tighter for it.

Harry's tongue dipped warm and sensuous into Draco's mouth, igniting the glowing embers of his arousal until he was aflame. They seemed incapable of keeping anything chaste for long. Especially not when they were alone in a room with a bed. Almost desperate to keep the closeness they had, Draco endeavoured to remove their clothes whilst maintaining their kiss.

He needed this. He needed Harry so much.

It seemed this last part may have slipped out of his mouth between kisses, because Harry smiled, against him and mumbled, softly, "need you too."

Draco couldn't find it in himself to be embarrassed. Not when his eager body was being led over to Harry's bed.

They were close to undressed, thank Merlin, and, as Harry lay him down on the covers, he pulled off Draco's trousers, pants and socks to fully disrobe him. Potter made swift work of his own trousers and then stood for a moment, seemingly drinking in Draco's recumbent figure sprawled across his bed, panting and aroused.

Draco didn't like the distance, although Harry's appreciative gaze was certainly causing him to blush – it was flattering to be looked at like that by anyone. Let alone him. He wasn't left craving much longer though, before Harry climbed atop him, spreading a trail of small kisses as he travelled up Draco's body, brushing his tight nipples, winding him up mercilessly. Once he'd reached Draco's face, he dipped his tongue to run smooth against Draco's.

"Draco, use your prep spell on me?" panted Harry into his mouth.

"Hmm?" Draco's upstairs brain was about two steps behind the current proceedings, fuel for thought currently being diverted to other vital organs. Or just the one really. Harry kissed along his jaw.

"I want you inside me," whispered Harry filthily, directly into his ear. That shot Draco right up to speed. Immediately, and almost painfully.
He shuddered.

Then kissed Harry deeply, plundering his mouth with his tongue and urging his body up, arcing it to press against the lean form that hovered over him. Draco clung to Harry's lower back, pushing them closer together, feeling their cocks slide between the hard press of their writhing bodies. Yes, yes, and so much yes.

"Wand," he just about managed as they continued to kiss desperately. Before he could lean anywhere to search for it Draco felt Harry's arm extend, felt a light tingle of magic, heard the slap of wood on skin and opened his eyes to see Harry handing Draco his holly wand.

Circe, that wandless magic was hot!

Draco, however was in no state to try and show off any magical prowess. He took the wand, uttered a hurried "Scourgify, Intus Discoperiet, Lubricus," then rolled Harry onto his back, situating himself between his legs.

Draco took a moment to compose himself. He was getting carried away when he should be savouring. So instead of simply diving straight in, he exercised immense self control and ran his hands over Harry's legs, dragging his fingers across the lean, rangy muscles of his calves and up, onto the less hairy expanse of his inner thighs. But then just touching with his hands wasn't enough, he wanted to taste skin.

His mouth followed the path his fingers had just taken, peppering gentle kisses onto Harry's skin, but did not stop at his inner thigh. He kissed up into the dip where leg met pelvis and further up into the coarse trail of hairs just below Harry's navel, deliberately skirting the hard, twitching erection that lay so close to his face.

After a few more kisses though, it proved too tempting. As fun as teasing might be, nothing compared to the noise that Harry let out as Draco licked a stripe up the underside of his cock, flicking the head with his tongue. The tangy hint of liquid he got at the tip urged Draco take the head, then the whole of Harry's hard length into his mouth, and he just loved the feel of it there. Iron sheathed in silk.

Harry's breathy groan was followed by gentle hands wending their way into Draco's hair. Draco slowly worked his way up and down, adoring each taste, each sound and smell. But Harry's hips were bucking a bit too violently, he was getting close, Draco could tell. So he slowly sucked up the hard shaft and off, leaving a wet kiss at the tip.

A tugging at his shoulders pulled Draco up and then he was being kissed thoroughly –just plain filthy-- by Harry, who seemed a little delirious. He muttered something Draco couldn't hear into their kiss and then rolled them both over, so he was back on top again. Harry straddled Draco's hips, looking down at him dazedly for a moment, before he wrapped his hand around Draco's cock. Draco moaned. A few easy, sensuous pumps with his fist and then Harry was angling himself and sinking down upon Draco's achingly hard dick.

Draco couldn't guarantee his eyes didn't just roll back into his head.

~ // ~

"Fuck yes," Harry breathed. Draco slid further into him, intensifying that glorious burn and stretch as Harry's body accommodated him, though noticeably eased by the spell. God, it had been too many months since he got to feel this.
Once he was fully seated, Harry clenched around Draco, revelling in the shoots of *hell yes* radiating up his spine from his arse. There was a violent hiss and a pain on Harry's left thigh where Draco dug his fingers in sharply, seemingly involuntarily.

"*Don't* do that again," he croaked out, "or this will finish before it even starts."

Harry flushed hot all over. He leaned down and captured Draco's lips with his own. They shared a gasping breath into each others mouths as Harry circled his hips slowly instead. Then he sat up, braced his hands on the firm pale chest beneath him and struck up a slow rocking which targeted his prostate beautifully. The sparking waves of pleasure engulfed him and his head fell back as he groaned loudly.

This... this was heaven.

"*Gods, you're so beautiful,*" gasped Draco.

Harry tipped his head forward to look back down at Draco. He was staring unabashedly at Harry's body, looking awestruck. Instead of feeling embarrassed by it, Harry felt a surge of confidence. He leaned back, resting now on Draco's bent knees and began working himself in earnest up and down on him. He knew what he must look like, spread out, dick fully hard and slapping against his stomach as he fucked himself on Draco.

He dragged his right hand down his torso until he had a firm hold of himself and he began jerking himself roughly as Draco gripped his hips painfully tight. Then Harry clenched again. Hard. Draco's jaw dropped open.

"*Fuck, Harry!*" he forced out after a moment.

Almost as if he couldn't stand to not be doing it for another second longer, Draco sat up quickly and grabbed the back of Harry's head, dragging him into a desperate, messy kiss, even as his other hand cupped Harry's arse cheek to aid in the thrusting of their hips.

Harry clutched onto Draco for dear life, his left hand tangling in that beautiful blonde hair. He felt full and sore and brilliant. He plunged his tongue into Draco's mouth and they kissed deeply until both simply had to breathe, still rutting and rocking together.

His mind was clouding the closer he got to release, all abuzz with ecstasy and he wanted to say all kinds of things to Draco. Things he shouldn't. Things he hadn't quite thought he would ever be ready to say. But as they held each other, as they looked into each other's eyes, and Harry felt the imminent arrival of his orgasm, he opened his mouth.

"*Draco, I lo-*"

A loud clunk and an icy draft snapped Harry out of his haze and he turned his head to see a tall gangly figure in the doorway that gasped.

They froze.

---

**Chapter End Notes**

Thank you to everyone who has read and especially to those who've commented and left kudos. Without those little nuggets of joy a) I don't think this would have got past
two chapters, and b) my days would be a lot less happy. Much love to you all, and see you in chapter 8...
No one in the room even breathed for a second until it occurred to Draco that both he and Harry were very naked and very much connected.

In tandem Harry quickly grabbed the sheets and covered them both as Draco tried to remove him from his lap. Harry gasped a little and Draco winced, hoping that he hadn't moved him off too quickly. Harry knelt beside Draco, both of them now covered from the waist down at least, but it seemed small consolation given that the Weasel had just seen them quite clearly having sex.

He still hadn't said a word, but neither had he looked away. With each passing second Draco's sex-addled brain sobered, and his stomach twisted into knots as the silence wore on. Then, without warning Weasley stepped back and closed the door loudly. Draco looked to Harry but, before either of them could say anything, it opened again and the ginger giant stood there as before.


"Yeah," Harry murmured weakly. "Ron, this--" he cut off as Weasley raised his wand. Oh Merlin, he wasn't going to curse them was he?!

"Finite Incantatum!" he called firmly.

"What? The fuck are you do--"

"Harry, you've been hit with a spell," Weasley stated bluntly. "Or a potion, or something." He scowled at Draco, then back to Harry, completely serious. "Let me take you to the hospital wing."

"I'm not under a spell," said Harry, frowning.

"Of course that's what you would say if you were under a—"

"Ron, I'm not under a fucking spell! This isn't—" he cut off abruptly, looking at the floor, "this isn't the first time it's happened."

Draco daren't speak into the tense silence; he knew he wasn't exactly a calming influence upon Weasley. A few beats passed.

"How many times has it happened?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably next to him.

"You...probably don't want to know..." he said quietly.

"Okay then. Since when?" Weasley asked angrily, turning increasingly more pink.

There was a loaded pause before Harry responded, simply, "July."

Silence shouldn't have the ability to feel this physically painful, but it clearly did. After too much of this, and apparently unable to respond to this shocking piece of information, Weasley stormed out, slamming the door behind him, not giving Draco so much as a cursory glance.
"Well that could have gone better," mused Draco dryly. "What are the odds my possessions are in ashes by the time I get back to my room?"

"Fuck," breathed Harry, his head sliding into his hands, exhaling heavily. "Fuck, fuck, fucking fuck."

"That about sums it up."

"Fuck!"

"Yes, you've covered that."

"FUCK!"

"Find a new word, Potter."

"FUUU—"

"Silencio."

Harry turned mid–expletive to glare daggers at him. "I'm sorry but I think seven 'fucks' is enough to succinctly capture the predicament we're in. More importantly, what are we going to do? Will Weasley tell anyone?"

Harry frowned and mouthed 'Hermione'. He could hear the extra silent 'duh' after it.

"Ah...well, so much for keeping it to ourselves. Maybe we could chase him down and you could cast an *obliviate*? Might be kinder on him in the long run, he did get a decent eyeful of..." Draco blushed, "...everything."

Harry's face fell into his hands again.

Draco sighed. "We didn't even get to finish."

~ // ~

Ron didn't come back to the room that night. Nor was he in the common room when Harry ventured out early the next morning after a pitiful amount of rest. Draco had dressed and returned swiftly to his own room after Ron had left, stating that he didn't fancy getting hexed in his sleep if and when Ron did return.

Harry's mind had been a panicky, blank mess, unable to focus on anything other than his own terror at Ron's reaction, and he was now feeling like shit that he hadn't offered Draco any kind of reassurance. He was surely feeling just as, if not more worried than Harry, and Harry had just let him go back to his room. He was being a terrible boyfriend; it did seem to be one of his talents.

After half an hour of sitting on one of the couches by the fire, legs tucked up underneath himself, Harry heard someone finally enter the common room from the bedrooms. His head swivelled, but it wasn't Ron, it was Draco. He let out a breath.

"If I look half as bad as you do, kill me," Draco said dryly, as he wandered closer, already dressed too. Harry tried to laugh. It didn't work. He felt quite sick.

"Harry, look at me," Draco said, gently. Harry raised his head and met his eyes. Draco didn't look bad, he never really looked *bad* –not even when he'd been in custody– but Harry could tell that he'd not had much sleep either.
"Ron didn't come back," Harry said, voice rough from lack of sleep. Draco sighed.

"I see. We should go down to the Hall, he might be there already. And if not, well – we'll both eat at least, then come back here and talk about it. Alright?"

Harry didn't know how Draco was being so reasonable right now, but he couldn't really fault that plan. He was very aware of how empty his stomach was, no doubt adding to the nausea. Harry nodded, then stood.

Draco quickly looked around the room, checking that the coast was clear, before winding his arms around Harry and giving him a tight hug. As per usual, and to a slightly ridiculous degree really, Draco's touch brought Harry down from the height of his anxiety and grounded him again, steadying his squirming stomach and letting him breathe easier. He clutched Malfoy back, closing his eyes and fortifying himself from the contact. They parted and Draco gave him a small smile.

So, although it was still early, they both walked down to the Great Hall and breakfast. There were a few students and a couple of teachers already down having their breakfast, so Harry and Draco walked in a respectable distance apart and simply nodded to each other before splitting off to their respective House tables.

Hedging his bets on plain toast being the safest breakfast, Harry munched away on it, feeling jittery and struggling to swallow the dry chunks of bread. He jumped when a small cough came from behind him and he turned in his seat. Hannah Abbot stood behind him, looking a little uncomfortable.

"Hi Harry," she said quietly.

"Uh...hi," Harry replied, a bit nonplussed.

"Um, you've been asked to go to McGonagall's office as soon as you can."

Harry was very confused.

"Okay..." he said, and got to his feet. Hannah scurried off fairly quickly, only adding to Harry's confusion. He left his half eaten toast in the hall and made his way up to the headmistress's office, getting slightly dizzy as the spiral staircase carried him upwards in tight circles. He knocked on the door but there was no reply. Easing the door open Harry stepped inside.

And saw Ron.

"What--?" Harry began, then realisation dawned. "Oh. Oh no! No, no, no, you didn't!"

"Harry, listen--"

"You told McGonagall?!" Harry cried out incredulously, all anxiety forgotten. He was suddenly furious.

"I'm seriously worried about you, Harry!" Ron yelled back vehemently. "You've had it hard the last few months, I know, the war's affected you more than anyone--"

"The war didn't make me like boys, Ron!"

"You're not acting like your normal self! Are you saying you wouldn't be this worried if I was the one shagging Malfoy?"
"Maybe I'm not like my 'normal' self because I've changed, did you ever think of that? And whoever I sleep with is none of yours or anyone else's bloody business!"

"Excuse me, gentlemen."

McGonagall had chosen that exact moment to appear in the doorway to her study. "Am I to surmise that the reason I have been summoned away from my porridge is something to do with what I just heard being yelled from all the way down the staircase?"

"Er," Ron had flushed crimson, but looked stubbornly resolute, "yes, Professor." The air was uncomfortably silent for a moment.

"Please take a seat, both of you." Stiffly they both took the chairs in front of her desk. She rounded it and took her own chair opposite, gazing at them with a stern expression. Her eyes fell to Harry. "So, am I correct in inferring that you have struck up a...uh, romantic relationship with Mr Malfoy?"

He considered for a moment telling her to mind her own fucking business, that he had no obligation to tell her anything, but quickly decided against it. She wasn't the enemy, in fact she'd helped him get Draco back into school.

"Yes," he said shortly. If the situation hadn't been so fraught, he may have found a modicum of humour in the phrasing 'romantic', though. Not a word he would use to describe Draco most of the time. And Harry almost swore he saw, out the corner of his eye, a twitch in the portrait that housed a snoozing Dumbledore. The sleeping Snape seemed almost too still.

