Sanguis Vita Est

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Sanguis Vita Est

by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan)

Summary

Whilst Voldemort’s prisoner, Draco is made a vampire and forced to take Harry as his first meal. With Draco managing to resist the temptation to drain him, just barely, in a moment of blind rage at what he has been forced to become, he aids Harry in the destruction of Voldemort. But even with that threat vanquished, once back at Hogwarts, Draco finds himself disturbingly addicted to Harry’s blood. And amongst all this, a dark shadow looms ominously on the outline of the forest, watching them closely. A vampire!Draco story and also an ‘Eighth year’ story.

Notes

This story is based on characters and situations created and owned by JK Rowling, various publishers including but not limited to Bloomsbury Books, Scholastic Books and Raincoat Books, and Warner Bros., Inc. No money is being made and no copyright or trademark infringement is intended.
Begins somewhere near the end of Deathly Hallows and is compliant up until that point apart from a few things to do with Snape and the horcrux hunt; they will be revealed as the story goes on.

I have this all written up already so I will update regularly.
A burning, uncontrollable inferno burst through his lungs, as he gasped for breath. His fingers scrambled, biting into the side of the basin he was being shoved face-first into. He screamed as pain ripped through his body at the repetitive starvation for air, his entire body tensed, struggling to remain upright, struggling to fight the control of the enemy trying to submerge him once more. He had already lost count of the number of times they’d done it today alone.

Today, yesterday, the day before…

He’d lost count of how many days he’d been their favourite toy in the dungeon, how many different tortures they’d exorcised on him.

He felt white-hot agony tear through his chest with every panting breath, as if the thick, unforgiving talons slicing into his sides were ripping into his ribs as well. He cried out, steeling his jaw against the desire to whimper, growling instead, trying to keep what remain of his pride, what remained of his life.
Behind him, the monster with his claws lodged in him, chuckled darkly.

“Such a handsome, proud little boy you were. Pure and white,” the creature growled, “Now look at you…” The claws lodged in his sides were suddenly torn free and Draco gave a low, spluttering gasp. Blood splattered across his front and he winced, not daring to look down. He knew, four, huge gaping claw tracks had been carved into his sides, just like the angry, red scars across his chest.

A flash of light, a memory from his ‘old life’ reached him. He was a boy sitting on his mother’s knee, watching her plait her gorgeous hair. “Malfoys are beauty and perfection, Draco,” she purred lovingly. “That is what we are. That is all we are.” He shuddered now at his mother’s words. He was no longer beautiful, no longer perfect, and every death eater that tortured him knew that stung more than any wound or torment.

It meant he wasn’t a Malfoy anymore. Wasn’t his mother’s son, his father’s heir…

Suddenly, those bloody talons seized his dirt-ridden blond locks and shoved him, without warning into the stone bowl once more. He inhaled the vile water, choked on it until his head swam with agony and he felt himself drifting. Then, just as the promising darkness reached him, those claws yanked him back out, into reality. Again and again.

“You thought you were too good to let the Dark Lord sully your pretty little body, hmm?” The brute snarled in his ear, raising a bloody claw to Draco’s right cheek, just to the side of where his eyebrow ended. He tapped it menacingly. And Draco flinched.

Not my face, he winced, wondering how his mother, if they ever got out of this, would ever be able to look at him if they ruined the one thing he was good for…

He was vain and arrogant and proud, and his tormentors – this one, Fenrir Greyback in particular, took pleasure in ripping it all away. One layer of skin at a time…

“You don’t get it, do you, boy?” Greyback barked, pressuring the claw so Draco set his jaw again against screaming in the flash of pain. “Wussy little faggots like you don’t say no to the Dark Lord, not unless they’re strong enough to back it up. Or have someone stronger to hide behind!”

Draco spluttered at last. Days, weeks, months, he didn’t know how long he’d suffered this, but he was crumbling, breaking apart as that claw tore a neat, bloody gash down his face. He screamed. “NO!” He cried out, pathetic, weak, he didn’t care. “STOP! I’ll do what you want! Just stop it!!!”

His eyes flared with agony as tears rolled down his wounded cheek, salt reaching the gash. He cried again, catching sight of the prisoner that had been chained to the wall since yesterday. He’d been forbidden to be touched by anyone but the Dark Lord, and Draco had been…too engaged before to take notice him, but now he did. And he could taste the despair mix with blood in his throat.

Large, green eyes stared down at him, Harry bloody Potter, stared down at his broken, miserable self, shamed, naked, ruined…

“Seen your dinner have you?” Greyback chuckled darkly, seizing him by the hair and dragging him to his feet. Draco’s legs trembled from the weight of his own body but that didn’t matter, he was ripped across the room by his hair only to be thrown to his knees before Potter. His body slumped from exhaustion as well as shame.
The door to the side opened but he was too weak to even lift his head to see who had been invited in to take a chunk out of his soul. He swayed weakly where he knelt, not able to stop himself from flinching as something was thrown to the icy stone before him. It took him a moment to recognise the sound of chains clinking together, the sound of ragged breath and a body under stress as it tried to right itself.

Eventually, Draco forced his head up a fraction, just enough so that he could see Potter kneeling before him through his dirty, matted curtain of blond hair. They were so close their knees were touching and he grinded his teeth together as he forced his head up a fraction more to meet those eyes. Green and vibrant and untouched by the rot of this place, they shone in the dimness, furious and yet desolate at the same time. He saw Potter fight the bonds of chain around his wrists. That was a sign, Potter hadn’t been here long, else he would’ve been too weak to need chains to prevent his escape. Like Draco…

“…The fair one,” came Greyback’s bark of a voice, and Potter looked up just as Draco dropped his head again, the last of his strength failing. He was resigned to his fate, he had been stripped of all life, all that remained was to be stripped of his existence and he could rest in peace. Potter’s presence was not the torturous beacon of hope they might’ve hoped to use to torment him. Then Draco froze.

Greyback had suggested Potter was his…dinner?

Before he could process the possibilities, the hair at the back of his neck was seized roughly and his head jerked back so that he was forced to look into Potter’s eyes. He gasped in pain, blinking as he felt Potter’s musky breath on his cheeks. What were they planning?

A wretched shudder coursed through him when a hard, cold body pressed in behind him. It was too cold, too swift and precise and graceful to be Greyback and the smell spiralling up through his nostrils, it was so sweet it made him light-headed. “Hmm,” a long, low purr sounded against his ear, making his back straighten in anticipation of pain. Instead, a slow lick up the side of his throat, just under the ear the cold stranger was breathing into made him hiss with pleasure.

Despite the coolness of that mouth, a heat unparalleled in this universe sped through his veins, like a swelling, icy inferno in his core. Despite his weakness, he tried to turn his head away, but the hand that had gripped his hair slid round to grip his head just under his jaw, on the opposite side to where that mouth was tormenting him. It forced him to look at Potter, even as his body jerked weakly. His breath was coming out in frantic pants now, panic surging in his gut. He was torn between longing for death and the end of this torment and the longing for the completion of the ecstasy burning through him. He cried out again quietly, the sound pathetic and shameful to his ears.

To his credit, Potter didn’t wince, didn’t turn away in disgust. On the contrary, he held his gaze firmly, his face hard as if he were trying to will him some of his own strength to survive whatever he was about to endure. Ever the martyr, Potter, his mind hissed, just as that cold mouth opened a little, hovering over the throbbing pulse in his throat.

“Yessssssss,” the cold stranger purred, “the fair one indeed. He is ripe with self-loathing and hopelessness, so wretched and tormented.” Draco shifted restlessly, wanting, for an end, for more, his body and mind longed for two different things. Sweat beaded his brow now, his skin aflame. The cold stranger, the man chuckled against his pulse. “Yes little one, my saliva is designed makes your pulse frantic, your blood blush and surge, just for my pleasure, my appetite.” With that, two sharp points press firmly on Draco’s throat, but not hard enough to break the skin.
“Stop!” Potter snarled, his shackles rattling as he rose up on his knees, struggling as if to break free and slaughter them with his bare hands. Draco, too drugged on that scent, that coldness, that saliva on his throat did not even blink, just stared dazedly at the Boy Who Lived, fighting for his life. “Take me! I’m stronger than him! Drink my blood! He’ll die!” Potter insisted.

“That’s exactly my aim,” the cold stranger murmured.

“Sit down and wait your turn, Potter,” Greyback growled, seizing the hair at the back of Harry’s neck roughly and yanking him back into his position in front of Draco. Potter hissed out a curse but remained still under the threat of the werewolf’s meaty fist, helpless as he watched the cold stranger, the vampire give him a final, fascinated glance before sinking his fangs into Draco’s waiting throat.

Pain burst in Draco’s throat briefly, before the pleasure swamped his body. He groaned in hapless ecstasy, his body going limp as the cold stranger drank from him. And all the while Potter’s brilliant, green gaze stared into him, watched his body quiver and his mouth move with little pants of need. The cold hand not holding his head in place swept up over his naked, heaving chest, dancing over his sweat-slicked skin like a lover’s caress, goosebumps rising over his skin in its wake.

“Isn’t that pretty?” Greyback’s voice registered in Draco’s hazy brain but the words seemed nonsense to him with this red-hot bliss making his mouth water. “The Malfoy heir, a whore for death,” the werewolf chuckled darkly, tightening his grip on Potter’s hair as the boy snarled and struggled. “Doesn’t it just make you hard, Potter? Watching him panting like a blood-stained bitch in heat? He was dizzy and weak with blood-loss and pain a second ago but it doesn’t stop him taking it like a slut, hmm?”

“Take my blood instead!” Potter demanded hysterically, his voice raw. “He can’t take anymore! He’s dying!!!”

Suddenly, those fangs ripped free of Draco’s throat, tearing a gaping hole in his throat and a scream of absolute agony from his lips. The haze of pleasure was still there but now a river of blood was cascading down his torn body, his body cold and trembling. Dying, Draco spluttered and choked, his hands flying up to his wounded throat, tears spilling over his lashes in thick rivulets.

Potter’s eyes widened then and panic surged anew in Draco’s chest. What had Potter seen that was evidently more horrifying than him dying slowly from having his throat ripped out right before his eyes? He found out, when the cold stranger’s free arm slid up, blood oozing unnaturally slow from his wrist.

“Drink it, my little fair one,” the cold stranger purred in his ear. Draco’s tongue swept across his lips nervously, and he tried to shake his head in negation, but the grip on his jaw rendered him immobile.

“No. No!” Draco gasped, his voice husky from his prior screams. Another, low chuckle against his ear making his stomach churn.

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“It wasn’t a request, fair one,” was the only reply he got, before that wrist was smashed against his lips. Draco clamped his mouth shut, the vampire’s wrist pressing against him with bruising force, but then the hand holding his jaw slid up a fraction, those nails slicing into the bleeding gash Greyback had gouged into his cheek. And Draco’s mouth flew open in a scream, the vampire’s
bloody wrist sliding into place.

Blood swamped his mouth and he had no choice but to swallow or choke, but as soon as he swallowed, he wished he was dead.

The vampire’s bite was a kiss of pure, unadulterated pleasure, but its blood was like drinking live electricity. It fried the blood in his veins, cell by cell, spreading through his organs like acid, killing him slowly, slowly. He screamed bloody murder, his body shaking with spasms as it died. Then, suddenly, everything stopped. His heart rate dropped, so slow it was barely moving, his body went cold, his mind went blank and his skin paled dangerously until his lips were blue. Eyes blind, hearing dulled, taste and touch, all faded by the fire in his blood.

He was vaguely aware of movement, of noise, even the throbbing agony in his body and the dryness to his insides, as if their life and moisture had been sucked up by a drought. Then, his senses came alive with a scream of pain from in front of him. His eyes widened, his vision bursting back with a flash of white, his tongue lolling in his mouth and his ears picking up the rapid thumping of a human heart. His body arched as the smell of rich, coppery blood reached his nose, whisking up his nostrils and feeding the flames still burning inside. He was still cold, still in pain, but not his stomach churned with an unnatural, insatiable hunger for the blood he could smell.

Blood. He knew it was blood because that was all that mattered, the only thought he could process. He panted at the delicious smell, his body quivering with need. Fingers still had hold of him, as strong as any chains and he longed to shake them free so that he could reach that feast he sensed right under his nose.