"I see," replied McGonagall slowly. Her brows furrowed slightly, and her lips began to thin.

"We're happy." Harry added quickly. There was a small strangled noise from beside him and Harry looked over. "Don't look at me like I'm crazy, Ron!" he bit out, hating the expression on Ron's face.

"Oh, trust me, I'm about five seconds from sending you to room with Lockhart."

"Mr Weasley," McGonagall cautioned, cowing him with a glare before turning back to Harry. "And, is it all—" she paused, seemingly searching for the right words "—above board? All healthy?"

Harry frowned. "What?"

The Headmistress sighed. "I'm assuming that Mr Weasley's concern is about whether you have entered into this relationship willingly and under no nefarious influence; taking into consideration the last seven years worth of open animosity between you and Draco."

"Exactly!" Ron blurted out and was swiftly given another look.

Harry didn't know how to explain any of this. It hadn't exactly started out 'healthy', necessarily. But it wasn't the same now.

"Professor, I don't know what it'll take to convince you that there's nothing wrong with me. Or Draco. And we kept it secret for exactly this reason! So we didn't have people interfering," he turned to Ron, "or judging us. Plus, there aren't exactly any other...couples like us walking around Hogwarts openly, are there?"

McGonagall seemed to consider him for a minute, Harry simply sat there, glaring defiantly back, with Ron looking between them. After appraising him for a while, McGonagall finally turned towards Ron and gave him a sympathetic look.
"Ron, I do believe that Harry is in his right mind and that any decisions he has made in regards to his current relationship are not due to any curse, potion or charm. I understand your concern," she ploughed on, because Ron looked like he was about to speak again, "but I think it's time to trust your friend. He's putting the war where it belongs – in the past. And he obviously sees that Draco has changed, maybe you could spend a little time getting to see that too."

Silence reigned over the circular study as Ron sat, stunned, staring at McGonagall in disbelief.

"May I be excused?" he asked after he seemed to regain his ability to speak.

"Of course," said McGonagall, almost sadly, and Ron got up without looking at Harry and strode from the room. Harry deflated. He dropped his head into his hands.

"Fucking hell," he groaned out.

"Language, Potter," chastised McGonagall. "I am certain that given all you've been through Ronald will come around. It is almost invariably a matter of time."

Harry was only half listening. He was becoming too aware of the sweat starting to pool on his palms. The creeping nausea pressing up from the base of his stomach again. The encroaching lack of focus at the edge of his vision.

Losing Ron again...he couldn't. Losing him, losing anyone...

"Harry?"

He was shaking, his clasped hands juddering along with his heart.

A hand rested on his shoulder and brought him back to the study. He blinked up at the headmistress, breathing shallow.

"Are you alright, Harry?" The almost hysterical laugh she got in return did nothing to remove the worried frown from her face, but Harry found that question just...just too daft. There was a rustle of robes as McGonagall knelt down beside him to bring them almost level. He noted that this was the first time he'd seen quite such a comforting gesture from her.

"Like I said, Ron will come round," she repeated gently and he let out a breath. McGonagall surveyed him closely with a calculating expression. "Is this a frequent problem?" she asked, indicating Harry's state. He nodded. "Have you thought about coming to the support group?"

"I can't– I mean, I tried. It's not for me." Harry thought for a second. "I couldn't handle it," he admitted.

"I understand."

"That's the problem, nobody can understand!" Harry exclaimed, frustrated. "Sorry, I don't mean to sound precious or anything but...no one can understand what happened to me. How I had to live, how I had to–" he swallowed, "how I had to die. Knowing there was a bit of Voldemort inside me my whole life, seeing the horrific things he did through his eyes! I'm not sure anybody can understand that. Honestly, I just want to be alone half the time."

McGonagall looked almost pained as she surveyed him.

"Harry, I know a Healer at St Mungo's. They've studied many techniques to help people who have...seen the harder side of things, and I would like to introduce you, if you would allow. I believe
she has the potential to help you if you were to talk, one on one. I would also like to offer you the use of the old Arithmancy classroom on the fifth floor. I'm afraid it's still in a slight state of disrepair, but I don't think anyone is likely to bother you there."

Harry looked up at her as he rubbed his hands together thoughtlessly. "There's a Healer for stuff like this?"

"Indeed there is; you may be singular in your achievements and trials, Harry, but you are by no means the only wizard who has suffered great tragedy. And may I suggest one more thing," said McGonagall evenly.

"Uh, yes?"

"Well, I believe that you and Mr Malfoy have been...beneficial to each other." Harry blushed. "Not a sentence I ever anticipated uttering by the way; I must thank you for keeping my life interesting! But I do think he would also benefit from being able to talk about what he has been through with an objective individual. I doubt there are many of those in his life, if any."

"You're right about that," muttered Harry darkly, recalling the looks that Draco received on a daily basis, even if he was walking with Harry, and the pressure from his mother.

"I would like to offer him the same help with a different Healer, but, as you can imagine, he may be somewhat...resistant to the idea at first."

"I'll talk to him about it," said Harry. "See if he can stow his pride enough to take the help."

"Thank you." McGonagall stood then and swept round to her seat across the desk. "I meant what I said before, Harry. If there is anything the matter, about anything, you and Draco can come to me."

Harry nodded, and with that he excused himself from the office and made his way back downstairs. Maybe, just maybe, he wasn't permanently damaged after all. Maybe he could stop feeling like a raw nerve. Maybe Ron would come around. Maybe.

---

Draco drummed his fingers on the arm of the sofa he was perched upon. He'd not been able to stay still since he saw Harry leaving the Great Hall earlier, looking worried. They'd said they would meet back in the common room to talk after breakfast, but he wasn't here, and Draco didn't know where he'd gone.

He stood, trying to walk off some of the nervous energy, when the double doors opened, letting in a gust of chilly morning air from the corridor.

"Harry!" said Draco, walking briskly (he refused to acknowledge he was running) to meet him as the doors closed behind him. "What happened? You look...well, let's just say it's still not one of your better days."

"McGonagall knows."

Draco's jaw dropped. "What? He– he told...oh, I am going to hex that loud-mouthed son of a–" Draco caught himself quickly at the look Harry gave him, but his temper still flared.

"I think she actually...approves," muttered Harry, with an air of disbelief. This took Draco aback.

"Someone approves of us? Merlin, it's the end of days, surely." Harry didn't laugh. "Was Weasley
"Yeah, he was." Harry seemed to sag. "I don't know what to say to him. He thinks I've gone mental."

Draco dearly wanted to tell Harry exactly what he thought of Weasley's judgement, but held his tongue yet again. He could live without the presence of the redheaded twit just fine but he was, for better or (more likely) worse, still Harry's best friend, and Harry would be miserable if Weasley were never to talk to him again.

Draco pursed his lips, unable to think of the right thing to say, out of his depth in this area and still fighting the urge to curse Weasley's name. Harry looked up at him and gave him a tight smile that held no humour. "I don't know what to do."

"How is that any different from usual?" Draco scoffed back automatically and immediately sensed he'd said the wrong thing. Harry looked away, annoyed and stepped back from him, huffing irritably.

"Thanks, you're a great help."

"I mean, I just-- I don't know what to do either," he said hastily. "But this was always a matter of time, wasn't it? You said we would face this and we will. As for Weasley, I can't imagine there's anything you could do to get him to give up on you completely."

This was apparently more along the right lines. Harry seemed to bolster somewhat and nodded slowly. Maybe Draco wasn't as rubbish at this as he'd thought. He stepped forward and cupped his palm to Harry's cheek, brushing his lightly stubbled face with his thumb. "You'll get him back. Can't have the Golden Trio as the Golden Uno, can we?"

Surprising Draco, Harry swept an arm around his waist and nearly tipped him back as he kissed Draco deeply, sweetly. It was kind of ridiculously romantic, and Draco absolutely point blank refused to swoon. It might just be something that closely resembled swooning. But not actual swooning.

When Harry finally pulled back (leaving Draco a little light-headed) he brushed a hand through Draco's hair.

"You're right. I think he needs some time. I don't think he'd talk to me today but I should probably try to find Hermione," Harry mumbled, biting his lip.

"Agreed. Here's hoping she reacts a bit better, although...actually, I don't want to think about it," Draco grimaced, recalling how scarily proficient Granger was at...well, everything. "Come on, time to rally yourself before class starts," he said bracingly.

Harry clasped his hand for a brief moment before he headed back to his room to get his books.

As the day progressed Draco was aware of a general...buzz happening around him. It seemed to effect the whole school, pressing around him in a gradual crescendo. The buzz was an amalgam of looks, whispers and scurrying, which by morning break had officially started to grate on his nerves. He was entirely used the the normal rudeness that came his way but this was something entirely different. Well, not entirely; people still weren't happy with him.

"Something's up," said Pansy as she settled herself beside Draco on a stone bench in the courtyard. This secluded area of the grounds was where he usually met up with Pansy, Blaise and Greg for break, and the three of them took their seats around him.
"What is it?" asked Draco, already in a pretty foul mood, casting a warming charm about them to stave off the harsh chill.

"Don't know, no one's talking to the Slytherins about it, but I'm pretty sure it involves you," she said pointedly, elbowing him in the ribs. "What did you do?"

"No idea," he muttered, eyes fixing on a cluster of what looked to be fourth, fifth and sixth years gathered nearby, who were whispering and throwing venomous and confused looks his way.

Actually, he had a slight idea. But it was unpleasant and he desperately didn't want to believe it could be true. Not like this.

He made it through break and all the way to Ancient Runes in one piece, but things were getting a little hairy. He'd seen a few wands drawn as he'd passed and couldn't shake the feeling they were directly related to his proximity. Draco slid into his seat in Ancient Runes and noted the arrival of Granger a minute later, who very deliberately didn't look his way.

Well, he supposed that was unsurprising; Weasley had surely informed her of everything by this point. Then again, Granger was one of the few students not deliberately looking his way when they thought he couldn't see. At the end she left the class faster than a Crup with its tail on fire.

By the time the lunch bell had rung, Draco was sick of it, and he was also pretty confident he knew what was causing all the hubbub. He went to go find Harry, who would surely be upset to know that his friends had so quickly chosen to spread a very personal bit of information about them. But Draco felt that Harry should know as quickly as possible, and honestly all this utter wank would be much easier to deal with if Harry was actually there with him.

Draco had descended only two staircases when the leglocker jinx hit him from behind.

He fell face first down the rest of the marble staircase, feeling his arm crack in hot, blinding pain as he braced for impact against the cold stone floor below. Damn, that was broken. Draco pushed himself up on his good arm, feeling the surge of pain roil his stomach, and saw the swish of a school robe whip around a corner at the top of the stairs. There were a few other students dotted here and there; some had gasped, some snickered, and only two young Slytherins looked like they hadn't wanted Draco to get hurt, but weren't coming over to help.

"What the fuck did you do?!" Draco heard being bellowed from up the flight of stairs. There was a bit more indistinguishable commotion and then Harry came bolting round the corner and looked down the staircase. As soon as he saw Draco, sitting on the floor cradling his arm, he charged down the stairs and knelt beside him looking furious and worried.

"What did they do? I heard them mention your name but—"

"Leglocker on the stairs," Draco gritted out. His arm really did hurt a great deal. "I think a visit to Pomfrey is in order." Harry nodded and stood, helping Draco up. The titters, whispers and muttering grew a little louder as Harry took his hand to help him stand. The both of them ignored it and made their way back up the stairs to the hospital wing. Harry was still fuming and didn't say much as they walked, just sending the occasional glare at any students they passed.

It took only a few seconds for Madam Pomfrey to mend Draco's arm; although it was a less than pleasant experience, at least it was over quickly. Harry had stood next to Draco the entire time, a scowl fixed on his face, and once he'd seen that Draco could move his arm again and was fine, he finally spoke.
"We're going to McGonagall. Now."

~ // ~

Harry almost sent the portraits flying in his anger and worry, as they made their way down the corridor, back to the office he had left only this morning.

So he'd done it. Ron had just been that angry at Harry for daring to like Malfoy that he'd spread it around, regardless of the jeopardy this could put Draco in. Well, of course he wouldn't even think on that. Maybe he was even happy about it. Maybe he'd laugh when he learned that Draco had broken his arm but could've done much worse. Harry had tried to find his other best friend, but she was doing a bang up job of not being wherever he looked for her. They should have been sharing a class in second period but neither she, nor Ron had been in attendance.

A suit of armour next to them creaked alarmingly as a fresh wave of fury surged through him.

"Jesus, Potter, I'm okay," panted Malfoy as he tried to keep up with Harry's quick strides, "calm down."

"Calm down!? I know what risk you're in here, don't tell me to calm down! What if--" he cut off, breathing deeper. "I don't think you should be at Hogwarts," he continued more steadily. "Just not right now."

"What? I'm not--"

"Look, I know better than anyone that you're far from a delicate helpless little flower, okay? But you shouldn't give them the option of targeting you. More importantly," and Harry took a deep breath, "don't you think your mum should find out from you, before she finds out from the Daily Prophet?"

Draco looked like someone had just used a tap to drain all the blood from his face. "Unfortunately, you have a salient point," he got out eventually, eyes wild. "Bugger."

"And, honestly, I just plain don't want to be here," Harry growled, thinking of what his best friend had done to him and feeling his heart break a little. It was the same feeling he'd had last year, when Ron had abandoned them in the woods, but this time even Hermione wasn't talking to him. "I'm about this close to losing my shit and I need to be far away before I do something stupid."

"You do something stupid? Surely not!" God help him, Harry even loved the sarcastic comments now, even in his current state. "Fine, I concede. We go and ask McGonagall for permission to go home for a couple of days – which I'm not sure she'll grant by the way – as long as you promise not to bring down the whole castle while we're walking there."

How Draco could still be this put together right now fucking stumped Harry. The Draco he had known before the war would've been spitting feathers by now, seeking out swift and malicious retribution; it was a little eerie to see the pale pointed face set in a mask of reason and composure. Harry was only keeping his composure by a thread. But he nodded, taking a couple of deep, calming breaths.

"Okay," Harry said.

"See? Much better." They continued moving, through the castle. "But, just so you know," added Draco as they reached the stone gargoyle guarding the headteacher's office, "the whole protective boyfriend thing...it's kind of hot."

They reached the top of the spiral staircase and Harry knocked yet again on the door. This time they
were called in by McGonagall, who took in the pair of them and raised a curious eyebrow.

"You said we should come straight to you if something happened," Harry said firmly.

McGonagall sighed.

"Both of you seem incapable of giving me just one academic year of peace," she muttered dryly, shaking her head slightly. "I am almost tempted to summon Sybil for some assistance in foretelling what you're to surprise me with next."

~ // ~

Draco hastily packed a small bag of essentials. McGonagall had, surprisingly, agreed that their (or more specifically Draco's) personal safety was better served having a few days away while the school had its hissy fit, and as much as he didn't really want to go back to the manor, leaving the heavily disgruntled and volatile student body behind for a bit was definitely an appealing prospect.

They were sort of against the clock here, but Draco was still unsure as to what exactly he was going to say to his unsuspecting mother.

He could just tell her about the Potter stuff, really. Not necessarily about how he didn't want to live at the manor anymore, didn't want to take over the estate, wanted to gain further education past his NEWT's, would probably enter into the workforce at a significantly reduced wage because of his Dark Mark and earn a pittance. These were all things that should be brought up at some point but really, was now the time to add insult to injury?

Oddly enough, one of the images that steadied his resolve in going to the manor at all (instead of just leaving the big reveal to the *Prophet*) was the memory of the Dark Lord sitting at the long dining table there. Relaxed, like he belonged there, horrid giant snake wending its way around the rest of them, a constant wordless threat. That image, that *insanity* right there, was exactly why, no matter what reaction he might get, he absolutely had to forge his own path.

Fuck tradition! It had caused *that* madness to be a fucking reality.

Staunchly ignoring Blaise, who had come up from lunch and was asking why Draco was preparing to leave school mid-week, and the other nosy eighth years who tried to waylay him, he made his way to McGonagall's office, from which he and Harry would be flooing to their respective locations.

After the most awkward goodbye with Harry (during which he received a scrap of parchment with Harry's address, a tentative grasp of fingers, and a nod, because they daren't do anything else in McGonagall's office, with McGonagall watching), Draco stepped through her fireplace and emerged in his own. After the anger, broken arm, pain and accompanying nerves, Draco's aroma was a little less than he considered decorous, so he decided upon an invigorating shower before making his way downstairs to see his mother.

Draco made his way to the parlour he knew she favoured in the winter months, and heard soft music playing from its direction. He approached the door, which was ajar and looked in. His mother was humming gently along to the music as she pored over account ledgers at her desk. He coughed quietly as he pushed open the door and she jolted a fraction, before freezing in place.

"It's me, Mother," said Draco hastily. Narcissa's reaction to unexpected visitors reminded Draco coldly that she, too, had not escaped their previous life unscathed. At his words though, she turned to him quickly, a surprised smile lighting up her face.

"Draco! What on earth are you doing here during term time, I didn't expect to see you until
Christmas," she said, as she stood to come over and give him a swift hug.

"Uh...I'm having a short break, for reasons that will become clear. I've not been expelled--" he added quickly at his mother's look of panic "--don't worry!" But she still looked a bit concerned.

"What's going on?"

"Er...maybe you should sit down for this," he said carefully, still unsure as to what he would actually say.

"Alright, " she said and took her seat again in the beautifully carved chair at her desk, watching him closely.

The time had come.

"Mother, I-- I have a few things to tell you. First of all, after school, I'm going to get further qualifications. I'm not going to be father's replacement. At this point I'm not exactly sure what I will do, but I know I want to work; preferably in any arena other than politics. I may even take an apprenticeship with a Master Potioneer. So I won't be living at the Manor.

"And I'm not going to marry Astoria Greengrass. Or any Greengrass for that matter. In fact, I'm not going to marry any pureblood witch, because I'm actually," Draco's throat threatened to close up but he powered through, "I'm actually gay. And I am already in a relationship. W--with Harry Potter; and as much as that may sound like the worst joke in history, I assure you it isn't. He's my boyfriend."

He breathed. He'd made it through! Suddenly Draco felt a wave of relief wash through him, he let out a swift breath. "Sorry, but there really was rather a lot of bad news so I thought it best I just get it all out at once." He dared a look up.

His mother was unmoving, still as the ornately carved chair she sat in. She said nothing. She wasn't even blinking. This was somewhat disconcerting.

"Should...I...? I--I'll give you a minute, shall I?" he said, stiltedly, feeling the short-lived relief evaporate to be replaced with cold dread.

Leaving his stunned mother where she was, he beat a hasty retreat to his rooms in the East Wing. Although once he was there he had no idea what to do to calm his frayed nerves. He paced in front of the fireplace that Potter had walked out of months ago and muttered to himself, "It's fine...you can handle whatever she says...handled the Dark Lord, you can handle this...not my job to fix the family or their mistakes..."

He kept up the stream of lame affirmations for a few more minutes but kept his ears pricked for any sound of his mother approaching his door. But it didn't come. In fact, it was past nine before Draco finally accepted that she probably wasn't going to come up here to see her crippling disappointment of a son.

There was no way his stomach was going to settle enough for sleep any time soon, so he did the only thing he could think of. He firecalled the address given to him by Harry in McGonagall's office.

~//~

Green flickering light illuminated the sitting room of Grimmauld Place and surprised Harry into spilling his very hot tea onto the front of his jeans.

"Ah, bugger! Draco you scared the hell out of me!"
"I would attempt to summon up some sympathy for you if I weren't so concerned for myself."

Draco's voice was strained, sounding far more wobbly than he'd heard in a while. Harry dropped to his knees before the fireplace to be level with Draco's head.

"You told her then?"

"Yes."

"About which part?"

"All of it."

"Oh." Harry didn't know what to say, really. He hadn't expected Draco to just drop all of those bombs at once. He smirked. "That was pretty Gryffindor of you, you know." This earned him a fiery scowl and he ducked his head to hide his smile.

"How did she take it?" Harry asked. The look he received told him everything he needed to know.

"Ah. Would you like to spend tonight here?" he asked kindly. Relief swept Draco's face.

"Yes, I would. I'll leave a note on my door and be there in a minute."

And so that was how Harry and Draco ended up spooning on the large four poster in Harry's bedroom on a blustery, cold November evening, Draco curled up on his left side while Harry stroked soothing patterns along his arm.

Getting ready for bed had been...bizarrely wonderful. It had just seemed so peculiar to be standing side by side at the bathroom sink, catching eyes in the mirror as they brushed their teeth together. But it had also set a warm, fluffy kind of contentment in Harry's chest that only grew as they changed into their pyjamas and climbed into bed.

And that was a first, too. Climbing into bed instead of falling into it in a haze of lust, pressed for time. As amazing as that always was, this was a thoroughly different kind of amazing. Just snuggled up tightly together, the embers in the grate illuminating the room dimly, the wind howling ever so slightly outside. There was no insistent urge to do anything, no craving for anything more than this gentle intimacy. Harry felt at peace.

He skated his fingers back and forth along the smooth material of Draco's pyjamas, enjoying the distinct scent of him and listening to the even sound of his breaths. He could already be asleep.

"Don't think I didn't notice."

Apparently not.

"Hmm? Notice what?" Harry asked quietly as he nuzzled into the nape of Draco's neck. He smelled incredible.

"What you were going to say before Weasley interrupted us. I haven't forgotten."

Harry stilled, his face heating uncontrollably and his stomach filling with lead. His stupid, stupid big mouth. He was suddenly very glad not to be face to face.

"Just so you know," Draco continued lightly, shifting slightly in Harry's arms, "I could've said it weeks ago. Months ago, even. Well, okay, maybe I couldn't have said it out loud, but...it would have been true. If I did. Say it, that is."
Harry's mouth fell agape for a gobsmacked minute, as he lay behind Draco, letting that sink in.

Bloody hell.

"Do you...want me to say it now?" Harry asked tentatively.

"Not right now. I don't want it to feel like I've just asked for it. But I thought I'd let you know...when you want to, you can say it."

"Will you say it back?"

"I thought I just did."

The solid bed could have been a roller coaster for how Harry's stomach was in free-fall. An uncontrollable smile was pulling across his face and a warm, intense prickling had started behind his eyes. To cover all of that up, he wrapped his arms around Draco, buried his face in the back of his neck and pressed a reverent kiss there, holding on tight.

"Goodnight, Draco," he breathed into the blonde hair, still beaming. Draco's hand sought out Harry's and wove their fingers together, then held their joined hands tight to his belly.

"Goodnight, Harry."

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, because I am terrible at pacing and editing apparently, there are going to be more chapters than expected! As previously stated I am incredibly slow at getting these chapters out BUT I am determined. So so so many thanks to the folks who have stuck with this from the beginning and much love to anyone who has left kudos and commented <3 Not long till the end now...probably...
Draco was experiencing urges he'd never experienced before. And it was unnerving. Even more unnerving was that he was actually acting upon them. Not having any guideline for how to deal with these compulsions, he'd simply let them guide his actions.

The thing was, he'd woken up to a sleep-crumpled, bed-headed, spectacle-less face beside him. It had looked peaceful. And content. And well-rested. And Draco'd then had the overpowering urge to take care of the person to whom that face belonged. It was more intense than any nurturing urge he'd ever had to date. Especially since nurturing wasn't exactly his usual modus operandi.

But it was why, after slipping quietly from the bed, Draco was now standing on the freezing stone floor of the ancestral Black home's kitchen, boiling water to make a cup of tea to take up to Harry. It was the only thing he could think to give him in that moment that would be appropriate, or well received, but also satisfy Draco's urge to provide.

Surely this wasn't so unusual though?

Harry took care of Draco after all. Even when Draco had kicked and screamed and rebelled and rejected all the help offered to him, almost pathological in his refusal to ask another human to give him support for fear of it coming with strings attached. Even after all that bollocks... Harry still took care of him, pushed him to ask for that help he needed. And, no, Draco did not feel like he was now indebted really, just more that...he wanted to take care of Harry right back.

Once he'd located the appropriate crockery, he'd then realised there were far too many variables to getting this right, so loaded up a tray with milk, sugar, spoons, cups, saucers, and then for good measure, some Ginger Newts he found in a cupboard too. Levitating the tray ahead of him up the stairs, he made his way back to the bedroom.

The lump under the duvet had not moved. As Draco perched himself on the edge of the bed however, Potter stirred, and blearily raised himself up off the pillow, blinking at Draco, then at the laden tray.

"I– I wasn't sure how you take your tea," said Draco, biting his lip, unsure as to the correct etiquette in such a situation. How did one do kind and thoughtful?

Harry's face, however, lit up in a surprised, beaming smile, dispelling its sleepiness; so Draco must have done something right.

"You made me tea," he croaked happily, his voice sleep-rough.

"Clearly," replied Draco, "the important question now being: how do you take said tea?"

Still staring at him with a bemused sort of amazement, Harry answered, "Milk, no sugar, any strength I'm not fussed." And so Draco readied a cup for Harry and handed it to him before making up one for himself, with one sugar of course.

He held his steaming mug close to his face as he watched Harry take the first sip, who closed his eyes and sighed softly as he swallowed. For no reason, Draco could feel his face heat and his hands start to tremor ever so slightly. Harry looked up from his mug and smiled warmly, in that bewitching
way he did sometimes.

"Thank you. This is perfect."

Draco could only nod in response, his pulse thudding in his ears and his heart located somewhere in his throat. Quickly, he sipped at his own tea to avoid getting flustered by Harry's expression again and burned his tongue on the scalding liquid, which however compared nothing to the warm, radiating contentment that was blooming within him.

So this caring thing. It didn't half feel strange...but it was alright, he supposed. If it got him smiles like that.

The rest of the day was almost ridiculous in its casual domesticity. Free from prying eyes, their goings about the house were punctuated with casual touches, a hand on the lower back here, a brush of fingers there. Several times Draco was the recipient of a brief kiss to the forehead, neck, lips, or cheek, that just came out of nowhere and seemed to happen simply because Harry had the whim. Draco adored it.

They walked out to a local muggle cafe for brunch, which had made Draco a little awkward, and Harry very amused. He had obviously never been to one before but the food had been passable, just right for the cold weather, and since there was little to no food in the house, Harry then dragged them round the muggle 'supermarket' to get ingredients for dinner. Draco would never admit it in a million years but he rather enjoyed pushing the trolley around.

They both seemed to be acknowledging that they simply needed a day. Just a day where they were free to be themselves before the consequences of their actions had to be faced again. Draco was going to have to return to the manor and find some way to assuage his mother, whatever state she might be in. Then they would both have to face Hogwarts. Then the world beyond. But that was not today.

That evening, the house was suffused with a spectacular array of delicious aromas. Harry had left Draco to read in the drawing room as he set to work in the kitchen, but once the smell became just too tempting, Draco set aside his book and nipped down the stairs to peek into the kitchen.

Harry stood at the huge stove, back to him, stirring several pans and tapping his socked foot to a tune only he could hear. His worn muggle jeans still hung slightly loose on his hips and the shirt he was wearing had probably never seen an iron. The hair, as always, was a catastrophe. Draco wasn't sure anyone had ever looked better in their lives.

Grinning, Draco sneaked up silently behind him, leaned in and blew ever so gently into his right ear.

"Je-e-eus Christ on a bike!" Harry exclaimed, jumping half a foot away and nearly spilling the contents of a pan. "You have got to stop making me jump out of my skin!"

"I can't ignore easy prey," chuckled Draco as Harry caught his breath.

"I could withhold your food, you know," said Harry warningly, brandishing a wooden spoon at him. "See how you fare at the muggle chippy down the road."

"At the what?"

"My point exactly – so behave!"

"What are you making, anyway?" asked Draco, moving forward to look as Harry turned back to a pan and stirred quickly.
"Something I kind of made up from scratch when I was younger. White wine, cream, bacon, stock, mushrooms, a few other bits, all reduced down, we're having it with pasta and salad."

Draco's mouth was already watering from the smell alone, but at the description his stomach gave a hearty growl. Harry chuckled.

"Think you can handle chopping some vegetables?" he asked, nodding towards a lettuce, chopping board and a few other salad ingredients laid out on the table.

"Do you think I'm a House Elf?" sniffed Draco.

"I think you really want to eat this," said Harry smugly, as he waved the spoon coated in sauce under Draco's nose. Merlin's moustache, that smelled incredible!