His vision was back, but it was hazy and unnatural. The world was black and white, glowing, like he was on an ethereal plain, everything in greyscale except that vibrant trail of thick, delectable blood that oozed from the deep gash across the cheek of the creature before him. That was the richest crimson, shining and beckoning him in. He vaguely recognised that the creature whose heart was fluctuating close to him, whose breath touched his own stinging cheeks, whose eyes stared into him imploringly, but that was not important. Nothing was as important as that blood and he let out a low, pitiful whine of longing for it.

Suddenly, the iron grip on his torso and head were released, so abruptly that he swayed waringly for a moment before catching himself. The foul-smelling canine thing holding his prey stepped away also and Draco barely registered a low chuckle of amusement as he edged forwards. The body before him was stiff with fear, pride and anger and…sadness?

Draco tasted the salt of it on his breath and his brow furrowed. Prey should be just the right amount afraid and aroused, shuddering with both, with longing but never sadness. Something in his churning, starving gut knew that, somehow. He leant in closer, considering the rigid body and realising he must’ve been chained to remain in such an awkward position, arms behind his back so firmly. No matter, for Draco’s hand slid behind that neck, tugging him forwards by it so that that body arched into him subtly. His fingers slid up into dark locks and he crooned softly at how perfect the hiss of pain was that left those blood-flushed lips.

So close now, he could feel the vibrations of that heartbeat against his own chest, the violent heat of that flesh against his cold hand. He could smell so much fire, life in this creature. He wanted it, more than he wanted the inferno in his organs to stop. And somehow, he knew that the taking of this beauty’s fire would extinguish his own pains. His tongue reached out, dancing along that gash on Potter’s cheek. He growled softly at the tang of that blood on his tongue, his head spinning, his body pleading for more, more crimson water to quench his unnatural thirst.
“M-Malfoy, you don’t have to do this!” That was a low insistent hiss from his prey and Draco tilted his head a little. Yes, he knew this sweet-tasting morsel, but all he was concerned about was that he wanted more of him and that he couldn’t take it while he was rigid and unyielding. Something in him knew to make the body supple and limp as a kitten in its mother’s grasp.

The gash had healed with his saliva, but it was not a main artery anyway and he couldn’t drink from it effectively. No. Instead, he nosed the flesh he had just licked softly, tongue darting out to lap at the little splatters of blood left from the initial cut. But when his tongue touched the corner of the boy’s mouth, he gasped, heat radiating from him in thick, intoxicating waves.

Draco smirked. Following the line of that mouth, he traced the shape with the very tip of his tongue and that body shuddered in response, arousal, Draco could smell it on him as potent as the sadness that clung to those lashes. He pressed in, free hand sliding around to the small of the creature’s back, holding him so that they were flush together. Were he human, were he capable of thinking in terms of anything other than this burning thirst, he might’ve been embarrassed that he was still naked, as it was, the arousal in his little meal only made the blood pound faster and he tilted the boy’s head more, exposing that delectable column of throat.

With an appreciative groan, he mouthed the honey-hued flesh, allowing his fangs to graze the pulse. He had to get the blood to the surface, get it pounding with a need to rival his own get the most satisfaction. He knew this. Suckling lightly on that frantic, pounding vein, he felt his own saliva make the body beneath him hotter, the blood faster, surging beneath the flesh as if waiting to burst into his mouth like a juicy truffle.

“Malfoy!” His prey gasped against him, the telltale hardness of his prick pressing into Draco’s own crotch, which was hard from want of that body as well as the fluid rushing through it. “Malfoy, d-don’t! You…you remember me. I’m… I’m Potter, Harry Potter. You’re Draco Malfoy, you…you go to school with me, you fought with me. Your mother is Narcissa Malfoy, your father is Lucius Malfoy.” His voice was hasty and desperate, verging on panic but his skin was as supple as silk under his influence. Under the drug of his saliva.

“Y-You’re Severus Snape’s favourite student!” His prey insisted, trying to remain lucid with everything that he was, it seemed, by his husky, distressed voice. “I punched you in the face once! You kicked me in mine, broke my nose. My best friend calls you ‘ferret’, I…I nearly killed you with a spell in the girl’s loo last year! Malfoy! We were both put here by Voldemort! You can come back to yourself, you don’t have to–!”

Then, his prey was silenced by his fangs sinking into his throat. Pleasure burst through Draco’s body as blood flooded his mouth. His dry, rotten organs renewed, a pale glow filling his cheeks and power pulsing through every limb, right down to his toes, which curled as he leant into his prey for more.

The body under his thrall was limp, skin soft and yielding, but those arms were still struggling for freedom from their chains, that mouth still moving with pleas for recognition instead of being inebriated with ecstasy. He sucked a little more softly but allowed more of his intoxicating venom to ride down his fangs, hoping to lull his victim into surrendering to the mind-blowing sensation with their aphrodisiac properties. Groaning at the rich taste still, Draco nuzzled into the dark hair, riding the sheer bliss out.

“M-Malfoy…s-stop! Y-You’re…you aren’t a murderer. You…you can’t kill me.” The words barely made sense to him, but the soft husky voice made his blood-high soar. “D-D-Draco!!!”
Potter screamed. And then it hit him, as hard and fast as the blood on his tongue. Potter. Harry bloody Potter. Draco’s eyes cleared, the fog of animalistic, primal desire was swept away and he still in his sucking.

“M-Malfoy?” Potter panted, obviously sensing the change. Draco’s stomach churned at the thought of drinking blood, at the memory of guzzling it down like a pint of water. He shuddered, his hands coming to rest on Potter’s shoulders. With the primal hunger gone, he wasn’t quite as in touch with his instincts anymore and didn’t quite know how to disengage from Potter without hurting him.

“What’s the matter, fair one?” The cold stranger purred from the distance. “He is your first meal, no one tastes better to you than him, he is yours to take, to rape, to kill. Can you not sense his lust? Take him! Kill him!”

Draco’s stomach lurched. He swore he was going to gag. A vampire, he was a vampire! Could vampires even be sick? He wished to Merlin he could retch up Potter’s blood now and curl up. He wished his organs had rotted away instead of being revitalised on nearly draining Potter dry.

Potter.

Perhaps it was his new condition, but he realised he had been unnaturally still now for a good few minutes, with his fangs the only thing stopping the flow of blood from the pinpricks he’d made in Potter’s throat. Slowly, with all the delicacy and accuracy this disease gave him, Draco lifted his head slightly until his fangs were free of Potter’s throat. Potter shuddered, as if he’d been tickled more than bitten, proving Draco’s care had paid off. Draco paused, blinking as he dimly recalled lapping at the gash on his school-rival’s cheek. Before he had even really contemplated doing it, his tongue had swept out and closed the punctures.

Potter gasped, toppling back slightly now he was free, staring at him with wide, hazy eyes. His mouth opened as if to speak, but the cold stranger’s hiss of displeasure cut short his words.

“You fool!” He hissed, launching forwards and seizing Draco roughly, nails biting into the blond’s shoulders. “You must always drain your first! Always unless you–!”

A bone-chilling roar filled the room, ricocheting off the stone as Draco flew at his sire, fangs bared, blood staining his body. He didn’t care about his nakedness, he didn’t care about his slowly healing wounds that had been inflicted by Greyback. He didn’t care about Potter, or Voldemort, all he cared about was this monster that had raped his body and stolen his humanity. His pure blood, the only thing he had left after…

His nails, hard as diamonds stabbed into his sire’s flesh, his body pinned him to the wall and he screamed out his agony. He swore he felt the stone tremble with the sound. “You turned me! You made me a monster! A vampire! A vampire! I’ll kill you!” He spat, raising his arm, but just as he did Greyback lunged for him. And the door flew open, Lord Voldemort framed in the doorway.

“Two of the world’s most feared creatures, unable to incapacitate two adolescent boys,” Voldemort sneered derisively, striding confidently into the room, his wand arm outstretched, and turning on Harry. Leaving a ravenous Draco scratching and clawing at the cold stranger. Greyback stepped away from both with a seething snarl, understanding Voldemort’s implied actions. Stranger was to be left to deal with his spawn himself. If he could not do that without help, he was unworthy of life in Voldemort’s eyes.
Voldemort turned on Potter then, on the boy chained on his knees, splattered with blood but with no visible wounds as he glared up at him.

“Such fire, Harry,” Voldemort chuckled darkly, pressing his wand into the boy’s chin and forcing his head up so that he could stare uninhibited into those obstinate eyes. “You glare at me so, even as you sway from blood-loss and agony?” the Dark Lord breathed venomously.

Harry wrenched his face from that grasp, his eyes darkening, his hands clenching in his chains, skin burning with the way he willed his magic to break him free of this.

Suddenly, from the corner of the room, there was a blood-thirsty screech, inhuman in pitch and Harry’s head whipped to the side, watching with wide, horrified eyes as Draco… No. Whatever Draco had become guzzled at his sire’s throat before wrenching his head back, ripping the demon’s throat out in one, swift movement. A vile snarl of fury left Malfoy’s lips as he spat the bloody matter on the floor.

Reaching up, Malfoy tore the burning torch from the wall above where he had pinned his sire. The blood he’d taken from Potter had made him that much stronger in that instant. Strong enough to land a stalling blow to his sire and that was enough to give him time to end him. The body in his grasp was hard as stone but it was dead, dead even for a vampire. And he will stay that way, for what he has done, Draco thought, gaining a glimpse of conscious thought back as he thrust the shaft of the torch into the demon’s chest, with a force so brutal it pinned the vile creature to the wall, like a dead insect in a glass case.

Harry felt bile rise in his throat where he knelt, his jaw dropping, his belly churning in repulsion of what he’d seen. He winced, and then that wand was at his throat again, shoving his head back so hard Harry cried out in pain.

“Only me, Harry,” Voldemort demanded, “you will look only at me. You will look right into my eyes as I kill you. I had hoped to watch your old school friend rip your throat out but since he denied me the pleasure…” With that, his wand arm raised.

Everything happened in slow motion then.

Harry’s entire body tensed for the blow, he was sure Voldemort wouldn’t take the chance on him now, wouldn’t mess around with lesser curses and give him opportunity to escape. After all, the only reason he had been captured so easily was because he had wanted to be found, had wanted to end it now. He had charged into the fray recklessly in search of Voldemort to end him once and for all now the horcruxes were gone, but now he couldn’t see the way to turn the tables.

A fiery flash of green glowed at the tip, on the cusp of casting, on the cusp of ending Harry’s life. His entire body throbbed with agony, his vision blurring from the blood-loss. That wand came down with the shape of the spell, aiming square between his eyes. A harsh, brutal laugh ripped from the Dark Lord’s lips, the slow syllables of the death sentence rolling over his tongue.

Then, suddenly, a chilling snarl filled the air. Harry wished he could close his eyes, he felt his skin quiver at the sound. The biting laughter of his enemy was cut short, strangled by a scream of agony and Harry watched as Malfoy launched himself onto the Dark Lord’s back, sinking his fangs into the monster’s throat.
Malfy wincde as blood rushed over his tongue. His nails, hard as diamonds sank into Voldemort’s chest, keeping his grip. The blood tasted vile, like drinking liquefied dirt. Surely blood was blood? Surely Potter’s should taste no different to the Dark Lord’s? His eyes narrowed then as the taste sharpened in his mouth, acidic and rotten. The taste of dying. But he held on, determined to make this brute pay for what he had made his family endure, for the family home he had tarnished with blood, for his childhood, lost to his reign. Revenge for allowing that icy corpse to steal his humanity, his perfection all because he had refused to be his catamite.

Malfy turned his gaze on Potter as he tore the holes in Voldemort’s throat wider, not drinking, allowing it to cascade over his body, staining his crisp robes. Potter was still kneeling there, still watching as if this were all a bad dream. Not sure how much longer he could hold this monster, Malfy gave an urging, growl. Potter looked into his eyes then, blinking, his tongue darting over his lips, hesitating.

Malfy’s stomach clenched at the sight, wanting like never before, desperate for another taste, the foul flavour under his mouth the only thing anchoring him to what must be done.

Why was Potter hesitating?

Finally, as if slapped into reality, Potter launched himself upwards, ramming his shoulder into the Dark Lord’s hand and knocking the wand from his grasp. Voldemort howled, Draco tore the gaping wound in his throat wider. Potter rolled onto his side, snatching the wand up with his bound hands and turning it, frantically muttering the spell to eradicate his bounds.