"Fine! But know that I am doing this under protest, and shall not be blamed if I somehow manage to render these raw vegetables inedible."

Harry snorted, and Draco started chopping.

It was only a few minutes until the salad was ready, the sauce was done and the pasta had been drained. Given that most to all of the meals prepared for Draco had been done by somebody else, out of sight, he found the whole process of cooking quite fun to watch. But when the steaming bowl of food was placed in front of him, he acknowledged that he really was far more interested in eating than cooking. Harry sat down opposite him and watched as Draco took the first bite of saucy pasta.

Draco believed his tongue might have died and gone to heaven! Smooth, rich, creamy, tangy, smoky – all perfectly balanced, coating his mouth in a wondrously decadent flavour. His eyes slid closed as he simply savoured.

When he cracked them open again, Harry was staring at him, one eyebrow raised.

"You like it then?"

"Let's put it this way; I now can't decide whether I want to chain you to the bed or the stove."

Harry let out a laugh and blushed as he twirled a forkful of his own dinner. "Being chained up might be more your thing," he muttered out, casting a glance up at Draco through his dark lashes. Draco heated and shifted in his chair, mind immediately conjuring up images best reserved for places not the dinner table.

"I used to cook a lot before," Harry went on, voice losing its playful, flirty edge. "It wasn't by choice but I tried to find some joy in it when I could. It was actually one of the few things I learned from my aunt, she let me watch her as long as I was quiet and I'd replicate what I saw her do. Then I started getting creative and...well, the Dursleys never complimented my cooking, but the less they insulted me, the better the meal had been. And the nights I cooked I could be sure I'd actually get something to eat, so that was a benefit."

Draco frowned at the boy sitting across from him. Because he really did look like a boy in that moment, not a man who was a war hero. Draco had heard a few bits here and there through the grapevine about Potter's upbringing with the muggles. He'd thought it to be exaggerated to garner sympathy from gullible people. Poor Potter, treated badly by the mean muggles, feel sorry for him. But the truth of Harry's words was undeniable from his tone. Suddenly his skinniness when starting school held a lot more significance.

Harry was looking intently at his bowl of pasta now and Draco didn't know what to say.
"Do you still speak to them?" he asked awkwardly.

"God, no. They had to get moved somewhere to protect them from Voldemort--" Draco spasmed and loathed himself for it "--and I've got no idea where they went."

"Shame," said Draco lightly. Harry looked up at him curiously. "I know some hideously unpleasant and efficacious curses that can be sent through the post. An address would be handy."

Harry's expression cleared a bit, and he smiled wearily. "I've given up hating them too much. I've got no energy for it these days. I'll get on with my life, they'll get on with theirs."

"They sound like the kind of people who would benefit from a long walk off a short pier," Draco drawled, and Harry laughed properly this time.

Although, Draco thought, a short time ago he had been no better than those muggles, bent on making Harry miserable for whatever reason. Draco's stomach clenched as the smile slid off his face. The fact that Harry still had any humanity left in him at this point was a miracle. And how he could see past what Draco had been, to--

No, he couldn't stay aboard this train of thought, it would take him right off a cliff -- and this was meant to be their day of reprieve.

He hitched the smile quickly back onto his face. "But coming back to my original point, this," Draco raised his laden fork, "is utterly delicious. Thank you."

"You're welcome, I guess. But don't expect this every time you come over, it's a right faff to make."

"I get the feeling that I will approve of whatever you cook, most likely." They shared a smile. "As long as it isn't spicy," Draco said seriously. "I handle spice about as well as I handle alcohol." Harry gave him a questioning look. "Embarrassingly badly," he clarified and Harry laughed.

"Noted," he said, nodding to Draco, still smiling.

They finished their dinner in a leisurely fashion, thankfully avoiding any other heavy topics as they conversed, and it was gone nine by the time they'd finished washing up (Draco was breaking all sorts of new ground tonight) and were heading back upstairs.

As they entered the sitting room there came a sharp tap tap tapping from the front window that drew their attention. Harry pulled back the curtain and revealed an owl that Draco recognised, bearing a letter addressed to him in a hand that was also chillingly familiar. It was from his mother.

Harry retrieved the letter, shooed the owl out of the window and handed the parchment over to Draco with a concerned glance. Draco took the letter and simply looked at it.

"Is that from your mum?" Harry asked tentatively. Draco nodded. "...are you going to open it?"

"No," he replied simply.

He resented the arrival of this letter, the settled contentment he'd enjoyed for longer than he had in years was threatening to seep away again. He crumpled the letter slightly as his fist clenched around it.

"No, I'm not. Today is ours," he said, with a small smile that only felt a tiny bit forced as he looked up at Harry again.
Harry returned his smile and leaned in to press a gentle kiss against Draco's forehead, which he appreciated more than he could articulate. Harry led them over to the antique furniture.

"It sucks there are no more time turners left," Harry sighed as he collapsed onto a sofa, "I could do with repeating today and avoiding tomorrow." Draco joined him, sinking heavily into the cushions. Following the impulse, and because he was too full and tired to do anything else, Draco tipped sideways and rested his head snugly against Harry's shoulder. Harry leaned his head against Draco's and they sat like that for a while.

"We're really doing this, aren't we?" Draco asked, after a while of only the fire crackling in the grate filling the silence. He still couldn't quite get his head around it all.

"Yeah."

"Maybe the war really did send us both mad."

"Hmph," Harry shrugged gently, moving Draco's head upon his shoulder as he did. "If it takes being mad to be happy."

Happy. Happy. That had seemed like such a far off concept for so long; surviving was the more immediate issue. But...happiness...

Despite the fact he was likely about to be disowned by his family, despite the fact he was practically painting a bullseye on his face, despite the fact it was mad – happiness was actually, unbelievably, right here.

Draco turned his face and looked at Harry's profile, at the slight shadow beginning to darken his jaw, at the edge of that legendary scar, at the thick dark eyelashes surrounding the vibrant green eyes. Harry turned to look at him and Draco leaned over and pressed a kiss to his warm lips.

"Take me to bed, Harry," he murmured, smiling.

~ // ~

They laid, side by side on Harry's bed, hands drifting over bared skin, the sound of their kissing and the slight rustle of sheets the only things breaking the silence. The slower pace of the day they'd shared seemed to echo in their touches and in the lack of haste with which they'd undressed each other.

They kissed, and Draco rolled them so he was lying atop Harry, hands wandering slowly all over his bared skin. He felt Draco smiling against his mouth, faltering and then his smile growing wider. Harry pulled back a fraction, the smile from Draco becoming contagious and causing his own lips to quirk upwards.

"What?" he asked, smiling even wider at the inane grin now splitting Draco's face. Draco ducked his head a bit.

"Just...us. This." He dipped his head to nuzzle and kiss at Harry's neck. "You," he mumbled into it. Harry chuckled a little at this complete non-answer and drew Draco's lips back to his own as their bodies pressed and rubbed together closely. Harry thought he got it though; they were an impossible thing. This was a barmy situation. And Harry knew Draco thought he was a nutter.

They smiled and kissed and rolled about the bed, and Harry wished every day could end like this. Unrushed and wrapped around each other.
"Want to finally finish what we started?" Harry asked quietly against Draco's lips. In response, Draco hoisted Harry's leg around his waist and drove his tongue into Harry's mouth hungrily, spiralling a sharp heat through Harry's body. He'd take that as a fuck yes.

They urged and thrust against each other, and the wonderful tangle of anticipation coiled tight in Harry's gut. He wasn't sure he'd ever stop wanting this.

Harry pushed Draco up slightly to still him, focused hard, muttered the incantation and managed to wandlessly cast Scourgify on himself. Draco looked even more turned on as he muttered "Bloody show off," and dipped his head to bite at Harry's lower lip, sucking it into his mouth.

Draco ran his hands firmly up and down Harry's chest, flicking his nipples and causing him to squirm. Harry entwined his fingers into Draco's white blonde hair, drawing him back to lock their eyes.

"I don't want to use the prep spell," breathed Harry, looking up and blushing a bit. "I want you to use your fingers."

At these words Draco bit his lip, flushed a little darker, and asked, looking away from Harry's eyes, "Can I use my mouth?"

Harry's semi throbbed to fullness at those words and the almost coy look on Draco's face.

"Yes," he said, although it embarrassingly came out as a rough, aroused whisper. Harry rolled over and held his breath. He raised his hips and rested his face on his bent arms, feeling very exposed.

Soft fingers swept across Harry's backside and he got even harder in the anticipation. Then a shallow breath hit him. Harry's stomach clenched, just waiting for the first touch to come, then eventually the tip of Draco's tongue flicked across his hole and he became one giant mass of excitement and goosebumps.

At first Draco was tentative, unsure, but grew more insistent and greedy with each passing minute. Harry was unsure he'd last long enough for Draco to actually penetrate him. The hot wet slide of his tongue across his rim had Harry keening into the sheets, embarrassing noises muffled in the material.

Warm, dry hands slid up his sides to steady him as he bucked and quaked.

This went on until Harry was about to cave and wrap a hand around his dick, so desperately close to the edge for so long that he just needed to fucking come already! And that's when Draco finally – mother of Merlin finally – slid two long, slick fingers into him and pumped them gently.

A string of precome dribbled out of Harry's cock onto the mattress as he practically cried into the pillow at the sensation. As those digits pushed into him again and twisted, Draco's tongue joining them, Harry very nearly came, his body shook and juddered, and he swung a shaking hand back to grasp at Draco's wrist.

"Dr–Draco, I'm, I'm nearly– please I want to come with you inside me," Harry panted frantically, completely past capable of feeling ashamed of his begging. The stifled curse from behind him was immediately followed by gentle but swift kisses up his cheeks, his back, his neck, as Draco's fingers slipped out of him. All the while he mumbled out breathy words Harry couldn't decipher against his skin.

"Roll over."

Harry practically slumped over and rolled onto his back to look Draco in the eye. He was pink, his lips slightly swollen and his blazing grey eyes intensely focused on Harry. Draco dipped his face to
kiss Harry like he was starving for it; Harry simply melted underneath him and clasped trembling arms around his shoulders. They kissed deeply, Draco's tongue stroking Harry's in a sweet caress and he was glad of the brief respite to come back from the precipice. They broke apart as Draco pushed Harry's legs open and up, and settled himself between them. He gazed down at Harry with something close to reverence. He gave a questioning look and Harry nodded.

Draco barely needed any pressure to slip into Harry. The slight burn, the drag against his insides, the wonderful warm, full feeling of having Draco within him, sensitive and worked up as he was, caused Harry's eyelids to flutter closed as a moan escaped his lips. He felt Draco's breath hit him in rough exhales as he held himself above Harry.

Then he moved, and Harry nearly floated away. A gentle push and pull, in and out, steady and patient, and as much as Harry could have taken a pounding right then, this was perfect, sweet torture. They rocked rhythmically with Harry's legs hooked tightly around Draco's back, his arms clutching at pale shoulders as he began to climb once more up to that wonderful place where time stopped having any meaning and all he could do was feel.

Draco's hair swung into his face, a slight crease between his eyebrows as he thrust into Harry. His tempo increased and Harry had to work very hard to minimise the long, drawn out desperate moan that wanted to escape him. He was capable only of a jumbled hodge-podge of quasi-syllables when he tried to speak, but real words had no place here, now.

This was why being with Draco only ever got better; he knew just how to touch Harry - how hard, how fast, where his most sensitive points were, just what he needed.

Harry swung one hand back to brace against the headboard as Draco began to take him more firmly, plunging strong strokes into Harry's quaking body, building that intense heat and pressure.

Their eyes met, Draco's hand sliding up to grip Harry's, fingers clasping tight together. Draco held his gaze, grey eyes dark and shining. God, Harry loved him. And Draco loved him back! Draco fucking loved him...

Harry came; sent shaking and shuddering, back arching, into sweet release.

It was a moment of perfection: joined to Draco so deeply, subsumed with sensation and the whole world zeroed down to the culmination of their pleasure. He almost sobbed as he came back to himself, now sticky, breathless, and juddering with aftershocks.

Harry desperately gasped for breath, every inch of him inside and out wracked with tremors. Draco held him close despite the fact that he was shaking almost as much as Harry himself. Oxygen was not forthcoming no matter how furiously he tried to get it into his lungs making his head spin. Christ, sex with Draco was dangerous.

They clutched at each other's faces, foreheads touching as they breathed the same air, perspiration rapidly cooling on their heated skin as they simply lay as close as they could possibly be to one another as their pleasure faded.

Harry dragged enough air into him to gasp out a few words. Ones he needed to finally say.

"Draco...I love you."

Draco held him tighter, face buried in his neck. He was silent for so long that Harry just assumed he wasn't going to respond verbally. It tugged a little at the edge of Harry's heart, but before that feeling could take hold there was the quietest intake of breath, and then an earnestly whispered, "I love you
Harry might have imagined it, but he thought he felt something hot and wet fall upon his neck.

~ // ~

Draco woke up before Harry again the next morning. He rolled over, aching in the best ways and looked over to the tuft of wild black hair poking up from out of the duvet. He smiled to himself as heady warmth suffused him – he might have this every day...Draco got a little giddy at the thought. Gosh, he really had turned into a sentimental Hufflepuff, hadn’t he? Funny thing was, he couldn’t seem to summon any shits to give about this. Instead he sat up against the headboard and just listened to Harry’s very light snoring for a while.

Eventually though, he succumbed to the calling of his bladder and slid out of bed, donned some clothes and Harry’s dressing gown that hung upon the back of the bedroom door, and went to the bathroom. After this he decided he’d worked up a hell of an appetite and strolled down toward the kitchen for some food.

Involuntarily, as he passed through the sitting room, Draco’s eyes alighted upon the crinkled letter from his mother, which he’d placed on the side table next to the couch. Riding a sudden wave of uncaring that briefly afforded him an emotional shield of apathy (a fortitude fuelled no doubt by an amazing night in the arms of his boyfriend) he reached for the letter and tore it open.

Dearest Draco,

I feel it almost unnecessary to explain that what you told me last night was shocking. I also feel it would be equally redundant to pretend that I am not disappointed in the revelation that the life your father and I have worked so hard to provide for you, not to mention generations of tradition, is to be rejected wholesale at the drop of a hat.