Draco felt the Dark Lord’s magic surge beneath him and he willed his own magic to his aid, his fangs and nails rooting deep in evil flesh to hold him, just a moment longer. Just a moment, he insisted, and his revenge would be as sweet as the blood he had stolen from Potter’s veins…

Harry scrambled to his feet the second the chains fell away, turning the wand on Voldemort, the world still moving in slow-motion, Harry stared into those blood-red eyes, every death this monster had created flashing before his eyes. His tongue swept over his lips again. His arm trembled. Draco tore his mouth free then, ripping a chunk of flesh with him.

“Do it, Potter!” Draco snarled.

Voldemort tensed, reaching back in that moment of distraction and throwing Draco across the room. The newborn vampire slammed into the wall, falling forwards onto his hands and knees. He jerked his head up just in time to see Voldemort undone. He saw Potter turn the wand on its master, a vibrant, dazzling light bursting from the end of his wand.

“Priorae Incanvore!” Harry cried, with all the conviction, all the desperation and confidence that made him Harry Potter. Draco’s eyes went wide as the light swelled with heat, with a fiery brightness to rival the sun. He was thrown flat against the wall with the strength of it. The glistening blue light swallowed Voldemort whole, his screams ricocheted off the walls, shrill and piercing as the smell of fear and sizzling skin filled the air.

Focusing his heightened senses then, Draco swore that in that prolonged moment, he saw faces, bodies in the light, incorporeal and vague, but definitely visible to his sharp, vampire eyes. The faces were drawn as if in agony, like zombies, but they screeched with otherworldly delight as they clawed at the Dark Lord’s body, searing his flesh from bone wherever they touched. What made
his already icy blood churn in his veins was that he recognised them, recognised some of the hundreds of faces. The Potters, Charity Burbage, his teacher he had been forced to watch die, dozens of death eaters he had sat beside at the gatherings…

These were all of the people Voldemort had killed, all of them exacting their revenge, tearing his flesh from his bones, burning him to a crisp. And those screams, they were their last cries, Draco realised, the noises they had made as they died, being played over and over again until he saw blood leaking from Voldemort’s ears.

“I…I CAN…NOT DIE!” Voldemort screamed, his voice a gurgling, sickening howl of anguish. “A BOY!” He cried, and if his eyes had not been devoured in their sockets Malfoy was sure he would have seen the evil wizard crying with the sheer pain. “He was just a boy! I AM LORD VOLDEMORT!” And with that his tongue burned with the rest of him. The light swelled again and Draco swore he heard a female voice screaming, “Please! Not Harry! Kill me, not Harry! Have mercy!” Draco flinched at the blinding light then, a final flash dying with that sound, leaving a pile of smoking, revolting ash lying in the middle of the dim dungeon.

Draco’s body slumped. His head bowed to his chest and his brain began to process everything that had happened in the last few minutes. He was a vampire. He could feel the thirst clenching in his belly even as Potter’s blood was warm and rich inside, keeping his cold heart pumping lethargically. His skin had become a touch warmer, his heart a touch stronger as he had devoured that blood, and Voldemort’s blood, although it was surely the same as Potter’s, felt as nutritional as dust to him. At the memory of Potter’s rich, sweet blood, his tongue swiped across his lips, encountering his bloody fangs in the process.

A frown creased his brow as he tasted Voldemort on them still and he winced as he touched a point to his tongue. They were sharp. His mouth felt awkward with them extended, as if he couldn’t fully seal his lips, or even stop the saliva from drizzling from his lips while he salivated over the memory of how Potter had tasted…

What have they done to me? he wondered, aghast, drawing his knees up and burying his face in his hands as despair clawed at his throat. Voldemort was dead, finally dead, gone forever, he had helped to rid the world of him, and all he could think about was Potter’s blood? He, Draco was a vampire, was ruined, was a monster, a thing. He was scarred, impure, imperfect and all he could think about was the saccharine taste of Potter’s throat.

Is that all that will ever matter to me now? Blood? Carnage? I cannot even weep for my lost life, for the disgust that I will see in my own mother’s eyes when I am reunited with her, because I am already mourning the loss of Potter’s taste…

His hands clenched, his nails digging into his hair, blood weeping from his skull into his eyes. He did not care.

Across the room, the door flew open and Draco knew that Greyback was gone. Seconds later, the room was full of aurors, aurors fussing over Potter, over the pile of ash and the dead vampire pinned to the wall, completely oblivious to Draco’s presence he was so still, so camouflaged thanks to his new body’s power.

Potter was silent as he was questioned ruthlessly, however. At the back of his mind, Draco heard the words he was asked, but could not make sense of them, he did not care. Potter’s footsteps approached him then, and the tendons in Draco’s neck tensed in anticipation of the end. Potter would end him surely, he would end his suffering, kill him for being such a revolting, blood-thirsty
Yes, Draco thought longingly. Potter had seen the way he had torn into the vampire and Voldemort, had felt Draco’s insatiable, animalistic hunger when he had taken his own throat. Potter will end me. He was sure. And yet his expectations were dashed when he heard the flutter of cloth and felt Potter’s tatty, common travelling cloak draped around his shoulders to conceal his nudity and preserve what remained of his shredded pride.

Slowly, Draco raised his head, staring up into those deep green eyes and the tumultuous thoughts reflected within. Potter held his gaze for a moment, speaking without words it seemed, before allowing himself to be tugged away by the Order. The werewolf Lupin and his mate by the smell of her, swirled Harry away, leaving Draco alone to the mercy of the Order of the Phoenix.

* * *

Potter had spoken up for him and his mother at the Wizengamot, of course. Thanks to Draco’s aid in vanquishing the Dark Lord and Narcissa for calling the Order as soon as Potter had been captured, they were released with their good names cleared. Lucius was placed under confinement to the manor for three-and-a-half decades, with a restriction on his magic on everything but first year spells. But that was nothing compared to what they would have lost, had Potter not been such a noble, foolhardy Gryffindor. They had their lives back.

Despite the miracle of their freedom, Draco’s pride was still broken, his world was still gone. He wasn’t beautiful or perfect anymore. He wasn’t Draco Malfoy anymore. Not his father’s perfect heir, not his mother’s precious son…

He hadn’t even thanked Potter at the Ministry that day, had simply walked away from the courtroom without so much as a glance back.

Before a mirror in the grand entrance hall of Malfoy Manor Draco now stood. He adjusted his tie, even though the mirror gave him no reflection. He straightened his new school robes then, not daring to look into the mirror where his image wasn’t. His scars from Greyback and the cold stranger may have faded, but he was still a monster, a vampire. Spoiled. That’s what he was. And no matter how much his mother cried that he was still her beautiful boy, he couldn’t believe it. He saw the revulsion in her eyes…

But he had to try regardless, he had to act the part of the superior, Malfoy heir for her. Had to try to make her proud, she deserved that much if she loved him enough to lie and tell him he was beautiful.

The students who would’ve been in seventh year at Hogwarts last year had been invited back for an ‘Eighth Year’ to complete their education that the war had ruined. Not everyone had agreed, not everyone was healed enough from the trauma, or had even survived to take the opportunity, but with Severus’s help, Draco had. He would fight for his place again.

The only thing he had to offer before now was beauty and perfection, as his father had said. As the Dark Lord himself had said, and now that had been stripped away, he was just going to have to find something else, or try at least. It seemed a lost cause…

His mother, who had been surveying him silently from the stairs, hobbled over to lay a kiss on his
cold cheek. Draco tensed but allowed it and then forced a smile as he bid her goodbye, following his floating trunk out of the manor. It seemed hopeless, a lost cause, but he was too afraid to give up, to die, too much of a coward to take the easy way and just fade into nothing. Just shut himself away. He had always been told he was so important, that he mattered and now it looked as if he didn’t…he was scared to death that it was true. That he was nothing. Scared to death that’s all he’d ever be…

He had a new year ahead of him, a chance to seize his life back, but he was terrified he wouldn’t be able to. Terrified to be a failure.

His mask fell into place as he left his home, arrogant, conceited and stuck up as ever. No one could see that the war had touched him, no one could know that he was a vampire. No one. It had been kept quiet, the only person that knew outside of his parents and Severus was Potter and for some reason, the boy had kept quiet. But he knew he would not be allowed back at Hogwarts if the Headmistress knew what he was, if the students knew just what would be supplementing his usual diet this year. Draco winced, the taste of even the finest rats could not wash the lingering taste of Harry Potter from his tongue.

Draco shivered as he walked into the sunshine. He had Severus to thank for this miracle, he could not have done this when he was first turned. He felt the warmth on his cold skin. It even stung his eyes a little but he could suffer it quite well. What was insufferable was this unquenchable thirst, this unstoppable clenching in his gut, the fire in his veins and the longing for that delicious, coppery sweetness of Potter’s blood. He knew he would have to keep away from Potter this year if he even stood a chance of not sinking his fangs into him in the middle of the classroom.

* * *

Harry sighed as he trailed quietly behind Remus, who was pushing his trolley, Tonks walking close by his side with baby Teddy in her arms. Platform nine and three quarters was busy despite the lack of students returning for ‘eighth year’. As he understood it, only fourteen students from their year had agreed to come back, some dead, some afraid, some just…not able to face it. He could respect that. If he’d had something else to do with his existence he wouldn’t have come back either. As it was, Hogwarts was his only home. That was the real reason he was coming back, selfish, pathetic but true.

They came to a halt as Remus loaded Harry’s trunk onto the train and Harry’s gaze wandered over to the little first year standing rigid under his mother’s fussing, her hand carding through his hair affectionately, while the father pressed the child’s owl-cage into his grasp. “Take care of him,” the father said to the boy, tilting his head to the owl. Harry felt his chest tighten. He thought when Voldemort died all his problems would vanish like a slither of smoke. But he was still plagued by nightmares, guilt, still afraid of the powers Voldemort’s death had imbued him with. Still have nowhere to call home, he thought.

“Wotcher, Harry,” Tonks piped up, setting a hand on his shoulder. Harry turned slightly to find both her and little Teddy watching him with matching amethyst eyes and violet hair. “Your head was in the clouds, Harry.” She followed the path of his gaze to the boy and his parents then, giving a sad smile. “Remus and I were thinking, perhaps for Christmas, we could scrape together enough to get you an owl. You must miss Hedwig awfully and of course, you’ll need an owl of your own now you’re heading back to school.”
Harry tried to smile, not having managed it for a good few months now, not even when he realised Voldemort was finally gone. She had misinterpreted his staring, she couldn’t know that her and Lupin’s valiant efforts to make him feel at home in their new little cottage in the middle of (a flowery) nowhere in Essex. Siddlebury cottage was no bigger than Privet Drive and was a little shabby due to Lupin’s lack of funds but it was warm and he was welcome there. But you don’t belong there, the bitter, shadows of Harry’s mind hissed. He wanted to, badly. He wanted to belong to Lupin and Tonks, but he couldn’t help but feel he was a pity-lodger, a burden left behind by Lily and James Potter. He wasn’t their son, wasn’t theirs, not the same way little Teddy was.

Suddenly, his thoughts were cut short as Lupin returned to his side to pull him into a tight hug. Harry sighed, his body tense at first. So ungrateful, his mind spat. They’ve done everything to make you feel at home, stop with this ‘poor Harry’ tripe!

Hugging Remus back fiercely, Harry held on for a minute longer, before regretfully letting him go. He loved Lupin and Tonks, as much as he had Sirius, he just felt awkward around everyone these days, and he could not help but wonder if they regretted taking him in once they’d seen what a state he was in after the war’s end. Killing Voldemort had left him a little empty, aching, a bitter shell of the boy he had been when he’d first come to Hogwarts. And Harry loathed himself for it.

“Say goodbye to Harry, Teddy,” Tonks babbled, lifting Teddy off her hip and pressing him into Harry’s arms. The five-month-old yawned widely, his big eyes staring up at Harry as he smiled around the fist he was chewing. Immediately, his hair grew darker to match Harry’s and he gurgled softly. Harry smiled awkwardly. He’d always wanted a family but he wasn’t quite sure how to act around babies just yet, particularly such a small, vulnerable one that wasn’t his.

“See you at Christmas, Teddy,” Harry said softly, kissing his head and handing him hastily back to Tonks. “See you at Christmas,” Harry repeated, hugging Tonks and then Remus again. “I’ll write. Don’t worry about me, just take care of yourselves.”