And, given the sudden nature of your infatuation, I am keen to know what prompted this ‘relationship’ so serious that you felt the need to tell me about it so boldly out of the blue. I hope that a sense of duty or obligation to one who has done much for us of late is not the culprit, and I would also be sure to check your food and drink for possible tampering.

But, in the eventuality that this is not the result of some magical interference, I must say this; No matter what course you take, no matter how far you stray, no matter who you choose to befriend, you are always and forever my son. I love you. And shall love you into the next life and beyond.

I cannot guarantee that I will not be upset by some of your actions or choices, I am a woman well set in certain traditions and values. However, the last few years have taught me that my preconceptions and prejudices can be misplaced, and also that I would give absolutely anything and everything for your safety and happiness.

I would appreciate another chance to talk face to face about some of the issues you brought forward, and I await your return owl with hope.

Your loving mother
x X x

Draco crumpled up the letter angrily.

The phrasing, the implications, the unsaid judgement of it...it was so her it was ridiculous! At least it
wasn't a disownment letter – although a small part of him wished it had been, then he'd be cleanly shot of all of this bollocks. But his mother still loved him, and that made his anger more complicated. There was a noise from behind him and he turned to see Harry, sporting spectacular sex hair, watching him from the doorway.

"Mother thinks I should check my food and drink for potions," Draco got out through clenched teeth.

"Ah. Did you get the 'I'm just making sure you're not being coerced and are still sane' speech too?" he asked, indicating the letter.

"More or less," Draco replied tightly. "You'd think our closest would have a bit more trust in us, wouldn't you?"

"I guess they wouldn't be them if they didn't care," Harry said fairly.

"Well they can bloody well keep it to them-damn-selves," he snapped. Harry snickered. "What?"

"You're...you go all pink around your neck when you get angry."

"Oh, sod off!"

"It's cute!"

"It is not."

Harry strolled over and kissed his neck. He shivered a little. "Really is."

"You're a fucking plonker," huffed Draco.

"As long as I'm the only one who sees how far down that blush goes." Draco rolled his eyes, temper dissipating in the face of all Harry's...Harry-ness.

"Fucking, honestly!" he griped before grabbing the wazzock and tackling him, laughing, down onto the nearest sofa.

"I've got an idea though," Harry said haltingly a moment later, breaking away from his lips and bracing himself above Draco.

"What is it," replied Draco, suspicious.

"We...we could invite her over here to talk? Neutral...ish sort of ground. Not the manor."

Draco stared at him. "You're honestly inviting my mother over to your house?"

"Well...yeah."

Draco thought for a second, and the last remnants of his earlier callousness prompted him to say;

"Fine. Your funeral. We'll see how much she cares about my 'safety and happiness' when we ask her to come over to the ancestral Black home now housing the queer blood traitor shagging her son," Draco added sourly.

He used the back of his mother's original letter – just to nark her off with the terrible etiquette – and invited her to have tea with himself and 'Harry, my boyfriend' at Grimmauld Place at five pm that day (Harry slipping in a hand written address to allow her entry). His mother's owl had roosted in a tree outside during the night, apparently disinclined to leave without a reply, so Draco called him in
through the window and attached the letter to his leg. His stomach felt like a newly sprouted Venomous Tentacula as he watched the owl soar off to become a small spot on the horizon.

They heard nothing back that afternoon.

"Don't worry about it," said Harry, coming over to slide his arms around Draco's shoulders from behind as he stood watching the mantle clock tick past five. God, he spent too much of his life watching bloody fireplaces. "You'll sort things out with her, maybe you could owl about it instead. She lied to Voldemort's face just to know you were safe, this is nothing compared to that."

Draco turned in Harry's arms to face him. He leant his forehead against Harry's and rested his hands on his hips. "I say we move to Peru. Or French Polynesia. Somewhere. Anywhere hot and sunny, and out of the way of my—"

The room flared into green light with a *whoosh* and Draco spun back around to see his mother pulling a most unusual face as she stepped out of the fireplace, elegant robes swishing, staring at them. Harry's arms dropped from about Draco.

"Good evening," she said lightly, straightening up, still eyeing them.

"Good evening, Mrs Malfoy," said Harry politely, moving to stand beside Draco and squeezing his hand reassuringly. Draco felt an age-old desire to move away from Potter, throw off his hand, to do whatever was necessary to gain his mother's approval when she gave him this shrewd, surveying look. But he fought it. Stayed where he was, next to Harry, where he should be.

"Mother," he said.

"Draco," she replied mildly, but with very evident tenseness.

"We've, uh, we've got tea in the parlour next door, should we...?" Harry began, haltingly.

"Yes, thank you. Lead the way."

They all walked awkwardly to the parlour where Harry and himself had set out a pot of tea under a Stasis Charm along with some biscuits. Draco and Harry sat themselves on a small grey loveseat while his mother took a seat on the large armchair they'd positioned opposite. There was further laden silence as Harry poured them all tea – Draco was in awe of the steadiness of his hands – and passed the cups around, then sat back beside Draco and shared with him a brief look of support. Draco cleared his throat.

"So, Mother, which issues did you want to talk to me about?"

She gazed at him inscrutably for a moment. "Well, I feel the Erumpent in the room should be addressed."

"And that is?" asked Draco almost mockingly, fearing the worst and so his natural instinct to be snippy taking over.

His mother let out the tiniest of sighs and addressed them both. "This– your...friendship."

So this was how it was going to be. She couldn't even bring herself to say it. That boded well. He shot a quick look over to Harry and saw the anger he had been so familiar with seeing directed at himself instead directed at his mother, although Harry was doing his best to hide it and look politely civil. Seeing Harry get riled up almost made Draco smile – some things might never change. He returned is attention to the potential catastrophe before him.
Our friendship, I see. Well, I have to say that our friendship is old news. The real sensation has been caused by our romantic relationship—" he emphasised the words and noted his mother's mouth pursing slightly "—becoming public knowledge. We're out of school now for that reason, to keep me from getting hexed, which, to be fair, was happening even before this. Not that you've been asking."

A stunned pause followed that statement. He hoped those words hit home.

"So, an entire school full of people are aware of your...situation." He could practically see the scenarios flashing through her mind of reporters, letters from other pureblood families, the potential for this to get very, very public.

"Yes," he said flatly.

"I see. Does Headmistress McGonagall believe you will be safe enough to return to Hogwarts soon?"

"She reckons so," interjected Harry. "We've got tomorrow off as well, then we'll need to go back." His mother could barely look at Harry longer than a few seconds, before returning her gaze to Draco, who defiantly held out his chin, determined not to crumble before her cool disapproval. This had been a terrible idea, no good could come of this...

"Mother, I meant everything I said the other day. And we didn't plan for it to be widely known but now it is, it still changes nothing. I still want to be with Harry and I still want to be independent."

If he didn't know better, he'd swear his mother's eyes were almost sympathetic for a second.

"There's no point throwing it all away, Draco, please think of your father, think of us. You may be sure now, but down the line—"

"How is this less sure to work out than marrying some person I don't know?" he asked, reasonably.

"Things are different in an arranged marriage. I'm sure you'll come to like Astoria once you've spent some time with her."

"Tell them that I am not doing it."

Narcissa's face didn't shift an inch, Draco knew she was Occluding, shutting away all her thoughts on the matter, but Draco didn't need Legilimency to know the lines along which her mind was working. In fact he knew exactly what she would do. "You're still going to string along the Greengrasses, aren't you," he stated simply.

"Draco, I—"

"You don't think we're going to last. You think this is some sort of rebellious phase I'm going through and in a few months I'll be ready to settle down with a girl and get back on track with your plan!"

He'd worked himself up to almost shouting. Holy hell, actually shouting at his mother – he'd never dared such a thing! If it weren't so utterly terrifying it might be exhilarating.

She leant forward and put on her most appeasing voice.

"Draco, its not uncommon to be confused at your age! You've been through so much these last years, but— "
"And whose fault was it that I went through so much, hm? Not that it has any bearing on who I find attractive, and that isn't any girl." His neck blushed at the words.

"Draco, you can't know for certain that you'll never find a girl you like, you're so young, you don't need to commit yourself to this...lifestyle forever. It's all very sudden—"

"None of this is sudden, Mother!" he cried, suddenly on his feet. "I just couldn't ever talk about any of it!" He saw Harry shift to stand beside him, even as his throat fell tight with emotion. "I couldn't talk about anything..." he trailed off, throat now too restricted for words.

He panted heavily, willing his lower lip to stop trembling.

~ // ~

Draco stood, looking like he was about to cry or curse or something, and Harry would not let it get that far.

"Mrs Malfoy," Harry said, feeling a battle wage within him at the anger of talking to Narcissa Malfoy, who was way out of line, and the need to remember that this was also his boyfriend's mother. "I can't predict how long our relationship will last, I'm not going to stand here and make a bunch of promises I might not be able to keep. But right now, this is what Draco and I want, and neither you, nor anyone else, is going to stop us from being together."

Harry stood, shoulder to shoulder with Draco and grasped his sweaty hand. Narcissa's nostrils flared a little, one of the biggest exhibitions of anger she'd given that evening. She rose to her feet to be eye level with them both.

"Mr Potter – with all due respect – I don't think—"

"Enough." The chill in Draco's voice could've rivalled Snape's. Harry looked at him.

"You're still waging a war, Mother. Fighting to keep us in our old place, in our old life – but I don't want to live like that anymore. I don't want to be who I was, I want to live honestly, as who I am. Let go, Mother."

Narcissa said nothing to this, simply gazed at Draco as if she did not recognise her own son. But Harry saw, underneath the traces of confusion, of bewilderment, a profound sadness there. He sort of felt sorry for her, remembering the desperate woman who had entreated his help in the Forest and who had ultimately saved his life.

"Thank you for your visit," Draco clipped cordially, "but I think you should be going home now." His hand trembled in Harry's but none of that emotion was betrayed in the rest of his demeanour or his icy tone. He'd summoned up his best Malfoy cool, and Harry didn't like the brief flash of Lucius he saw there.

Narcissa gave one more weighty look to her son, one more conflicted look at Harry, before she turned around without a word, strode through to the sitting room fireplace, threw glittering powder from the box on the shelf into the fire and disappeared into the Floo.

Draco all but collapsed onto Harry the moment she was out of sight, that discomfiting flash of his father immediately evaporated. Harry slid his arms around him and noted the clammy shirt.

"Do you need some time alone?" Harry asked.

"Yes. No. I don't know," Draco mumbled into Harry's shoulder. So Harry simply stood there
holding him securely.

"You were really brave by the way," he said.

"That's more your thing, isn't it?"

"Nah, seems to be more yours lately." He nudged his nose against the side of Draco's head and heard a small huff. "Let's take your mind off it for a bit," he said, grasping Draco's hand and leading him through to the kitchen. Once there he raised his other hand and summoned the tea service wandlessly from the parlour. It whooshed into Harry's waiting hands and he placed it in the sink, turning the old brass taps to fill it.

"Washing up," he said, smiling at Draco's look of confusion.

"Certainly not what I thought you were going to suggest," he said, less shaky now.

"Come on, doing something monotonous with your hands is good for clearing the mind. There's something satisfying about cleaning without magic."

With a raised eyebrow but, amazingly, no complaining at all, Draco rolled up his sleeves and grabbed a sponge from the counter. Harry moved to stand behind him and slipped one arm about his waist and one stroking through his hair soothingly as he began scrubbing. Harry hadn't had any physical comfort like this growing up, and it felt good to give it.

"Just me doing this muggle cleaning then, is it?" asked Draco lightly, sounding amused but tired. Harry smiled.

"I'll dry up in a minute," he replied, scratching his fingers gently across Draco's scalp. Draco shifted against him, pausing in his scrubbing of a teacup, drawing a shaky breath.

"Do you think that we'll..." he started, hesitantly, "that what we have will change now that everyone knows?"

Harry thought about this. "Probably," he answered honestly.

"I mean, do you think we'll actually make it?"

"...yeah," Harry said gently. He carded his hand through pale locks, dragging his nails just behind his ear. "Come on, we've both been through way worse. You and me, we're both tough as nails." Draco straightened up slightly.

"I like to think of myself as something a little more refined than a nail, Potter," Draco sniffed, with his old familiar drawl coming through. It tugged a relieved smile onto Harry's lips to hear it.

"Antique ivory coat hook any better, Lord Fauntleroy?"

Draco chuckled, pushing back closer to Harry's body and giving him a soft pinch to the leg with a wet hand.

"Arse," he muttered.

"Posh twat," replied Harry through his smile.

Draco finished the washing up and set everything on the side - flicking the water off his hand into Harry's face afterwards, of course. While Harry was drying up Draco headed upstairs and, alone now for the first time since Narcissa had left, Harry sagged a little against the counter.
God, that had been pretty bloody unpleasant. Seeing Draco that upset had been worse than his own feelings by far, and not being able to sway his mother had been—well, he felt powerless yet again.

Harry felt the familiar squirming of his insides as the tension he'd been swimming in for the last hour morphed into worry, into fear. He braced himself for a bad one.

But after he'd acknowledged it, once he'd let it hit him properly, despite the prickling sweat and the hiked heart rate, it started to ebb away almost at once, much quicker than it usually did. It did not control him.

He'd—well, they'd faced a tough obstacle, and he was still functioning, still himself, still in the present, still in control. As he stood there in the dim kitchen, he felt a small glimmer of pride, for both of them.

And then he felt a huge surge of pain as he thought about his two best friends.

Chapter End Notes

The slowest updating fic in the world has returned! And has yet again added another chapter—but this is the last extension, I promise! It's 10 chapters now and we are nearing the finish line. Every single person here being patient deserves a medal and a New Hope style award ceremony. Much appreciation for any kudos and comments and I shall be back in the final installment <3
Despite the clear, blazing November sunshine streaming through the house's windows, their last day at Grimmauld Place was slightly marred by the looming spectre of their return to Hogwarts the following morning.

Harry didn't take the Daily Prophet anymore, but felt antsy and anxious, like they were potentially missing something being written about them. True, it had only been a few days but that was more than enough time for any industrious student, wanting money or attention, to contact the paper for an interview.

When he'd brought this up to Draco, he'd merely shrugged and said he'd borrow someone's copy when they got to school because he refused to 'give any money to that libellous rag'. He also pragmatically pointed out the futility of worrying about it, since they had no control over what the other students would or wouldn't do, or what the Prophet might print. Harry was getting a bit pissed off with Malfoy's pragmatism and logic. Mainly because he was right. Calm git.