“That goes for you, too,” Remus murmured with that same, warm smile. A familiar group of voices caused them all to look then and Harry blanched as Ginny Weasley gave him a contemptuous look before disappearing onto the train. It was a surprise to Harry that Hermione waited on the threshold of the carriage Remus had loaded his trunk into. But no sight of Ron.

“They’ll come around, Harry,” Remus reassured him, evidently having seen his face fall. “They’ve stuck by you through worse.” Harry just nodded dumbly. He couldn’t get his head round the fact that Ron was angry that he didn’t want to sleep with his sister. But then, Remus was talking again, distracting him from his wonderings.

“Remember, Minerva has made special allowances for your year since you are technically adults, but with those privileges come responsibilities,” Remus warned him, “And you can firecall us whenever you need to talk, don’t forget that.”

Harry nodded, giving them a final, forced smile before heading onto the train, walking straight past Hermione but feeling her following him quickly.

“The Weasleys love you, Harry, whether you’re with Ginny or not, you know that you’re like another son to them,” Hermione leapt straight in, no small-talk necessary. Harry sighed, turning to face her.

“And you’re telling me this, why?” Harry asked, his neck prickling oddly. He frowned, scratching at his throat absently as he stared at his friend. The wound had been a bit tender over the summer
but it never ached like this.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Ron can be…stubborn. You have to see it from his point of view, Harry. He had this image of it in that thick head of his, of his best friend and his sister, of you finally being his real brother. All of us a proper family. It’s…it’s hard for him to let it go, particularly as you didn’t explain why you—”

“I don’t have to explain myself,” Harry seethed, jaw tight, that odd tingle still buzzing through his skin. He rubbed as his neck again, irritating the skin until it was red. Hermione winced, swatting his hand away.

“Do stop that, you’re making it red-raw,” she snapped. “And I never said you had to explain anything, I am merely trying to explain what Ron sees from his point of view. He sees his perfect world shattered for no reason. And that’s not your fault, I just think that maybe if you were to tell him—”

“Ron’s already made up his mind,” Harry cut across her, leaning back against the window and closing his eyes. The train hadn’t even left the station and already they were arguing, just as he had expected. “And you were with me, both of you on that Horcrux hunt. You should know better than anyone why I cant just pick up where we left off like Ginny thought we would, why I can’t just to pretend to be who I was before. The war changed me, taking life changed me, I cant pretend it’s all alright because it isn’t!”

Hermione recoiled at his voice, and Harry saw some people leaning closer to the doors of their compartments to listen. He’d only given one interview of what had happened on his part, to the Quibbler, and had refused any contact from the media after that. It was no surprise they were as nosy as ever.

The itchy, tingling in his throat became unbearable then and Harry snarled in frustration, whirling around to check it in his reflection of the window. It looked red from where he’d been rubbing it, but aside from that it was normal, the same old golden-tinted skin and the same iridescent, almost circular scar that Malfoy’s bite had left. He frowned, wondering if the pale scar was finally fading at last. He had tried ointments, potions, spells, even a glamour or two but nothing had affected it.

A magical scar, Remus had said, when he had caught him staring at it in the mirror. The werewolf had pointed to the old wounds marring his own face and smiled sadly. Remus most likely assumed Voldemort or Greyback had caused the wound, if only he knew.

“I wish you would tell me what type of curse they used on you to make that,” Hermione said then quietly, startling him from his reverie, “I am sure if you told me, even the colour of the curse, I could try and find something to get rid of it for you.” Remus, Tonks, Hermione and the Weasleys had all asked about it, even the media, but Harry had simply turned a deaf ear. It wasn’t his secret to tell, what happened that night. He knew that vampires were accepted in society on the whole, but he wasn’t sure if Malfoy’s condition would be greatly appreciated in a school full of students. So he had kept quiet.

“Not like I’m not already scarred, Hermione,” Harry replied despondently, “I’ll live, it’s just another wound.” He saw the pain whip across her face in her reflection then and his chest clenched tight with regret. “I’m sorry,” he said, turning to face her, leaning against the window again. “I’m sorry, I know you only want to help me, I just…give me a while, yeah? It’s only been a little while and I…I need time to get over this.”
Hermione considered him a moment, her eyes glistening wetly but a smile touching her lips. She nodded slowly. “Of course, Harry. Just...don’t shut us out. Ron’s being a prat at the moment but we’re here for you. Let’s do this together, alright?”

Harry nodded, waving his wand to shrink his trunk and put it into his pocket. “I’ll meet you in the compartment in a bit,” he said, “Maybe you can butter Ron up for me before I join you?”

Beaming, Hermione gave him a swift hug before nodding and heading through to the next carriage. “Watch where you’re going, Malfoy,” Hermione hissed and Harry’s head snapped to the side, just in time to see both of them stepping back from what looked like a slight collision. Hermione carried on up the carriage, Malfoy, however, paused on the threshold for a moment, before stepping closer. He shut the door behind him and then the one next to Harry, leaving them both alone in the cramped area between the carriages.

Stiffening in anticipation of an attack, Harry’s hand slid down for his wand as Draco tugged the blind down over the window in the carriage door. He faced Harry fully then, his stormy grey eyes shining likes stars in the dimness. His skin was pale, but clear and smooth and a frown found Harry’s face when Malfoy’s lips quirked into a smile and there was no glimpse of the fangs that had scarred him.

“I never thanked you for what you did for me and my family at the Ministry, Potter,” Malfoy said huskily, his voice rich and smooth like caramel. Harry raised his chin defiantly.

“No, too busy storming off like a pillock,” Harry spat, feeling awkward. He had seen Malfoy in a pitiful state when he had first been ‘captured’ had seen him endure unimaginable torment, every strip of his beloved pride stripped away. He wasn’t sure how he should look at him now. The man that had been with him in the dungeon that night deserved more respect, but the boy he was showing himself to be right now didn’t. “I would’ve done it for anyone in your position, Malfoy. You helped me to take down Voldemort in that dungeon, I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Malfoy tilted his head a little, his blond locks falling into his dazzling eyes as he considered Harry for a moment. “You did it for me even though I ripped open your throat and drank your blood?” Draco asked, honestly curious, not understanding how Potter could have forgiven that.

Potter’s eyes darkened and his hands tensed into fists. “You were mad with the change, it was a miracle you didn’t kill me, I read a lot over the summer. About vampires. The thirst for your first is meant to be undeniable, yet you resisted.”

The blond’s lips curled in a sneer. “Don’t make it sound so glorious, Potter. I ceased because I was repulsed with myself. I was disgusted with myself for guzzling at your throat, disgusted by being tainted. It made me sick to my stomach, that’s the only reason I let you go.” He caught sight of something then, and his dead heart thumped a little harder as he stepped closer, the smell of that blood he wanted surging up into his nostrils. He shivered involuntarily, his eyes locked on the sight of the pearly scar at Potter’s throat.

“Rubbing one off with the scar, Potter? Surely you couldn’t have enjoyed my bite that much that you’re frustrated at the loss?” He growled huskily, the hunger churning in his stomach. Potter was alone, helpless, he could pin him here and take him and no one would know any different…

Harry snarled suddenly, shoving Malfoy back hard and reaching for his wand, holding it against the vampire’s throat. “Don’t presume that because I forgave your weakness that we’re friends, that it’s alright for you to joke with me, or flirt with me. I saved you and your family from Azkaban but
that’s it, I don’t want repayment, I don’t want to be your friend, I don’t want to talk about something…something personal like that with you and I most certainly don’t want your pity fuck or whatever it was I saw in your eyes just then.”

Malfoy chuckled darkly, leaning his head to the side, for some reason wanting Potter to see how his flesh did not yield under the pressure of the wand, wanting him to see how strong it was. “Did it occur to you that I didn’t come here to fight, Potter? I came here to thank you.”

Potter’s sneer grew, his eyes glowing with rage behind his glasses. “Did it occur to you that you’re really crap at it?” Harry spat, pressing harder with his wand. “I just got out of a war, Malfoy. A war in which I was our side’s number one weapon. Perhaps you might consider that before you delude yourself into thinking that I want this!”

Stepping closer, ignoring the sharp pinch of the wand in his throat, Draco smiled dangerously. The sound of that blood was flooding his ears, he could hear Potter’s heart thudding rapidly, smell the faint hint of sweat to his musky scent. The memory of Potter’s blood on his tongue flooded his senses. For that moment, his pride dissipated like water on the sun. His instincts surged like a beast at the bars of his cage, desperate for a taste of freedom.

Potter was freedom to him, an escape from this eternal hunger. The animal blood he drank did not sate him, Snape was researching, had even tested a few donated human blood samples but nothing had quenched his thirst as apparently one drink should. In the end, if he could not find some satisfaction when he fed, he would be driven mad by thirst. Everything he drank was as Voldemort’s had tasted, like ash in his mouth…

Suddenly, the train lurched into movement, throwing both boys off their feet. Harry stumbled back onto the wall behind him, his arms flying out to save him uselessly and Malfoy fell forwards against him, effectively pinning him between his hard, heavy body and the wall.

Harry took a sharp in take of breath despite the pressure on his lungs.

“This?” Draco breathed, his cool breath dusting Harry’s cheeks. “And what exactly is this, Potter?”

Harry growled warningly, before shoving Draco back hard again, keeping his wand between them. “Perhaps you should read about your own condition, Malfoy,” he replied indifferently. “The way you’re acting towards me, the reason you came to me, it isn’t because you wanted to, it wasn’t to say thank you. I don’t want a pity fuck from a slave to his instincts and after being the wizarding world’s weapon for the last seventeen years, I have no desire to be your whipping boy.”

With that, Potter threw open the door and stormed off up the train after Hermione, leaving Malfoy to ponder his words.

Vampires did not need to breathe, but some freshly sired, like Draco, simply felt more comfortable allowing the habit to continue. He took a deep breath of air, composing himself and then his pride sank its fangs into his chest as his control flooded back. He had let the monster swamp his pure blood, everything that made him who he was. He winced at the thought of losing himself to the hunger, just as Snape had predicted. Turning and heading the opposite way to Potter, Draco made the conscious decision to raid the Library as soon as they arrived at Hogwarts. Evidently Potter knew more about the vampire’s curse than he, he would just have to change that, especially if it led to a greater understanding of the monster he had become.

If those cretins at the ministry had not stolen our family’s archives I might have had a chance of
Taking a seat in the slytherin carriage, he kept to himself. He had made his decisions on what to do next, consult the library and then Severus, but he could not help but be plagued by the cold stranger’s warning, icy words. They haunted his mind. “He is your first meal, no one tastes better to you than him, he is yours to take, to rape, to kill. Can you not sense his lust? Take him! Kill him!” Draco winced, his hands clenching into fists, nails biting into his palms as he tried to shut the memory out. Still it revolved in his head like a foreboding, cursed mantra. “You fool! You must always drain your first! Always unless you–!”

Unless what?

~To Be Continued...
Temporentia Sensium

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

Important Story Note for you to consider: Temporentia Sensium, is my own creation, so please do not steal. Ask if you wish to use or copy or adapt in any way shape or form and credit and link back to me accordingly, thank you. The name is derived from the latin Temperantia (self-control) and Sensus (senses). Ingredients: Salamander blood, because it’s used in strengthening solutions Wit-sharpening potion as a base because it keeps one’s wits together despite what is happening Asphodel because it is traditionally associated with the afterlife and the underworld Hellebore and moonstone, because they are ingredients in the Draught of peace, which soothes anxiety.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

:chapter two:

TEMPORENTIA SENSIUM

The welcoming feast was much the same as ever, Harry thought as he prodded at his mashed potato, scooping it into a small pile before shoving some in his mouth. The same hall, same faces, except that the ‘Eighth Years’ had procured their very own (smaller) table that had been squeezed in near the front of the hall. There was nothing wrong with that, except that when they had all made their way into the hall, they had had longer to walk, a greater amount of time for all eyes to study them as if they were a heard of first years.

Harry kept his eyes down, feeling their eyes on the back of his head while he ate. But also, he sensed a particular, inhuman gaze riveted to his every bite. Malfoy was a few seats away from him granted, but not far enough given what he had tried to pull on the train earlier…

“If you duck your head any lower you’ll be face-first in the gravy,” Hermione murmured in his ear and Harry straightened up a little, just in time to see Ron look away from him. Harry tried not to let the hurt touch his face as he focused solely on Hermione. Ron was speaking to him again, but it was strained and awkward.