"How come you got so wound up about me defending you in the trial but you're cool as a cucumber about this?" Harry huffed.

Draco blushed heavily, staining his pale cheeks a deep pink and he looked at Harry's shoulder as he mumbled, "Well, that was to do with what you thought of me...bit different." Harry felt himself blush in sympathy, but a smile still tugged at his lips.

"Besides," Draco added more clearly, "I like to think I've experienced some personal growth since then. Plus, my mother already disapproves and my father is in prison; whatever else happens is small fry at this point."

Harry could see his point. Even so, he got the feeling Draco's supposed zen was a bit more effort than he was letting on.

Harry spent most of that day deliberately finding ways to distract himself from thinking about his return to school and what he would say to Ron and Hermione. With just himself and Draco alone in a private house this distraction wasn't hard to come by but in between bouts of incredible sex, and during essential pauses for sustenance, Harry's mind couldn't help but drift back to them.

He was hurt. So beyond hurt at this point, and no matter how much he tried to find excuses for them he just couldn't see a way around the fact that they'd blabbed to someone about him and Draco, because it definitely hadn't been McGonagall.

True to his word to her, Harry had indeed brought up the subject of private sessions with a Healer to Draco that evening after dinner. His reaction had been...interesting. After listening to what Harry had to say he'd opened his mouth quickly, eyes flashing, and Harry had girded himself for an irritated tirade, but all Draco had done was pause, close his mouth and go quiet, looking at the wall. After almost a solid minute of this, he'd then nodded slowly and opened his mouth again to simply say, "If you think it might help."

Once Harry had told Draco that he himself was going to see a Healer for the same reason, he seemed to become less awkward about the whole idea. Then Harry slid to his knees on the cold, stone
kitchen floor and helped Draco feel a whole lot better.

That escalated into Draco pushing him back, straddling him upon the wide kitchen table, and culminated in such a way that made Harry incredibly thankful that a) Kreacher was at Hogwarts, and b) his neighbours couldn't hear them.

They collapsed back on the scrubbed wood, breathless, clothes scattered about the floor and upon the overturned chair.

"Maybe I could quickly drop by Diagon under the invisibility cloak and nick a copy of the paper," Harry panted as they lay staring at the ceiling.

Draco sighed hugely. "Look, if you're this paranoid about it why don't we just conduct a sodding interview with the *Prophet* ourselves and have done with it," he said, sounding exasperated but perfectly serious.

"That would put you in danger!" Harry said vehemently, pushing himself up on his hands to look down at Draco. There was no way Harry was going to cause even more attacks to happen.

"I'm *already* in danger, Harry! Every day," Draco replied forcefully, propping himself up on his elbows, frowning. "But funnily enough I am capable of surviving some disgruntled students and some hate mail – I have done so far!"

"With a broken arm, and who knows what else if we hadn't left," retorted Harry.

Draco paused, looking at him intently.

"Are you ashamed of me?"

"What? No!" cried Harry immediately. "No, not at all!"

Draco shifted uncomfortably, reaching for his discarded shirt and sitting up to put it on. Harry sat up too.

"I *was* ashamed," said Draco quietly, looking at his knees. "Deeply. Intensified, no doubt, by the fact that I'd already...already wanted you even when we were enemies, which at the time I thought couldn't have been more wrong of me." He looked up at Harry.

"I can't say that those feeling are completely gone, but I know now that they're ridiculous. This isn't wrong." He laid his hand upon Harry's. "So I'm ready to be open about it, not just to our closest but to the world. When you are."

Harry took a moment to think honestly about how he felt.

"I was never ashamed but...well, I wasn't exactly keen to tell anyone. But that was before. I'm definitely not ashamed of you but, let's face it, being close to me has always been a hazard."

Draco huffed a small laugh, bringing his fingers up to trace the lightning scar on Harry's forehead.

"Yes. But standing in your way has proved even more so. Let's hope people remember that."

~ // ~
Draco had made up his mind about his very stupid decision before they even fell asleep. He ached at leaving the slumbering form of Harry still wrapped tightly in the warm sheets that smelled so thoroughly of them. He daren't even run a hand through his hair (because yes, that was apparently the sort of sappy thing he did now) for fear of waking him; but this was something Draco was going to do on his own.

He would go back to Hogwarts before Harry, find his two best friends, and allow them to ask him questions. In his head it sort of felt like a Gryffindor-ish challenge, something that they would do to prove they weren't afraid and were totally committed (which, well Draco was committed but he was also piss-scared). Plus, he didn't imagine Harry's response would be all that good if he knew what Draco was up to – but, easier to ask for forgiveness and all that.

Giving Weasley and Granger the opportunity to speak to him alone – and indeed, curse him if they so chose – meant they could ask him anything, vet him in a way, because Draco was determined to prove that he had changed, and even more determined to do whatever he could to hang on to Harry. And even though it was likely that Weasley had let their secret slip, Draco couldn't really blame him; not for that or for being angry. It was still a spectacularly gittish move, but Draco had done awful things when angry and confused too, far worse than this. And it wasn't like the other students had been holding back their distaste for him before this anyway.

That morning he rose early, slipped quietly out of bed, donned his school uniform, and made his way through the Floo into McGonagall's office. It was empty, but it was very early in a Sunday morning, most of the students and teachers wouldn't even be at breakfast yet. Utilising the secret passageways he knew best, he sped down to the Eighth Year common room, treading lightly and avoiding any students, making his way inside and was relieved to find it deserted.

He walked up to the Phoenix Room and raised his hand to knock on the wood, but halted as he heard the unmistakable, intense voice of Granger.

"– ridiculous; why don't we just go and talk to him?! He's still Harry!" she was pleading.

"Yeah, right. Doesn't seem like it anymore," came the gruff reply from Weasley. Draco's jaw clenched hard.

"Ron! Just because he's seeing someone you don't approve of does not mean he isn't the same person who has been our best friend for eight years!"

"And you can overlook it, can you? That Malfoy poisoned me? That he almost killed Katie and Dumbledore? That he let monsters into this castle, one of which mutilated my brother? That he wasted no opportunity to call you the worst things he could think of and wish you would die?! That's all just fine and dandy now because Harry likes his dick!"

Draco's stomach curdled.

Granger sounded like she was about to cry when she spoke next.

"I refuse to lose Harry because of this," she said stubbornly, though her voice quavered. "I will not. Not after– not after everything. And we have to let him know we didn't say anything, because I know that's what he thinks we did!"

Draco had to do it now, before he lost all semblance of a nerve and fled. He raised his hand, jaw still clenched, and knocked lightly on the wood. The voices fell silent instantly. After a heart-stopping few moments he heard a shuffle and the door cracked open. There stood Weasley in his hideous maroon pyjamas, Draco could just see past him to Granger, who sat on the end of Weasley's bed.
Both of them wore identical expressions of wide-eyed shock.

"I may be the person you least want to see right now," Draco said quickly, before he could back out, "but...I think we should talk."

Weasley still looked dumbfounded, but, almost it seemed, against his own wishes, he opened the door a little wider and allowed Draco entrance. Draco tried desperately to ignore the memories of the last time Weasley had seen him in this room, in flagrante delicto with Harry, and strode forward, standing a few feet apart from them, not knowing how long he'd be permitted to stay, so electing to remain on his feet.

Granger was also in her pyjamas, and looked a tiny bit embarrassed to be caught in this room wearing them (Draco had no doubt that Weasley and Granger were guilty of similar activities in this room that he and Harry were), but was still meeting his eye in an almost calculating way. Draco took a deep breath.

"I'm here to clear the air, so to speak. You can ask me anything," he said shortly, feeling exposed and crossing his arms over his chest. "Ask away," he prompted when they did nothing but stare at him in silence.

Weasley had just taken to scowling at him, body tensed for a fight, but Granger seemed to ponder this for a second.

"Why are you and Harry together?" she asked, almost academically.

"Because we want to be," he replied honestly, although it may have come out a mite defensive due to nerves.

"You know what I mean," she added, bit more impatiently.

"And I meant what I said," said Draco, starting to feel irked, temper rising a little.

"I mean what do you two even really know about each other?!" Granger went on, exasperated, her own eyes flashing with irritation now.

Draco surged hot with a lance of anger – of course, what the hell would he know about Harry after all these months; he was obviously too Slytherin to find out anything about him, to care about him as a person, or to think about anything other than sex.

"What do I know?" he began sarcastically. "Well, I know he likes being scratched. He likes getting fucked. He loves having his hair pulled. At least that matted mane is good for something; it doesn't half create the best noises. And he can get me off without having to touch my dick. So, all in all, I'd say I have a plentiful resource of pertinent information to hand."

The look he got from both of them could've put Medusa out of business.

Oh, shit he had overdone it. Damn his tongue, quicker to act than his brain! He was very much torn between wanting to sneer at them (through fear, indignation and sheer ingrained habit), and wanting to be genuine enough to earn their...well, not approval, but get them back on Harry's side at the very least.

Were he a lesser man he would have left the room at that point, clung on to some shred of self-preservation and dignity, but he felt he owed it to Harry and himself to keep up the fight for them. He cleared his throat.

Draco surged hot with a lance of anger – of course, what the hell would he know about Harry after all these months; he was obviously too Slytherin to find out anything about him, to care about him as a person, or to think about anything other than sex.

"What do I know?" he began sarcastically. "Well, I know he likes being scratched. He likes getting fucked. He loves having his hair pulled. At least that matted mane is good for something; it doesn't half create the best noises. And he can get me off without having to touch my dick. So, all in all, I'd say I have a plentiful resource of pertinent information to hand."

The look he got from both of them could've put Medusa out of business.

Oh, shit he had overdone it. Damn his tongue, quicker to act than his brain! He was very much torn between wanting to sneer at them (through fear, indignation and sheer ingrained habit), and wanting to be genuine enough to earn their...well, not approval, but get them back on Harry's side at the very least.

Were he a lesser man he would have left the room at that point, clung on to some shred of self-preservation and dignity, but he felt he owed it to Harry and himself to keep up the fight for them. He cleared his throat.
"Alright," Draco straightened his robes and stood up straighter, un-crossing his arms, breathing away some of his ire and accepting the challenge properly this time.

"You know he has nightmares, obviously. But did you know that he doesn't have them if he's sleeping with me? I mean, in the same bed as me," he added witheringly at the look of consternation – or constipation, it might be that – on Weasley's face. Granger just looked surprised.

"I don't know if he's told you but he also gets these episodes, they could be panic attacks; he just disconnects from reality and relives all the awful shit he had to go through, he sometimes forgets where he is. These are...well I get the feeling they happened a lot over the summer but he– it appears that I help...with them...with keeping him in the present."

Against his will he was blushing, trying to ignore the stupid manic butterflies filling his stomach as he shared this very personal information. Desperately attempting to rein in the heat in his face he ploughed on while staring at the ground.

"He's got a marvellously off-colour sense of humour when he's in the right company, but that might be a Slytherin influence, I'll grant. He is a spectacular cook for all the wrong reasons. He has survivor's guilt like you wouldn't believe, but he doesn't talk about it. He's not quite as atrocious at Potions as I had previously thought, although not a particularly high bar there. He cries in front of me, and he is the only being in existence before whom I am capable or willing to do the same.

"And he cares about your opinions over the entire rest of the wizarding worlds', which is the reason I am here for your inspection. Although he doesn't know it.

"I feel I also ought to add..." now this part was difficult, but he had to do it. For Harry. "I apologise. For my behaviour towards you, for the terrible things I did and said, and for the harm that it caused you and yours. I won't offer excuses, just an assurance that I am sorry, and that I certainly don't hold those views now. I don't believe Harry would come anywhere near me if I did."

Draco finished his ramble to two wide-eyed, blank stares. He summoned all his will not to revert to habit and roll his eyes at the pair of them, and instead stood there, impassive, vulnerable, waiting for them to pass judgment. It was Granger who spoke first.

"I...I accept your apology," she said stiltedly. Weasley's head whipped around to stare at her so fast it might have snapped, and she shifted uncomfortably but didn't retract her statement. Draco felt a sort of relief; one down.

"Thank you," he replied simply. She nodded shortly, still unsmiling, mouth tight.

Weasley stared at his girlfriend for a while in silence. Then looked at Draco. Draco saw a muscle working in his jaw and his ears were already a rather intense shade of magenta.

"Hermione could you give us a minute alone?"

Granger looked like she trusted Weasley in that moment just about as much as Draco did, but she nodded, cast a slightly worried look at Draco, then left the room.

The door shut with a clunk. Weasley stood, levelled a look his way, his expression dark, and Draco felt all his muscles tense in anticipation of a fight, but he did not reach for his wand. Weasley stepped forward and Draco saw he was gripping his own wand in his hand.

Oh Merlin, death by Weasley. That would be humiliatingly tragic.

"Have you lied to him?"
"What?" Draco wasn't following.

"Have you lied to Harry?"

"About what?"

"About anything. About this thing you've got going, about how you feel, about what you've done. *Anything.*"

"No," he answered.

"Have you hurt him? Jinxed him, hit him?"

"No," he said a little more firmly.

"Are you planning on chucking him the minute your sentence is over or you get bored with the novelty of dating Harry Potter?"

Draco bristled. "No!"

Weasley took another step forward.

"And do you understand that if you hurt him in any way, *any* way at all, I will get you sent to Azkaban faster than you could apparate?"

Draco levelled his stare at Weasley, raising his chin trying to look defiant but genuine as he said, "Yes."

Weasley regarded him for another few seconds before he seemed to be satisfied.

"All right then." He turned around and walked to the door, but halted and spun to address Draco once more.

"He's doing better...than he was. Just...just keep making him happy, okay?" His face contorted as he forced the words out, like he was in physical pain from saying it. "Don't be a massive prick like you usually are." And with that he left.

Did...did he just get Weasley's approval...?

~ // ~

Harry pelted into the Eighth Year common room and scanned it avidly as he stood there panting. Encountering only shocked stares from a few students who absolutely weren't the one he was looking for Harry charged through to the bedrooms and knocked loudly on the Hippogryff Room's door.

The door opened a fraction and Harry felt drenched in relief as the white-blonde hair came into view. The door opened wider and thankfully Draco seemed alone and unharmed.