“It’s ten time worse now, the staring, I wish they’d find fascination with someone else,” Harry replied, rubbing at his neck as it twinged uncomfortably. He couldn’t help but wonder if it had something to do with Malfoy – it was exactly where his scar was, after all. Maybe he’s given me vampire rabies, he mused, wondering if there even was such a thing.

“Got fleas, Potter?” A voice jibed and Harry looked up to see Zabini leering at him from the seat beside Malfoy. “Or just got an overzealous girlfriend?”
Harry flushed even as he glared back, hearing a disdainful snort from the side that was Ron. The slytherins had perfect timing as ever with the taunts. “If you got off your poncy arse and into the real world more often, Zabini, you’d know a scar when you saw one,” Harry snarled, shoving away what was left of his meal and gulping down his pumpkin juice.

“I get out in the real world often enough to get laid, Potter, you might want to try it once and awhile,” Zabini sneered, making a show of taking another eloquent bite from his own meal. “The way the Weasley bint tells it, you’re still a dainty little virgin.”

Harry saw red then as the hall fell silent to hear his humiliation. His body physically shook with rage and a breeze flew out of nowhere, whipping up his short dark locks and lapping at his steaming flesh. The table shook. He glanced up to see Headmistress McGonagall’s eyes set on his, however, and managed to keep himself in the seat from the warning in her eyes. Her words from only fifteen minutes ago were still fresh in his mind.

The Eighth Year students were adults, they were to be settled in a separate dormitory arranged especially for them, they would have certain privileges but with those perks came responsibilities. They had to be on their best behaviour, major mess-ups (like a brawl before term even officially started) would end up with the sheer privilege of them being allowed to finish their education being withdrawn. None of them wanted that, even the slytherins. All of those who had had the guts to return had something to prove, had to make something of themselves and they needed Hogwarts to do that.

Remembering this just in time, Harry brushed the dark-skinned boy off, tucking into the bowl of ice-cream that had suddenly appeared before him. Mentally counting to ten. He’d spent all summer struggling to harness the sudden increase of power he’d been imbued with but hadn’t had opportunity to test his control. He felt is shudder, stretch to its limit. But it held. Just. With a low sigh, he glanced up to see McGonagall giving him a soft smile. It figured, being head teacher meant prising choice students with sweet things, McGonagall seemed to have a knack for guessing their favourite ice-cream. He smiled back absently as he took his first bite, cookie dough was his favourite.

“Drop the house rivalry, Zabini,” Hermione bit out from Harry’s side, “there is no house segregation in ‘Eighth Year’. We aren’t on the quidditch teams, we can’t even earn or lose house points. Perhaps it’s about time you grew out of such childish enmity.”

Zabini glared at her while beside him, Malfoy chuckled with mild amusement. “She has you by the brass balls with that one, Blaise,” he mused, eyes flickering to Harry to try and garner his attention. Even a glimpse of those infuriated eyes, but the boy kept his head down, denying Draco a sight of them. “And if a good slytherin is known for anything, it’s for adapting to chance in lieu of self-preservation.” Blaise grunted in irritation at Draco not taking his side. Granger flushed and gave a rigid nod before looking back to Weasley, who was distinctively not looking at Potter. Potter, he hadn’t even acknowledged the conversation had continued.

“Look at me, Draco growled within the dark, echoing expanse of his mind. Look at me, damn you. He watched Potter twitch then and rub the scar on his throat again, but the boy did not look up. Meet. My. Eyes. He willed, his body deathly still and his cloudy gaze fixed intently. His first would look on him, he willed him do so!

Draco froze then. What was he doing? What was happening? It was as if something inside him, a primal desire had acted without his conscious permission. He swallowed back the heat in his cold
throat then, tearing his gaze away from Potter as if to spite the vampire instincts and turned back to his cherry bakewell. He grinned lasciviously then, without thinking. It seemed Potter was still a cherry. Something thick and hungry in his belly liked that thought and his smile touched every muscle in his body. *Dead body,* he reminded himself bitterly, in an effort to quash the vampire’s infuriatingly insistent wants.

*I am still Draco Abraxas Malfoy,* he insisted, smothering the vampire and its will, its pathetic desires for Potter’s attention. *I am still me. I will not be changed by a monster’s blood!* Abruptly he shoved his now empty plate away, rising to his feet without so much as a glance at the eyes watching him. They had been disclosed the location of the eighth year dormitory, but that was not where he was going. No. He needed information, he needed to acquaint himself with every tiny flaw and virtue of this *disease,* if only to learn to harness the vampire beneath his skin. Learn to conquer it. *If only to get the insatiable thirst for Potter out of your mouth,* his mind supplied. He hastened towards the library.

* * *

Harry sighed as he watched the light from the smouldering flames dance over the golden body of the snitch that hovered above him. The soft, regular fluttering of its wings calmed him, he found. He stared up into the golden globe of the magical instrument and lost himself in the potential freedom. He wasn’t sure why it comforted him, an old trinket left behind by Dumbledore. He wasn’t even sure why he had kept it now the war was over, all hallows aside from his cloak gone along with the horcruxes.

Perhaps it comforted him because it reminded him of a time where he had worth, where he had purpose, where he was ever-moving forward. Where he *meant* something more than baggage to those around him. Either way, with his temperament still unsteady from dinner, it helped so ease the inner battle of power trying to get out. Like a caged tiger waiting to be unleashed.

Turning his head to the side, he gazed into the fire glowing in the hearth. He was lying on the rich suede settee in front of the fireplace in the eighth year common room, flat on his back with his legs hanging over one of the arms. It wasn’t that different from Gryffindor common room except the colours were mostly creams with rich gold detailing, and the location, of course, which was a brand new branch off the moving staircase that no first to seventh years could enter. ‘*For legal age reasons,*’ McGonagall had said. If they wished to converse with the lower years, they had to leave their common room.

Not that Harry felt much like conversing with anyone. The common room was nearly empty except for a few, Ron and Hermione long having left him to his moping. Not that he blamed them. *Pull yourself together you sulky prat,* he spat at himself, studying the fluttering wings of the snitch as if it held the secrets to his escape from the abyss of depression he had stumbled into.

He winced as that burning itch resurfaced on the inflamed skin of his throat, and resolved not to rub it anymore.

Suddenly, the portrait hole opened and in instinct-reaction, Harry’s eyes flicked in that direction, only to see Malfoy striding into the common room, surveying the richly decorated area critically. Harry scoffed and turned his gaze to the fire, the snitch’s wings brushing over his cheek gently.

“Did you get lost, Malfoy?” Daphne Greengrass called over from the corner she was sitting in with Blaise Zabini. “Weren’t you eager to see your new sleeping quarters with the gryffindors? Since there are only seven boys and seven girls we’re all meant to share, it seems. Just one dormitory for
the girls and one for the boys. How demeaning…”

Malfoy’s gaze drifted to Potter, strewn across the settee, before he made his way across the room and towards the fire, dropping his heavy book-bag onto the floor beside the armchair closest to it. He kept his eyes off of Potter from then on, concentrating on warming his unnaturally cold body by the fire. He didn’t need to be warm, but it was comforting nonetheless, especially in light of some of the things he had read in the library…

*I need to see Severus in the morning*, he thought, before swallowing. Forcing his throat and voice into action. “Consider yourself lucky that you were able to return this year, not all of us were so lucky, or did you not notice that our numbers have greatly depleted since we enrolled first year?” Draco murmured. He didn’t like the way Blaise and Daphne were acting like they were still children, like nothing had changed when surely, any blind man could see. Everything had changed.

“Easy for you to say,” Daphne sneered, “You are at least going to have Blaise at your back in your room…”

Draco closed his eyes against the stupidity, dropping his head into his hands. His fingers tightened around fistfuls of blond locks and he winced. He couldn’t function properly. Not now he knew this and had no one to turn to with it. “You’ll find your way into his bed quick enough,” he snapped, his fangs making his gums itch where they lay hidden, his teeth grinding. Why was the fire so noisy? Why was Daphne’s voice so shrill?

Why could he hear Potter’s blood thrumming through his veins?

*You know why, now*, his mind breathed. No, the vampire breathed.

Draco jerked back then, dropping into the armchair behind him, his nails digging into the fabric. “If after the war, after this second chance we’ve been given all you have to be concerned about is sleeping with a few girls that (rightfully) dislike you then I’d say you have it easy, Greengrass,” He snarled, not daring to turn to face the other two slytherins, or Potter, who was listening intently now. Draco could feel his pupils dilated with hunger, glowing silver instead of their usual murky grey.

The emotions were running too high through his being, and the hunger cramps were twisting his insides into knots. He couldn’t function, but he couldn’t reveal himself either. No one could know what he was.

“You’ve come back a right self-righteous prat, Malfoy,” Daphne huffed, leaping to her feet and flouncing off up the stairs (which Draco supposed lead to the dormitories). In contrast, Blaise rose slowly and Draco’s unnatural senses let him know his once-friend was eyeing him carefully from across the room.

“You should be careful who you isolate yourself from, Draco,” Blaise warned coolly. “You are going to need all the contacts you can to redeem you from your shame.”

Like Potter had in the great hall at dinner, Draco anchored himself to his seat rather than launch himself at the boy who was making his way up the stairs also. His nails hooked in the fabric of the chair as if to ground him. If he attacked Blaise now, while he was this angry, he would, no doubt kill him and reveal himself in the same instance.
Then he realised. He and Potter were now alone in the common room. His skin tingled at the knowledge and his stomach clenched hungrily. Yes, he was starving and Potter was like a four-course meal under his nose. At least he knew why now…

_Not that it helps,_ the vampire whispered. _You want him, you can smell how tasty he is…_

It was like he was hyperaware of Potter’s every movement, every breath, he didn’t even have to look at him to see his fist snatch the snitch out of the air and tuck it away in his pocket. He just knew when Potter sat up slowly, remaining still and upright for a moment or so, until he got to his feet. Perhaps Potter was leaving him in peace, allowing him a moment to beat back the swelling desire to open a vein and taste that blood. How on earth would he ‘sleep’ with that smell clouding his judgement and senses?

It didn’t matter right now, because Potter was moving – _toward_ him, not toward the stairs.

“Don’t come any closer, Potter. I’ve read up on a lot of things, and you really don’t want to be near me right now.”

The reason why everything tasted of ash except Potter, the reason why a mere waft of his shampoo sent his stolen blood pounding. Potter was his first, he was meant to have drained him dry that first night, thus completing, _finalising_ his transformation into a vampire. But he had spared the chosen one, he had let him go and now that doomed him to a life – an _un-life_, of hunger and madness, unless he finish what he started and drain Potter dry.

Without the miniscule scraps of sustenance from Severus’s experiments he would not have even survived the summer. Although this felt very unlike surviving. His stomach was churning, _clenching, burning_ for something, _anything_.

Despite his warning, Potter hadn’t stopped. On the contrary, he was now at the side of the chair, staring down at him. Draco’s knuckles went white with tension. It hurt so badly to resist. How much easier it would be to just reach out and end this? Potter was so lost in his own self-loathing he probably wouldn’t even struggle…

“I mean it, Potter, piss off,” he hissed. Still the obstinate boy remained and Draco snapped his head up to turn his vampiric glare on the chosen one’s face. Those eyes, they were shining like emeralds in the firelight and the depth of emotion that glistened there almost made him choke on his words. Almost. “What do you want from me?”

Potter just studied him for a moment, unflinching and shockingly unconcerned that he was standing before a ravenous vampire who had once nearly killed him. Had only a few hours ago imposed himself upon him. Who only had a taste for his blood.

At last, Potter broke the silence with, “It doesn’t seem fair that you have to suffer this alone.”

Malfy flinched at the pity in his voice. “I don’t want your bloody pity, _Potter,_” he snapped. “And I don’t recommend you offer. Particularly as the only way you can help is by opening a vein and letting me reap the rewards.” He lowered his head then, turning his eyes to the fire once more. The way Potter returned his glare so unwaveringly only made the hunger worse. Only made him want to conquer him more.

“You researched vampires,” Potter said then. It was a statement, not a question.
“Since you took such pleasure in bringing to attention how ignorant I was,” Draco hissed, not looking at him. “And don’t waste your compassion. Even if I’d drained you dry back at the start, do you honestly believe that a pureblood raised like I was, by a family like mine could ever feel anything but revolted by the disease that courses through me?” His voice was low and sharp with loathing. Hate. He hated everything. The only reason he was still here and hadn’t staked himself like a coward was because he was too afraid to be left unremembered. To leave this world as a nothing. A nobody. His fingers clenched so hard his knuckles cracked. No, that was unthinkable…

“I got a kick out of taking you down a notch because even as a vampire you’re an arrogant arse,” Potter retorted stiffly. “I owe you a life debt for not ‘draining me dry’ so I was offering an ear since you’re limited in choice, but if you want to bite my head off–”

“Bite you,” Draco hissed, leaping to his feet, his body arching as he surged towards Potter. “Bite you is exactly what every fibre of my being is screaming at me to do, because all other blood turns to ash in my mouth. And I am restraining myself, Potter, barely.” Air that did not bring him life left his flared nostrils as he snarled at his prey.

Harry glared at him as the vampire’s breath touched his cheeks. It was cool, unnaturally so, like a sudden, light breeze. His throat was on fire now and without thinking, Harry raised a hand to touch it, only to have his wrist seized. He hissed as Malfoy’s grasp squeezed him so hard he swore he heard the bones grind in negation. Green eyes set with hatred and he stared fixedly into Malfoy’s face, not giving him the satisfaction of a wince.

“Same old Potter,” Draco growled. “I thought you’d changed, thought you’d grown but you’re still the same pigheaded Gryffindor. You think you know everything, but you know nothing.”

Harry sneered at him raising his chin a fraction in defiance, unwittingly giving Malfoy a tempting view of his throat. “Is there a point to this rant?” He asked offhandedly.

Malfoy smirked darkly, tugging Potter’s hand a little higher so that his breath weaved between the boy’s fingers. He saw the digits twitch, felt Potter’s shiver. He felt it to his bones. The heat coming from that skin swept through his veins like a tide of pure, unbridled pleasure. He let out a little groan, his fangs itching his gums where they lay hidden. The vampire wanted Potter, so badly. It had waited for too long…

“If you knew as much as you first thought, Potter, you’d realise that scratching at that bite will only irritate it more. You’d realise, that the fact that its burning increases in my presence is no coincidence…”

There. Potter’s eyes flared with confusion and a hint of fear. Delicious. He certainly felt like himself now he’d wiped that smug defiance from the boy’s face.

“If its something you’ve infected me with, Malfoy, you’d best let me know now,” Potter warned.

Malfoy lifted his own head back then with pride. It was amazing really, how Harry bloody Potter, his first meal, seemed to allow him the chance for some of his human self to seize back control. With his infuriating attitude and heroics, no less.

“You were my first meal, Potter. And I have learnt now that in letting you live, I doomed myself to a life of addiction to your blood.”
Those green eyes went impossibly wide then. That tongue darted out to wet those dry lips, tempting him. “Y-You... you’re–”

“Addicted. In not finishing you off, I inadvertently invoked a bond in which you are my soul source of food,” Malfoy explained mechanically, despite the way his mind was still reeling from the information he had discovered. “It happened in old times, apparently a vampires first meal would often be a lover or close companion, someone they wanted to keep with them. A first meal must be drained until dead. But by taking only a taster the first time, I led our bodies into believing I wanted only your blood and that you wanted to be my only donor.”

For a long time, the only sound was the crackling fire, almost vicious in the silence. For a long time, Potter only stared at him.

“You’ve got to be bloody joking,” Harry spat suddenly, shattering the silence and shoving Malfoy away from him roughly, wrenching his hand free in the process. “If think you suckling at my neck like a starving sex-addict was the highlight of my life you’re barking, Malfoy!”

Malfoy laughed humourlessly. “Oh, believe me, I can make you want it, should I desire it. But you should know this, in sparing your life, I damned myself to a life of thirst. Anything I drink has all the sustenance of ash to me. Eventually, I will starve and turn to ash myself.”

Potter looked thoughtful for a moment. And then, “If I don’t offer my blood to you on a regular basis you will die?”

“To put it bluntly, eventually yes, I will die. I survived this summer on some blood substitute experiments, but each lasted me not more than a day and now nothing is working at all. I am dying, Potter,” Malfoy explained flippantly, dropping back into his chair beside the fire, longing for his skin to take in some of its warmth. But the only heat his dead body wanted to devour was the heat of Potter’s body.

*Shut it!* He hissed at the vampire growling beneath his skin, gnashing its fangs in hunger for Potter’s blood. He was beating it back. He wouldn’t lose himself to it.

“I said I wouldn’t be a pity fuck for you, Malfoy, what makes you think I’d be your meals on wheels?” Potter snapped. His hands curling into fists at his sides. “My entire bloody life I’ve been the martyr, I’ve been expected to give and give of myself and I have. I’ve given until I’ve ended up this hollow, empty, self-pitying shell. I don’t even have a life now. I have nothing to give to anyone, not my friends, not the people who want to make themselves my family. Least of all you. I won’t be a martyr anymore.” Potter was screaming. He was panting for breath, his face flushed with fury and his teeth grinded together loud enough to make Draco cringe.

“I spent seventeen years being a willing sacrifice,” Potter said, deathly quiet. “No more.” He turned then, whirling on his heel and storming towards the stairs.

Draco leapt to his feet. “You would let me die then?” he demanded.

Potter paused on the first step, but did not turn. “What would you do, if the situations were reversed? I hardly think my life would be your first priority—”

“But you’re the bloody chosen one!” Draco insisted.
“Not anymore. I don’t know who I am anymore,” Harry snarled, bolting up the stairs. He needed to get away, far away from this conversation, this situation and the feelings it incited in his roiling gut. His magic was hard to harness and his control over it hadn’t been challenged at all over the summer, now he was finding it even harder to reign in. He shook his head to clear it as he ascended the stairs. He had to keep it under control or it would rule him and he wasn’t a weapon any longer. He wouldn’t allow his whole life to be dictated by another person or thing, not ever again.

He didn’t know who he was, but it was for him to decide, not anyone else.

* * *

Harry didn’t see Malfoy in the great hall for breakfast, but that was fine with him. As he understood it from the books he’d read, vampires didn’t need to eat per se in any case. They just could. Human blood was what kept them going, kept their heart beating and in doing so, kept their organs working similar to a humans. Better in fact. But how was Malfoy functioning if all blood consumed turned to ash in his mouth?

The answer came as he made his way into the Charms classroom. He took his seat on the other side of Hermione of course, even if she and Ron were too engrossed in each other to notice his wandering gaze. It suited him fine that they were otherwise occupied right now, he didn’t want to answer questions. Malfoy sat on his own at a desk near the front of the class, so Harry had an unhindered view to his suffering.

His body was tense, his skin so deathly white it looked almost blue, his face long and gaunt. He looked like death, in short. It was quite obvious that he wasn’t dealing with it, wasn’t coping with the lack of blood. It had accelerated over night it seemed. It looked as if it were killing him slowly…

I’m killing him slowly, Harry thought. Because I refused to help him out of a sense of pride–

He’d do the same to you, and more so, enjoy watching you wither away, his thoughts argued, so loudly that he didn’t even realise Flitwick was talking.

“Did you hear me, Potter?” Flitwick demanded.

Harry snapped back into reality with a jerk, sitting up a little straighter as his gaze moved from Malfoy to his professor. “Sir?”

A low huff of impatience left the tiny professor’s lips. “First lesson of term and you’re already drifting, Potter. Let us hope your attention span improves.” With that he flicked his wand, levitating Harry’s books and quill up into the air. Harry watched in confusion as they floated across the room…

No.

“You will need to be in pairs for this term, Mr Potter, I urge you to move to Mr Malfoy’s side so that you can begin the work. You’re all a year behind as it is.”

Harry just stared dumbly between him and Malfoy for a moment. It seemed like forever before he could force his legs to move. He felt the eyes on his head, he heard the whispers, especially Hermione and Ron’s urgent ones. They were all confused or amused, perhaps a bit of both at the
fact that both Harry and Malfoy had been the two ‘spares’ left after they’d silently chosen their pairs.

_We’re both outcasts_, Harry thought wretchedly, throwing his book-bag under the desk and slumping into his seat beside Malfoy. Angling the chair as far from Malfoy as possible within the boundaries of the desk, Harry resentfully drew his wand waiting for the book to finish turning itself to the appropriate page.

“Don’t look too pleased with this situation, Malfoy, it doesn’t get you any sort of intimacy with me,” Harry hissed under his breath. Malfoy turned his head an inhuman fraction to set him with a glare. Harry’s own eyes widened a the sight. Malfoy’s eyes were almost black, a startling change in his already death-like complexion. Harry swore he could see the veins through that flesh.

“Twice I have extended my hand to you, Potter,” Malfoy growled quietly. “Once in friendship, once in search of help. The second time, I assumed you could look beyond past differences in order to save my life, however miserable and pitiable it may be. I won’t make that mistake again. And since you so tritely refused to aid me, I have no further use for you.”

Harry opened his mouth to answer, but Flitwick was speaking again. “Next lesson will be a practical, this lesson, however, we need to cover the theory of dual casting. Can anyone tell me what that is?”

Oddly, a few hands shot up, of course, Hermione’s was the fastest.

“Miss Granger?” Flitwick asked.

Hermione, looking extremely pleased with herself as usual, fastidiously recited, “Dual Casting is the act of performing a spell with a partner in order to increase the strength, speed or sheer force of the spell.”

“Correct!” Flitwick squealed, looking as if he wanted to give ten points to Gryffindor and had only just remembered in time that eighth year were not included in the house cup.

“This lesson, you will together read through the chapters on joint casting. It isn’t as easy as it sounds to cast on the same object, it can have disastrous affects if you aren’t in tune with your partner. Your homework for next lesson will be to practice casting separate spells on separate objects but with the same strength and speed.”

Harry balked at that, at spending his after school hours trying to tune his spell casting to match Malfoy’s while all he really wanted to do was keep out of his way. He didn’t like the anger, the guilt and the confusion the vampire made him feel. Or the way his throat still felt inflamed. It felt like the bite worsened the more he denied Malfoy his pound of flesh!

It didn’t seem fair that he seemed to be forever forced to act as others pleased, not himself. He didn’t think he’d ever have his own life. I will, he thought defiantly as he kept his eyes on his own book, not giving Malfoy so much as a second look. _This is my time to live for myself, not for anyone else._

That voice may have sounded more convincing if he couldn’t feel Malfoy shivering beside him, hear his teeth grinding together and sense the sharp, painful spasms of agony the vampire was trying to smother.
Half hour had passed before Harry swore he heard the blond choking on his efforts to stay upright in his seat. His tongue swiped over his own dry lips nervously as he turned to him. “Malfoy, are you alright?” He whispered. “Maybe you should have a glass of water? Do you need to go to Madam Pomfrey?”

“I need nothing from you, Potter!” Malfoy snarled venomously, despite the way his teeth clenched together in pain.

Harry flinched at the biting whisper, but did not miss the moisture gathering on Malfoy’s startlingly pale skin. Harry’s throat was throbbing painfully now, his own fingers curling into white-knuckled fists under the table.

Suddenly, Malfoy leapt to his feet, all eyes snapping to him. “Professor, I think… may I be excused?” It seemed that before now, the only person to notice Malfoy’s sickly appearance was Harry. No one seeing him not could deny he wasn’t well, especially since Harry was the only one present who knew he was, in fact, dead.

Flitwick blanched as he surveyed his student, giving him a short nod. Malfoy did not even wait to try and obtain a pass before flying out of the classroom, leaving all his possessions behind in his haste.

Malfoy did not return. When Flitwick dismissed them, Harry packed his own things away. Getting to his feet, he stared at Malfoy’s belongings for a moment as the class piled out of the room. He glanced to the door, where Hermione and (oddly) Ron were waiting for him. He made a move to go to them, but something stopped him, something completely separate to the unsettling, throbbing in his scarred throat. It didn’t seem right that Malfoy hadn’t returned, hadn’t taken his things with him.

Hastily, as if afraid of being caught doing it, Harry scooped Malfoy’s possessions into the bag abandoned by his empty chair and slung the other bag over his shoulder as well. Both of his friends gave him an odd look as he made his way over to them.