"Why did you leave?" Harry asked quickly, taking in Draco's dozy demeanour. "Are you okay? What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry, I had something to do before you got here." At Harry's livid glare he sighed and said, "I tried to make my peace with your compatriots; which was successful...I think. But if I'd told you you would have tried to stop me, or asked to come along. And I just needed to do it by myself."
"Why couldn't you leave a note like the first bloody morning after?" Harry asked, nettled, still coming down from the anxiety of waking up alone.

"Go find your friends and talk to them, Harry."

"Did you ask them why they told–"

"I didn't ask them anything," said Draco, sounding quite tired and leaning against the door jamb wearily. "It was for them to ask me questions. Just go and talk to them. I'm in need of a strong cup of tea. I'll see you downstairs once you've spoken to Weasley and Granger, and after I've found Pansy, Blaise and Greg."

"Okay," Harry said, deflating a bit. "Okay, I'll see you later." And, resisting the urge to look around them because it didn't bloody matter anymore, he leaned in to kiss Draco gently. Draco kissed him back, a hand sliding onto his chest, and some of Harry's agitation was soothed away. He pulled back and gave a small smile.

"Wish me luck."

"You don't need it, you plonker," Draco said, and he swatted Harry off down the hallway then retreated back into his room.

Harry couldn't locate his friends in the common room, so he took a quick peak at the Marauders Map. He located them among the many labelled dots in the Great Hall. Girding himself for the inevitable reaction of the Hogwarts masses, he headed down to the Great Hall, where students were now breakfasting. He spotted them at once at the Gryffindor table and hurried to them, noting amongst the many stares, the intense gaze of Ginny a little further down the table. That would be another fun conversation to look forward to.

Ron and Hermione were deep in urgent conversation as he approached, but both looked up at him, startled, as he sat himself opposite. After marching in here on Draco's orders but without much of a plan he could not help the twisting burn of betrayal that seeing the pair of them set off within him. He swallowed.

"Can we talk?" he asked. "Somewhere else?"

"Of course," said Hermione quickly, while Ron uttered a belated, "Sure."

They trooped together out of the Hall (Harry trying desperately to ignore the hundreds of eyes on him) to the nearest empty classroom, Harry checked the ceiling for Peeves and then they filed in, shutting the door behind them.

It was the most uncomfortable Harry had ever felt in the presence of his two friends, and that included the times when they'd been nauseatingly lovey dovey, when they'd been fighting, and when they'd all been slightly Horcrux Crazy. He tried to organise his thoughts into something vaguely coherent and not too aggressive, but there was a faint ringing in his ears as he stood there feeling anxiety war with anger twisting up his insides. A hard knot in his throat was making it difficult to speak. Hermione opened her mouth.

"Harry, we–"

"Why did you blab about us?" he burst out, unable to contain the hurt any longer. It was directed at Ron, who was standing there all tense and grumpy. "Why did you make it so the rest of the school knew but avoided me?! Were you just that pissed off at us? Draco got attacked because of this! He broke his arm but it could've been so much worse and you--"
"It wasn't me!" Ron yelled out, indignantly. Harry snorted. "You're the only one who knew," he barked back.

"I didn't tell anyone, all right?! Well, 'cept for Hermione, obviously – but no one else!"

"It's true Harry! I've been listening to the gossip and I'm not sure exactly who, but somebody saw you and Draco k-kissing in the common room two days ago," Hermione stuttered, earnestly.

Harry lost his righteous indignation pretty fucking fast in light of this new information. "You really didn't...?"

"No!" said Hermione and Ron together.

"And it's a little fucking hurtful that you'd ever think we would do that to you, mate," said Ron, who did seem genuinely upset. Tears swam in Hermione's eyes.

"Well...I thought...I thought you were the only ones who knew," Harry muttered weakly.

"Weren't exactly bloody careful about it, were you?"

It was Harry's turn to blush.

"I s'pose that won't matter much from now on," he mumbled, now feeling rather ashamed for his assumptions.

"By the way, if you can keep Malfoy from sharing any more info about your sex life, I'd really appreciate it," huffed Ron, frowning. "Unnecessarily explicit he was; and I've still got bloody images to repress and all! Hermione refuses to Obliviate me–"

"Why didn't you tell us, about your panic attacks?" Hermione interjected. "It seems like you've been hiding so much; Malfoy said they'd been happening all summer."

"He seems to have said an awful lot," grumbled Harry.

"He seems to care an awful lot," said Hermione sounding fairly surprised.

"He sighed. "I didn't mean to keep stuff from you, it's just... You guys have had your own shit to deal with, and I guess I was ashamed, really, for being a mess, for being...well. After stopping Voldemort I couldn't help but feel like of course I should be able to handle this stuff; small potatoes after last year, isn't it?"

"Oh Harry," said Hermione, eyes shining, "you can be really fucking stupid sometimes!"

Harry and Ron both jumped – Hermione never swore all that much, and certainly never with language that blue! She was glaring intently at him, her eyes blazing.

"You went through all that, all the pain and confusion and worry on your own just because you believed your own press? That you're some superhuman who's above needing help with the problems the rest of us mortals do?!!"

"Get a grip! You're still human and we still want to help you, even when we're having a tough time too, you stoic berk!!!"

Hermione's tirade ended and Harry simply stood there, mouth hanging open like a guppy,
unblinking. Harry had the impression Ron was looking rather the same as him.

"Uhh..." said Harry.

Hermione took several deep, composing breaths and settled her expression into something much more calm. It definitely felt as though she'd been sitting on an outburst like that for a while. When she met his eye again she looked sympathetic rather than exasperated.

"Harry, we're your best friends," she said, walking towards him, "and none of this changes that. It was...a surprise, but it'd take a lot more than this to stop us from caring about you." She rested a hand upon his upper arm and Harry fully comprehended that Ron and Hermione were still with him, still his friends, his family; he had not lost them.

"Now we've established that we didn't say anything and you're an idiot," said Ron, coming out of his shock, "are you going to tell us now? Why you're with that tosser?"

Harry ran a hand through his hair, exasperated, but relieved. His friends had not betrayed him, and they may be less than happy about his partner, but they weren't insisting Harry break up with him, or telling him he was disgusting and weird. They were accepting him as he was.

"It's a long story involving a lot of confusion, a lot of swearing, and a lot of sex, which I know you don't want to hear about," he said lightly.

Ron made an aborted movement like he was going to gag. Harry sighed. "I'll tell you in time. When it's going to be slightly less horrifically uncomfortable. The short answer is though, that I'm with him because I want to be.

"You know that's exactly what he said too," murmured Hermione, staring at Harry as though she was seeing something about him she'd never noticed before. Something inside him grew warm.

"You guys are taking it a fair bit better than Narcissa Malfoy," Harry said. Ron's mouth fell open dramatically.

"His mum knows? Wait, did she catch you at it too?!"

Harry laughed, a bit more tension leaving him, and he told the other two about their uncomfortable tea with Mrs Malfoy the other day, which led to Harry explaining the attempted arranged marriage and the other pressures on Draco's life.

"He came out to his mum for you," whispered Hermione, a little awestruck. Harry blushed.

"Well, no, he did it for him, but I guess he's pretty serious. I mean, I'm serious about him too."

"Merlin, Harry, just make sure when you tell my mum that I am far, far away! Preferably on another continent," said Ron fervently. Yet another difficult conversation to add to the list. Harry was starting to feel tired at just the thought, but at the same time he also felt immeasurably grateful that he no longer had to keep it a secret.

Their bubble had burst. The whole spectrum of reactions would be thrown at them, all privacy and surreality had ended. But in some ways it would be a relief. When trying to orchestrate time alone together at least they wouldn't have to come up with ridiculous alibis or bribe people for their silence. Of course, they'd be subjected to ruthless judgement for it but, honestly, they'd both endured a fair amount of that within the walls of Hogwarts before and survived, especially Harry.

People wouldn't like it. That was certain. However, Harry rather prided himself on his ability to do
the right thing even if people didn't like it; and coming clean, being honest about them to everyone, most importantly not hiding Draco, that was the right thing. And Draco wanted to be open about them too. Harry had his friends backing him up. He felt in that moment, for the first time in a long while, like he could take on the world.

As a group, they left the classroom and returned to the Hall so Harry could have some breakfast, just as the post owls flew in.

~ // ~

The reactions of Draco's friends were almost comical.

Pansy gazed at him, slack-jawed and disbelieving; Blaise simply raised an almost knowing eyebrow; Greg, the poor sod, seemed not to understand.

"So, you're friends with Potter?" he asked in his slow voice.

"He's *fucking* Potter, you nitwit!" cried Pansy, her voice echoing around the walled garden they sat in, still gawking at Draco like she didn't know him anymore.

Blaise just shook his head minutely and sighed, "I thought I recognised the smell in our room."

At the looks he got from his friends Blaise's eyes widened and hastily went on, "No, I meant– he uses a cheap muggle deodorant, you can't have missed it! Stop looking at me like that, *I'm* not the one being weird! Draco's the one shackled up with Potter!"

"You know I spent the last few days defending you, calling those rumours a load of old troll dung," huffed Pansy, looking sour.

"Well, there's no point defending me; I'm guilty. I am unironically dating Potter."

Their three faces then hardened and looked fixedly at something behind Draco. A hand tapped him on the shoulder. He swivelled to see who it was and there stood a sheepish looking Harry flanked by his two cohorts. Their chat must have gone well then. Draco nodded to Granger and Weasley, who gave equally awkward nods of recognition back.

Suddenly a paper was waved right in front of his face.

"It happened," Harry said simply.

Draco could take a fair guess at what 'it' was and grabbed for the paper immediately. It was the *Sunday Prophet*, with the front page sporting two huge pictures, one of himself and one of Harry, under the headline;

**HARRY POTTER IN LOVE WITH A DEATH EATER?!**

*Reports from multiple sources inside Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry allege that Harry Potter, eighteen-year-old saviour of the wizarding world, is having a torrid affair with none other than Dark Mark bearing Draco Malfoy, son of Lucius Malfoy, a chief Death Eater who is currently serving a term in Azkaban for his crimes in the war.*

*They've been acting all chummy for weeks,' said a Hogwarts seventh year who asked to remain anonymous, 'but then a friend of mine saw them kissing in the common room, in public! I couldn't believe it at first, I think a lot of us have our suspicions about the whole thing. I mean, why would*
Harry be interested in him?’. Why indeed.

While Potter did speak on behalf of Draco and his mother at their trials in July, keeping both of them from incarceration, nobody could have guessed that the reasons behind it may have been more complicated than simply a desire to see justice done!

The pair have an interesting history to say the least, and many have questioned–

Unwilling to go through the whole, very long, article Draco just scanned quickly over the rest of the page, catching glimpses of other worrying phrases.

Sure to break a thousand hearts – how long has it been going on? – true enemies – out of character – dubious motives – can Harry Potter still be considered an appropriate role model for children? –

Draco stopped reading at that point. He screwed up the paper decisively and threw it over Greg's head, across the garden and into a raised flowerbed.

"Uter drivel," he said putting on his best unruffled air and turning to Harry. Harry's hands were convulsively rubbing together so Draco put his own hand over them to still the movement. "Which is exactly what we expected," he said calmly, meeting Harry's eye. He gave Harry's hand a squeeze and received a half smile from him in return. Behind him he heard Pansy huff a breath out of her nose, and Blaise giving an uncomfortable little cough.

"Come on," Draco said briskly, getting to his feet.

"Where are you going?" asked Pansy, sounding put out.

"Well, now I don't have to be all cloak and dagger about it, I'm going to take Harry somewhere private and earn my reputation as a terrible influence."

"Hey! You've had him for three days, we wanna hang out with him too!" said Weasley loudly, to a couple of snickers from Draco's friends.

"I am actually standing right here," Harry interjected, frowning. "And I think this is another thing we should tell McGonagall, there's sure to be owl-mageddon because of that article."

"Pfft!" snorted Blaise, smirking at them. "Only you two would need to report your relationship to the headteacher! Still making life easy for yourself there, Draco."

"Fine! We shall talk to McGonagall," said Draco, ignoring Blaise, "and then I vote we utilise that secluded hideyhole she's gifted you with."

"You can't hide forever," said Granger evenly.

"No, but crowds aren't exactly Harry's favourite thing, if you hadn't noticed–"

"Again, standing right here!"

"Well, why don't we all hang out there then?" Weasley asked, turning to Harry. "Would that be okay?"

Harry glanced at Draco swiftly, before shrugging and saying, "Yeah, that'd be okay with me. Draco?"

Draco looked over to his friends, who all looked a little like he was shovelling Hippogryff dung onto
their laps and telling them to like it. There had been a lot of revelations and no curses fired yet, he
knew better than to tempt fate.

"The four of us can go. Weasley I heard you play chess – bring your set and we can have a match."

And with that Draco left with the Golden Trio, leaving his rather miffed fellow Slytherins behind.

It was almost funny how awkward they all were, sat up in the old Arithmancy classroom. Well, it
would have been funny if it wasn't, you know, so painfully fucking awkward. He and Weasley
played chess in complete silence and when Granger suggested that she and her ginger giant go and
fetch some sandwiches because they missed lunch it was with relief that Draco watched them scurry
from the room. He let out a breath.

"Have I won all the boyfriend points yet?" he asked, sagging back in his chair. Harry, who'd been
perched on a desk, chuckled.

"You win some, definitely. Is it really that bad?"

"It's just very counter-intuitive at this point, being polite to your friends."

"You manage it with me...sort of."

"Yes, but they don't suck my cock." Harry pulled a face at him. "Alright, no it's not that bad. I'm just
tired and I don't know what to talk to them about. We can't exactly reminisce – 'ah, Granger,
remember that time when you hit me in the face?' Or 'Weasley, what about when you accidentally
drank that poison I made? Such a hoot!"

"You know what would make me feel better though..." Draco said with a slight smile. Harry eyed
him up suspiciously.

"What...?" he asked dubiously.

"If you showed me a bit more of that wandless magic," he finished, grinning mischievously. Harry
rolled his eyes, but blushed all the same.

"You are incorrigible," he muttered, but shifted off his table and stood before Draco.

"Go on," Draco said, excited, "show me something new."

Harry held out his hand, furrowed his brow, and then suddenly the room was a heck of a lot chillier
around the region of Draco's nipples. He gasped.