“Harry?” Hermione began, a frown of confusion creasing her brow as they walked together to Potions. “Why are you carrying Malfoy’s things?”

Harry stiffened, but managed a shrug all the same, trying to sound complacent about it all. “He left them behind. I won’t have him laying all the work on me for Charms and using feeling queasy as an excuse,” he said nonchalantly.

“What was wrong with him anyway?” Ron asked, his tone cautious, as if unsure if Harry would be willing to forgive him for his stupidity so soon.

Harry decided to give him no clue either way, not feeling especially generous with Ron’s selfish streak right now. “Don’t know what was wrong with him. Probably too much reading for his dainty little eyes,” he retorted, a chill running through his bones, making the hair on his arms stand on end as they made their way into the dungeons. It reminded him too much of that place. The place they had dragged him to, the place where he had watched Malfoy be tortured and then turned into a vampire. The place where he killed Voldemort.

*The spell killed Voldemort*, his mind insisted, *the spell, not me.*

The few times anyone had dared to mention Voldemort’s demise, he had exploded into a fit of rage
and nearly taken half of Siddlebury cottage with him. He did not kill anyone, he had not and would not take a life. That was the beauty of the spell he had used. The spell, the manifestation of it had ended Voldemort, not him. It wasn’t as if he took a knife to the monster’s throat and slit it open.

_But that is what you’re doing to Malfoy_, a voice whispered darkly at the back of his mind, behind the mask of cool indifference he had forced up. _I will be no one’s puppet again!_ He spat back as they entered the hauntingly familiar potions classroom.

Still, his mind wasn’t on the task at hand, but rather the extra book-bag cluttering up the underside of his desk. Three times Hermione saved his potion from ruin by jabbing him sharply in the ribs. “Harry!” She hissed urgently, her eyes trained on the vulture that was Professor Snape as he loomed over Zabini’s potion. “That’s not hellebore!”

Harry looked down just in time to stop himself from dropping powdered wormwood into the concoction as opposed to the hellebore. He cursed, cursed himself and cursed Malfoy for distracting him without even being present. He could no longer dock house points but Harry was sure Snape would find some way of punishing him for his lack of attention.

Oddly enough, when Snape finally came to Harry’s desk, he merely gave the potion a fleetingly unimpressed look before meeting Harry’s eyes. “I should be amazed, I suppose, that you managed to get it to this level with the appalling amount of attention you spared your work, Potter,” Snape sneered. Harry swore that dark gaze snapped to the inflamed mark on his throat before adding, “Passable, but keep yourself focussed in my class or you will find yourself out of it. Am I clear, Potter?”

Harry nodded dully, it was better than what he had anticipated coming out of the potions master’s mouth. Was Snape behaving better towards him because he…helped to kill Voldemort? Because he knew now what he had endured? No, ridiculous, Snape was not capable of that. And in any case, his slight change in attitude seemed to apply to the whole class. He was not nice, not by any means, but he was correcting, advising instead of just insulting and banishing the failed or less than perfect brews. He even gave Hermione a small, “Well done, a near-perfect potion, Miss Granger,” before sweeping away.

Whatever the reason for it, it seemed to lighten the tension in Harry’s muscles for the remainder of the lesson, that was, until a shadow fell over him as he hauled both his and Malfoy's bags onto his shoulder as the class was dismissed.

“Mr Potter,” came Snape’s forebodingly cool voice. “You will stay behind.”

Harry glanced up to see his friends’ confusion again and Ron’s irritation on his behalf which he could not help but smile at. He just gave them a gesture for them to go on ahead to break before approaching the front desk. Snape had already slunk back behind it and was filtering through the vials of potion the students had set on his desk. He was lifting them out of the stand one by one, as if deciphering which was the best. Harry thought he could clearly make out his whitish pink potion, whereas Hermione’s was the bright, brilliant red Snape was now examining.

When the sound of the door closing behind the last student reached Harry’s ears, he finally got tired of standing there in silence and cleared his throat loudly. Snape did not react immediately, he studied what Harry thought to be Hermione’s potion for a moment longer before closing his hand around the vial carefully and looking up at him.

Those eyes were dark as ever but with a shine of thoughtfulness to them that told him Snape was
surveying him, calculating something. Finally, he spoke, his cold, softly droning voice breaking the silence.

“Are you aware, Mister Potter, that the potion you and your cohorts made today is in fact a variation of the Wit-Sharpening potion?”

Harry shook his head, but now he thought about it, ground scarab beetle, armadillo bile, sliced ginger root, he definitely remembered them. As if seeing the light dawning on his face, Snape gave a nod. “Yes, the ingredients, combined with the asphodel, salamander blood, syrup of hellebore and powdered moonstone, they make a new potion that students generally have no use for.” He paused. “All students, except you, Mister Potter.”

Harry’s eyes widened and he struggled to calm his breathing, wishing to bring his hand up to his aching neck. It felt like his blood was about to rupture from his skin there. “W-What do you mean? Sir?” He added the last bit hastily.

Snape raised a brow at the politeness, slowly sweeping to his feet with all the fluidity of a shadow in his dark robes.

“The potion you made, Potter, Temporentia Sensium, to you, self-control over the senses. Can you not guess what I might require it for? What you might require it for?”

Harry thought for a moment, wondering if his guess would reveal too much to a man he wasn’t sure knew about Malfoy’s…situation. “Is it for Malfoy, sir?”

Snape glanced to the mark at his throat again, before lifting the vial of bright crimson potion and placing it in Potter’s hand. “Close, Mister Potter. The potion, however, is for you.”

Harry blinked. “Me? But I–”

“Mister Malfoy’s body can only digest things because the blood he drinks allows his organs to function, Mister Potter,” Snape interrupted. “For you to ingest the solution would mean you both, in turn, would be partial to its effects.”

Harry glared at him then, dropping both bags to the floor, infuriated. “You are going to make me do as he wishes? You’re going to force me, is that it? Because that is the only way I will allow someone to use me, to make me into their tool again, Snape. I won’t allow anymore of my life to be sapped away by other people’s selfish demands of me. I’ve been alive eighteen years now without living at all!”

“Poor Potter, life has been indubitably unfair to you hasn’t it?” Snape snarled, his eyes dark with hate. “Look around, boy, the whole world is suffering. There are many who are unluckier than even you, the boy who was robbed of his childhood to face a monster no adult dared to face. Does it not occur to you that while you have lost your family and youth, you still have a great deal?!” Snape raged, surging forwards and seizing Harry’s shoulders, physically shaking him.

Harry sneered up at him, magic burning through his skin and filling the air with an electrical sizzling. He grinded his teeth together in an attempt to keep his magic from swelling out of control with the surging fury. “What do I have that’s so bloody perfect then, Snape?!”

“You have your friends. You have your magic. You have your health and a man and woman, Lupin and his wife who are so desperate to take you as their son that their attempts to comfort your
egotistical self are pathetic to watch!”

Harry gave a cry of pain and rage, throwing Snape off of him and keeping his eyes locked on his hateful face even as his lungs threatened to burst. He was panting with the effort to control himself.

“How dare you?!” Harry hissed. “How dare you?! You think I have it all, right? Friends who don’t give me the time of day, a family who only want me out of pity? You think that’s a good life?!”

“It is more than many have, it is more than I have, you selfish little prat,” Snape said, his voice warningly low. “This may not be the life you wanted but it is the life you have. You must learn to make the best of it no matter how awful it is. Lying there complaining how unfair it all is and how wronged you are will not change a thing!”

“You’re all the selfish ones! I saved all your lives! I gave up everything, even my life to save you all and all you’re doing is asking for more, more, more! I haven’t anymore to give!”

SLAM!

Snape’s hands slammed down hard on the surface of the desk, causing Harry to jerk back in surprise.

“A child. After all this, you are still a child, no matter what adult responsibilities and agonies you have endured,” Snape murmured darkly, his face tight in what Harry thought was desperation. Snape was desperate? For Harry to help Malfoy? “Your mother always gave of herself. She gave and gave until she had nothing left. I had once thought you were becoming less like James Potter and more like her, a good person—”

“Oh, don’t you bloody preach to me about being a good person, I may just piss myself with the irony of it all!” Harry snapped, noticing Snape’s expression twist with distaste at his words.

“I cannot force you to save him, but I had thought a man who ‘gave up everything’ to save us from the Dark Lord would need more reason than unfairness and self-loathing to let someone die.”

Harry’s mouth snapped shut at that and silence swept over the room. The coolness of the dungeon contrasted sharply with the flush of fury in Harry’s skin and he winced as a shiver ran through him. Magic was pulsing frantically through his body, crackling and biting at his veins as he fought to stifle it. It was brewing, it wanted a release but he would not allow it to overcome him. No matter how angry and lost he was. It was Voldemort’s power, not his and he wouldn’t let it ruin him. His throat was searing hot now and he swore a sound akin to a slow, almost dying heartbeat was thudding dully in his ears.

Slowly, surely, he conquered the swelling magic in his veins back to a dull murmur during the silence that had fallen. Tamed back the savage beast, for now.

“Come with me, Potter,” Snape said suddenly, his voice a barely there whisper, but it was more of a question than a statement. He paused where he stood for a moment, before turning and heading to the door. Harry sighed, lugging both bags up onto his shoulder again before following Snape out into the hall. They followed the dark, dungeon corridor down to Snape’s office, a sense of dread filling Harry’s stomach. Every time he had been here, it had never been for something good.

The office door closed and locked behind them as they entered but Snape was still walking, so Harry followed, finding himself being led to yet another door. The bite mark was throbbing.
violently now. He let out a half-whimper, half-gasp of pain as he cupped his neck with one hand, pressing down hard to try and alleviate some of the piercing sting.

“Through here,” Snape said, pushing the door open and standing back to let Harry go in first.

Harry hesitated. The room was dark from what he could see, illuminated only with the soft, orange glow from the fireplace. He could see thick, dark green drapes hanging shut over some (no doubt enchanted) windows. Lush, worn but comfortable looking furniture and a dark green carpet were shadowed with the silhouette of the dancing flames. This was Snape’s lounge laying before him. There must be some mistake. He shivered, wondering why the greasy old potions master was leading him to his darkened rooms.

Glancing up to his professor, Harry saw only a nod of assent, before Snape shoved him forward. He stumbled into the room, heard Snape follow him in a bit more gracefully and then the quiet sound of the door shutting behind them.

Harry froze at what he saw there in the chair closest to the fire. Malfoy was always closest to the fire, to the warmth recently. No doubt unnerved by the fact that his body could not keep itself warm, even though he didn’t technically feel the cold, Harry thought as he took a few hesitant steps closer. The firelight bathed the deathly pale blond lying in the chair, bound it seemed by thin, glistening ropes, as silver as unicorn’s blood.

Malfoy was writhing in his bonds, hissing and spluttering and groaning like a poltergeist being exorcised. It was heart-wrenching to watch, almost painful. Malfoy, who had always been so proud, now brought down to the level of a mindless, snarling beast. Harry felt bile rise up in his throat as he approached, kneeling down in front of where Malfoy sat. He felt tears prick the back of his eyes and he blinked hard, refusing to let them fall. Malfoy was clearly suffering so badly he couldn’t even form words. His body surged and arched grotesquely the nearer Harry got. Harry glanced up as Snape neared, the man’s dark gaze fixed on Draco’s completely.

“It’s my blood,” Harry said simply, “He needs it so badly he’s dying painfully, slowly without it.”

Snape just nodded.

Harry worried his lip between his teeth, torn, confused as to what to do. A low screech ripped from Malfoy's lips, slicing through Harry’s ears. The sounds leaving him, they sounded worse than death. “I don’t care about him,” Harry said resolutely, determined a conscience would not betray him. “I don’t even like him!”

Silence. And then…

“If that were so, why did you take the trouble to carry Mister Malfoy’s bag with you since he disappeared from Charms?” Snape asked.

Harry looked back to Malfoy again, the veins frighteningly prominent, almost black against his ashen skin. His mouth was open, panting like a beast under torture and Harry could bear it no longer. He rolled up onto his knees, his body shaking with anticipation and no little fear. “What do I do?” he asked cautiously.

“Drink the Temporentia Sensium,” Snape explained. “It will not rob you of sensation or create a lie of your feelings. It will merely allow you to keep hold of your senses, even in the onslaught of intense emotion. He is near-starvation. If I were to unbind him and set him loose he would do us all
a harm, including himself. I will have to restrain him while he feeds this time.”