"Did you just Vanish my shirt?!" Draco squawked.

"Oh, shit, I didn't mean to! I just meant to undo the buttons one by one!" Harry looked mortified, and
Draco's skin erupted with goosebumps in the cool air. He strode straight over to Harry and yanked at
the bottom of his jumper.

"What are you–"

"I'm having this," Draco said imperiously, tugging the garment over Harry's head, making his wild
mane even more haphazard and pushing his glasses askew. "You Vanished a very nice shirt, and I'm
not going to sit here topless with your mates. You tit."

When Granger and Weasley did return, they looked sceptically at Draco, now wearing Harry's
jumper, and Harry shivering in his flimsy t-shirt. To be fair, Draco regaling them with Harry's
wandless cock-up did indeed give him, Granger and Weasley something to joke about, which made the time pass much more pleasantly (less so for Harry, who occasionally bemoaned how cold he was – he deserved it in Draco's opinion) until it was time for them to nip quietly back to the eighth year common room and head to bed.

It was a pleasant surprise as they split off to their respective rooms when Harry, despite Ron's presence, gave Draco a tender goodnight kiss. Draco decided he'd be keeping the jumper.

~ // ~

The day after the speculative article had been printed, Harry got the impression that the whole school had read it. The eighth years alone were quite a mix of reactions. In amongst the less pleasant attitudes there was a healthy dose of people who just plain didn't believe it.

In the short time between his waking and going to breakfast Harry received a fair few joking retorts from people who quite clearly thought the whole thing was a tasteless wind-up – a little like Fred and George had done during his second year. Seamus Finnegan saw Harry coming out of the bathroom that morning and came over to clap his hand bracingly on Harry's shoulder.

"Don't worry, Harry," he said hearteningly, "they'll have forgotten it by tomorrow. Some people will make up any old crap to get attention."

Harry opened his mouth to correct him that it wasn't made up crap, but Seamus had already marched off to join Dean as they headed for the Great Hall, leaving Harry feeling wrong-footed and distinctly annoyed.

That was also the first morning that Draco and Harry had decided they would walk down to breakfast and sit together. Because why the fuck shouldn't they.

They entered the Great Hall side by side and sat down at the Slytherin table to eat; amazingly, so did Ron and Hermione a few seconds later. Harry hadn't asked them to and he couldn't quite shake the suspicion that they had joined him in an effort to act as some sort of protection, to stop anything untoward happening to him; whatever the reason he did appreciate it all the same.

It gave the impression that they were all getting along, the Slytherins and the Gryffindors. Parkinson, however, pulled a very unflattering face and Zabini's perfect eyebrows slid up his forehead slightly, but no one said anything disparaging. That was, no one at the Slytherin table did.

Zacharias Smith was throwing them very ugly looks and talking so loudly to his neighbours that even from across the hall the occasional word like "disgusting", "Imperius", and "deviant" floated over to them. Harry tried his best to ignore it, but it wasn't exactly the nicest soundtrack to a breakfast Harry hoped would engender goodwill between the lot of them. Beside him, Draco was sat ramrod straight with his mouth set in a tight line, not eating.

Ron looked angrily over his shoulder at Smith.

"Twat," he huffed, irritated, turning back to the table.

"Understatement," replied Zabini icily.

"I think he's in the closet so deep he's befriending Boggarts," Ron grunted.

To Harry's great surprise Draco let out a loud snort of laughter! This seemed equally shocking to
everyone else before, in a move Harry would be eternally grateful for, Ron began laughing too and the rest of the table joined in soon after. Hermione raised her eyebrows and Harry grinned at her.

The tension around the group significantly eased by Ron's joke, they began to make some light conversation. This tentative small talk, however, was then interrupted by Luna Lovegood swanning her way over to them at the Slytherin table and plonking herself down in the not very big space between Draco and Zabini. Everyone looked at her; she smiled benignly.

"Morning everyone. I was surprised by the Sunday Prophet article yesterday," she said in her usual dreamy voice.

"Yeah, you and most of the rest of the world," said Ron, glancing briefly at Harry and Draco, who were sitting very close to each other (Ron couldn't see but Harry's foot was also gently rubbing against Draco's under the table).

"No, I was surprised they're acting like it's only just happened and that everybody is so shocked. I didn't think it was a secret; the Flitterwims have been attracted to these two for months, emitting their sound waves. I thought everybody knew by now," Luna stated nonchalantly to the entire gawking table, before breezily tucking into a bowl of cereal while the rest of them exchanged identical astonished looks.

As they stared at her, a familiar haughty-looking eagle owl interrupted by gently fluttering down onto the table in front of Harry and Draco. Draco took one look at the bird and rolled his eyes, looking thoroughly done.

"Ugh, you open it," he huffed, waving a hand at Harry. "She's obviously seen the paper and I don't think I can stomach another passive aggressive marvel right now."

Harry took the letter from the owl (which glared at him rather as he thought Narcissa might), split the Malfoy crest embossed wax seal and unfolded the parchment to read it, taking a sip of his pumpkin juice as he did.

The next second a vast orange mist was sprayed across the table! Everyone turned to gape at Harry, pumpkin juice dripping from his chin as he stared agog at the letter still clutched in his hand.

"That's disgusting!" Draco cried, pushing away his now sodden toast. "What on earth--"

"I think you might want to read this," said Harry simply.

"It's covered in your spit and juice! Can't you summarise?"

"Nope. 'Cause if I tell you what it says you won't believe me."

With a curious frown Draco quickly but carefully snatched the dripping letter from his hand and read eagerly. When finished he turned to Harry, utter disbelief painting his features.

"She's invited you to the manor for Christmas?!" he hissed.

"What?!" squawked Ron, Hermione, Parkinson and Zabini all together, looking equally shocked. Luna just said, "How lovely," whilst dropping fruit into the leftover milk in her bowl.

"Well...it's a step in the right direction," Harry said tentatively to his boyfriend. Draco remained frozen in place staring at the letter. "Are you okay?"

"Not to understate it, but it's been a hell of a fucking week, Harry. I think I'm done with breakfast."
"But you've hardly eaten–"

A firm hand landed on Harry's thigh and scraped its nails across the fabric. "I'm done with breakfast."

Draco was giving him an odd, blazing look, and, not wishing to get an erection at the Slytherin table, Harry hastily nodded, glugged his last bit of juice and stood up along with Draco.

"See you guys later," he said quickly to Hermione and Ron as they left the odd collection of people at the damp Slytherin table. He thought he heard Zabini's voice mutter a knowing but exasperated, "For fuck's sake."

As they approached it, Harry noticed there seemed to be an unusually large gathering of students in the Entrance Hall. Harry and Draco exchanged a look, before venturing through the double doors into it and encountering a large, restless congregation of people, all of whose eyes rested upon them. It seemed they had just received what they'd been waiting for. There was some chuckling, whispering, a lot of odd looks and some guilty faces. It was all very shifty.

Harry and Draco shared another glance and as one made to walk swiftly on, Harry clutching his wand in his pocket, ready to act at the slightest suspicious movement.

As they passed by the crowds of muttering, awkward students Harry noted the tense line of Draco's jaw. And then, from behind them a loud, unconvincing cough barely covered the word 'poofers' followed immediately by another equally false cough that sounded like 'queers'. There were a few titters, a gasp or two and Harry went red hot with both fury and humiliation. Draco had slowed down slightly.

"I definitely can't hex them?" he asked quietly, eyes ahead.

"No," replied Harry, through gritted teeth, "though it pains me to say it."

"Punch them?"

"Not much better."

Draco stopped suddenly, an inspired expression blooming over his face.

"Scar them for life?" he asked, looking at Harry and grinning wickedly, eyes glittering. "Come on, let's give them a show."

Harry broke into a smile: His boyfriend was a genius.

Harry closed the space between them, right there in the middle of the crowded Entrance Hall and swept one hand up to Draco's cheek, before kissing him passionately, Draco's right hand tangling messily in his hair. The hallway went silent. Harry wound his other arm around Draco's waist and deepened the kiss, giving it his all, at which the pin-drop silence shifted into ripples of shocked whispers.

He felt Draco move his arm and heard more agitated noises from the onlookers; he opened his eyes for a quick look. Draco had raised his left arm straight out towards the crowd and was giving them all the finger whilst still kissing Harry. Harry couldn't help but smile, which in turn made Draco smile too, which sort of broke the kiss.

But it didn't matter, because then Draco turned to the stunned audience and said loudly, "You're all just jealous that I get to do that and you don't. We couldn't give two shits what you all think."
And with that, they strode brazenly through the Entrance Hall to their common room, Harry's arm slung over Draco's shoulders, Draco's around Harry's waist, leaving a beautiful quiet in their wake. They met each other's eye and shared satisfied, beaming smiles. Sod the lot of them.

~ // ~

Amazingly, after the initial hubbub, life simply continued on. The spring and summer terms were full of exams and studying but they were also so much better than his first term back had been. Harry was able to seclude himself in the empty Arithmancy classroom on the fifth floor when he needed space, which was less frequently as the months wore on, but it still helped (he even learned from Hermione how to put some warding up to aid his peace of mind). Ron and Hermione made considerable effort with Draco, even going so far as to include the other Slytherins for social outings and games – he loved them for this more than he could say.

Molly and Arthur were informed by letter. It was probably a bit cowardly, but he couldn't get more time off school from McGonagall and he wanted them to hear the details from him, even if the *Daily Prophet* had beat him to the initial reveal. The response had been in Mr Weasley's hand and had expressed their support and continued love, but Harry got the feeling that it took Mrs Weasley rather a while to get over the fact that he and Ginny weren't getting back together and that he'd chosen Draco Malfoy instead. Ginny herself elected not to speak to him for a while, but when they did talk, they managed to smooth things out alright, even if Harry could tell that she was very hurt by the whole thing, which he understood.

Harry's Christmas at Malfoy Manor had been predictably excruciating as well, and he chose not to think about it too often, but neither did Draco. Still, things between Draco and Narcissa seemed better these days, and Harry had even been extended an open invitation to visit whenever he liked – not that he wanted to, but the gesture was nice all the same. She'd even managed to use the word 'boyfriend' once! It had looked slightly painful for her to say, which kind of made the memory all the sweeter.

The flashbacks and nightmares hadn't completely gone. His Mind Healer, Kwame, who he'd started seeing in January, had told him that this was normal, to be expected, and that in conjunction with sessions and support, he would simply need time. It didn't rule his life anymore though, and he was making decisions for the future now, instead of being trapped in the past, which was more than he could have hoped for a year previous.

Draco didn't speak about his sessions with his own Mind Healer, but he seemed to be benefiting from them, because several weeks after he started them he actually set up a support group for the Slytherins, which had apparently been very well received. It was things like that that really blew Harry's mind and reminded him of how different they all were.

It was June, the blazing hot summer sun beat down on them as they escaped into the grounds after their final NEWT exam; Ron, Hermione, Harry, Draco, Pansy, and Blaise all walked down the lawns together (Goyle having gone down to the kitchens for a much needed snack apparently). The unlikely group ambled down towards the lake and chatted amongst themselves; Hermione fervently going over all her answers to a pained looking Blaise, Pansy insisting to Draco that he accompany her on a trip to the Seychelles that summer, and Ron beside Harry exclaiming happily that he was now blissfully free of examinations forever! If Ron still wanted to be an Auror then this was probably a very inaccurate statement but Harry chose not to disabuse him of his fanciful notion for the time being.

When they reached the lake Hermione conjured a large checkered blanket for them all to sit on and they sprawled upon it, taking in the sun and their freedom. It hadn't hit Harry fully yet, but it surely
would in time, that he was about to leave Hogwarts forever. These were his last weeks as a student in the first place he'd felt was his true home. Oddly though, he wasn't too depressed by the thought.

He, his life, and the people within it had changed so much over the last few years that moving on, moving forward into new and unknown things was not as scary an idea as it once might have been. Sure, it was still a big change, but now it felt exciting over anything else.

Draco settled himself beside Harry, close enough so that their shoulders were brushing.

"Apparently I'm going to the Seychelles for a few weeks," he said matter-of-factly.

"Does Pansy realise the Ministry is extremely unlikely to sign off on that?" asked Harry, raising an eyebrow.

"Shh, just let her live in the fantasy for now," whispered Draco, waving an airy hand. "It's a nice afternoon, I don't want the peace shattered by a shrieking harpy."

Harry chuckled and leaned back on his arms, head titled towards the sky.

"It's been a weird year," he mused, eyes closed against the sun.

"That it has," Draco murmured, shifting a little closer. "Actually, in a month I was planning a stay at the Leaky Cauldron." Harry felt Draco's hand slide over his and turned to him, opening his eyes.

"How come?" he asked, frowning.

Draco raised his eyebrows and smirked slightly, then turned his own face up to the sun.

"Because in a month it'll have been a year since I last stayed there," he muttered, still smirking.

Harry's heart sped up and now-familiar butterflies fluttered about in his stomach as he smiled broadly, taking in Draco's beautiful sunlit face and glowing platinum hair. He really was a goner.

Harry squeezed Draco's hand and replied, "I think that's a brilliant idea."

"Of course it's a brilliant idea, it came from me." Christ, by this point that was practically his catchphrase.

"I can list a bunch of your ideas that failed spectacularly: like when you wagered that you could catch the Snitch more times than me in an hour, and L-"

"You are an arsehole," interrupted Draco, nostrils flaring.

"Good thing I can translate Draco Speak; I love you too. Tosser."

Harry simply got an extra hard squeeze of his hand in return. He raised his face back to the sun, grinning broadly.

If asked, he wouldn't have been able to explain how they got to this point. He wouldn't have been able to describe most of it. But as they sat there, steeped in the history of their rivalry, surrounded on all sides by reminders of what had been, Harry still felt like everything had led them here and that, even after the sheer hell they'd both faced, everything would be alright. After all, life was never simple – but sometimes it was good.

He held Draco's hand securely and all was well.
Chapter End Notes

Whoa...it's done. It's been, like, over a year! I'm a bit discombobulated now it's finished. But the biggest, most massive, Grawp-sized thank you to every single person who's read, downloaded, kudosed and commented. No word of a lie it's thanks to you wonderful patient folk that this was finished or that it ever became a fic in the first place. Much love to you all and I hope you enjoyed the ride – I know I did <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!