Harry gave a small infraction of a nod, opening his hand to reveal the vial of crimson fluid. There was no pause, no second thought now he had seen Malfoy’s suffering and he tore the seal off the vial, pouring the potion down his throat. A long, deep inhale of air, then another and another and he felt ready. His heart was thudding madly in his chest, he had to concentrate to stop his breaths from coming out in short, sharp pants but none of it stopped him. The fear didn’t even make his bones shake as he shrugged off his school robe and threw his tie over to the side to join it.

“What are you doing Mister Potter?! ” Snape gasped, evidently horrified at his strip-show.

Harry flushed but shrugged, his face perfectly straight while his fingers worked the buttons of his shirt. “I don’t want to get blood on my uniform, Sir,” he explained matter-of-factly. “Seems to me as if Malfoy isn’t going to be caring about a bit of mess.”

Snape still seemed uncomfortable with that, but he relented in light of what must be done, and soon, before Malfoy’s body ate itself alive in starvation.

“Shouldn’t I feel different?” Harry asked. “I mean the potion, it… I don’t feel any different.”

“You won’t do, until you are put under pressure,” Snape explained, stepping behind the chair that housed Malfoy then. He cast some sort of protection charm on his arms and hands and then seized the thrashing vampire’s shoulders. Malfoy howled in pain, in hunger and Harry winced, kneeling up between Malfoy’s frantic legs. He flushed darker. It felt so personal, so intimate, and if he was sure of anything he was certain that he did not want anything personal or intimate going on with either Snape or Malfoy.

“S-Sir,” Harry forced out, shaking slightly with his throbbing jugular inches from a ravenous vampire’s fangs. Yes, he could see them now, ice-white, long and sharper than any basilisk fang. “I… I assume that the potion will allow us both to stop when…when it’s enough?”

Snape gave another nod. “When you feel your consciousness slipping, tell Mister Malfoy to stop.”

Harry’s eyes widened. That was the plan? “But, sir, what if he–?”

But it was too late. The silvery bonds holding Malfoy to the chair vanished and the vampire lunged for him. Harry flinched but it seemed Snape caught him just in time, holding Malfoy back from outright ripping Harry’s throat out. Malfoy was panting still, his breath ragged and animalistic, dusting over Harry’s skin.

Swallowing deeply, Harry closed his eyes, readying himself for what was to come. He turned his head a little, exposing the long, honey-hued expanse of throat, marred only by the inflamed scar created by Malfoy’s own fangs. Snape allowed Malfoy a little closer, close enough so that his nose just touched Harry’s neck.

Harry fought hard not to shudder. He breathed as slowly as he could, but he knew that both he and Malfoy could hear his heart thundering in his chest. “Y-You…you can have it…me,” Harry said huskily, not daring to open his eyes, not sure he could keep this sense of calm if he saw those fangs. But then he realised.

Syrup of hellebore and powdered moonstone, the ingredients for the Draught of Peace. Snape would be so proud, he thought bitterly, on finally comprehending the need for those last two
ingredients. If he was relaxed the bite wouldn’t hurt, the other ingredients would keep his mind awake during that relaxation, awake enough to not let Malfoy drink too much in his moment of passion and kill him.

“You can have me,” he whispered again, trying to calm the savage beast so that when those fangs finally sank into him, he didn’t tear his throat out. “But you can’t hurt me, or you won’t be able to have anymore.”

A low croon left Malfoy’s lips at that and Harry could not help but shudder from shameful arousal as Malfoy inched forward enough to run the flat of his tongue over the bite mark. Vampire’s saliva did the rest. It was good that the vampire in Malfoy seemed to understand what Harry had said, somehow, because suddenly, Harry didn’t care.

He didn’t care that Malfoy was the one lapping at his throat as if he were an ice-cream, or that Snape was still holding onto Malfoy’s shoulders lest the vampire lose control. He didn’t care that there were fangs accompanying those wet kisses. He just wanted more.

A groan of need left his lips and he tossed his head back, his hands flying up, welcoming Malfoy to his throat. That tongue pointed, pressed purposefully on the erogenous pinpricks left by his teeth last time. “Yes!” Harry gasped, his hips arching forwards against Malfoy’s urgently. “Please! Do it!” He wondered distantly if wizards could use vampire saliva to get high the way muggles might with ecstasy, because he was sure this was better than any man-made substance. His head was spinning, his body was dancing without moving. He needed it, more than he needed air.

“Bite me!!!” Harry screamed and there was but a harsh, teasing suck on his neck, before those fangs pierced him. His eyes flew open. It was painless, it was perfect, like his throat was made for those fangs to sink into. His body arched. His head tilted back to give Malfoy more access to guzzle greedily at his throat, while his groin undulated against Malfoy’s desperate for touch.

Malfoy’s fingers, long and possessive, seized hold of him. One hand gripped his hair tightly, keeping his head firmly to one side. The other wrapped around the small of his back, holding their aching pricks together forcefully. He felt Malfoy groan around his mouthful, the vibrations rippling through Harry’s skin and filling him with warmth even though consciously he knew that Malfoy was stealing his warmth.

The vampire’s icy skin grew warmer with the stolen blood and Harry dimly registered the sight of Snape still standing behind Malfoy, perhaps unsure if Malfoy would let go now he had his prize. He had been starving after all. For some reason Harry himself didn’t care. Far from that, he found himself massaging Malfoy’s scalp with the pads of his fingers, drawing another soft croon from those lips.

Panting hard now, Harry lay limp in the vampire’s embrace, all except for his hips which rocked insistently back into Malfoy’s. But it was not enough and he felt his limbs shaking, felt them weaken. A glaze of lust covered his eyes, a light sheen of perspiration caressed his skin like the soft, sensuous pass of Malfoy’s tongue whenever a drop of blood spilled from his lips. He was so hard. He could not help the humiliating noises that left his lips, quiet, incoherent sounds that begged for more.

Suddenly, a pinprick of awareness pierced the euphoria. It didn’t burst it, only made itself known in the chaos of lust and desire of the bite and he knew that now Draco was taking too much. His fingers that had splayed limply in that halo of blond hair tugged as hard as his shaky limbs could manage. “E-Enough!” He gasped, his voice husky and raw from cries of passion. “S-S-Stop,
Malfoy. T-T-Too much!”

With the insistence of his final words, he felt Malfoy’s frantic sucking pause, but his mouth and body did not withdraw. No, for a moment he was still, but then, Malfoy’s tongue returned, lapping soothingly at the bite-marks until Harry felt their throbbing presence dull into non-existence.

Harry’s head was still spinning, his cock still hard and desperate and pressing against his trousers. When Malfoy’s fangs withdrew at last, a choked sound left Harry’s lips and his eyes fluttered shut. Another pause, as if Malfoy was consorting with his instinct, the hesitation but a heartbeat long before Harry was drawn tightly to that lukewarm chest, one arm supporting his back while the other palmed his hardness roughly.

A groan of pure pleasure tore through his lips and he felt himself swoon, felt the world become a less tangible place as his mind and body spiralled into a utopia of ecstasy. He wanted to seize Malfoy’s body and ride him hard but his body was weak and only capable of feeble little jerks of white-hot pleasure into Malfoy’s hand.

It didn’t take him long. Those slender, strong fingers massaged Harry’s weeping prick vigorously, a long, droning growl passing Malfoy’s lips continuously, urging him to surrender. Forgetting himself, forgetting the whole world, only feeling and existing, all of Harry’s concerns and pains burned away for that moment as his climax burst through his body.

~To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

This story is strictly Draco/Harry. Although Snape was present due to the circumstances (Draco potentially killing Harry) he won’t participate. I have other plans for him...

I have this all written up already so I will update regularly. Please review if you have a moment.
Repercussions of Chivalry

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

I have recently made a Harry/Draco music video/trailer for this story. Please watch if you have 3 minutes to spare: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-NY7zEsUU8

Please, if any of you could spare the time for a review I would be SO happy.

*: chapter three:*
REPURCUSSIONS OF CHIVALRY

When Harry spiralled back down from his blissfully silent oblivion and the fog of ecstasy had finally drifted away, his first coherent thought was that the front of his trousers were damp and sticky. The room was quiet, silent except for the crackling of the fire. The inferno in his throat had died, his body still felt weak and shaky but at least he was thinking straight now.

But then, finally, he realised, those slightly warmed arms were still holding him. His eyes fluttered and focussed slowly, revealing Malfoy’s face dangerously close to his own, watching him intently, studying him almost. There was a line of blood on his lips, so startling against his pale skin. Pale, yes, but so much healthier. The blackish veins had vanished to a pale blue, only barely visible this close, his eyes were a rich, shining grey as they studied him. There was even a soft, pinkish hue to his lips now. My blood really did save him, Harry thought, flushing slightly at their close proximity and the feeling of Malfoy’s unnecessary breath on his skin.

Then it hit him. The humiliating sounds, they echoed through his ears. His own, shameful cries of passion. He’d begged Malfoy to bite him! He’d squirmed in his arms and rutted against his hand like a wanton slut. He’d climaxed in his trousers for Malfoy – in front of Snape!

His entire body bunched to flee, to rage, to scream, but the relaxing feeling brought on by the potion delayed him long enough for Malfoy to anticipate the explosion.

“You’ve lost a lot of blood, Potter, don’t do anything stupid or you’ll pass out,” Malfoy warned him, before lifting him as easily as if he were made of feathers. He hissed in irritation as Malfoy carried him over to the generously sized settee and laid him on it. “Severus can give you a Blood Replenishing potion but you’ll still be weak and light-headed after giving me so much.”

“Indeed,” Snape said from across the room where he was searching through his personal potions storage. He seemed awkward with what had occurred, if not a little repulsed, and trying very hard to distance himself from them. Harry was grateful to that at least, though it would’ve been much preferable if his professor hadn’t just seen him come in his knickers. His stomach lurched at that.

“We’ll have to arrange a schedule so that Mr Malfoy does not get into such a dire state again. It would be much more preferable to take small amounts regularly rather than large doses when he is on the brink of starvation—”
“Oh, and that’s alright with the two of you, is it?!” Harry demanded, bolting upright, regretting the action instantly. His head twisted, his vision spun. He felt dizzy and nauseated and cold all at once. He grit his teeth, snarling through the pain and disorientation. He’d be damned if he humiliated himself anymore this evening. Despite the pain, he raised his head, glaring in Malfoy’s general direction.

“Have you already forgotten that I came here of my own free will? I don’t have to give you my blood. I don’t have to give you anything, I can let you starve if I want to, so it might be an idea to treat me with a little respect!”

Malfoy’s eyes darkened and he flew towards him, descending over Potter’s body and glaring directly into his eyes. “Do you intend to blackmail me then, Potter?” he hissed venomously. “You intend to control me and threaten me with starvation? What makes you any better than the Dark Lord?”

Harry flinched. At the comparison of himself and Voldemort, not Malfoy’s harsh voice, not his threatening behaviour. Although their closeness made him more than a little uncomfortable. “I was talking about common courtesy, you prick, not blackmail,” Harry corrected tersely, his vision still blurry and nausea still rippling through his gut. “I gave you something of myself. I did you a bloody favour, it isn’t much to ask for respect and consideration in return!”

“Quite, Mr Potter,” Snape said levelly, suddenly beside them and pressing a vial of potion in Potter’s hand. “Two drops now, two drops with breakfast tomorrow morning,” he explained, fixing Malfoy with a calculating stare as Harry took the specified dose. “His wording leaves much to be desired but he makes a fair point, Draco. And I believe that looming over him like a shadow is poor repayment indeed. Sit yourself down so we can talk this through like adults.”

Harry felt the potion go down, and immediately his dizziness and nausea eased. He still felt light-headed and shaky but at least he could see the other two men clearly now. Snape was standing by the fireplace, his arm propped on the mantle, eyes flickering with the light of the fire as he stared into it contemplatively. Malfoy, however, was sat in the comfy chair nearest Harry watching him unwaveringly.

A heavy silence permeated the room, which smelt of blood and sex now. Harry shifted, uncomfortably sticky and loathing the way it reminded him of his weakness. Reaching for his wand where it lay in the piles of his robes, he cast a quiet, hasty cleaning charm on the damp patch. At least he had some of his dignity back now. He was still infuriated with Malfoy’s behaviour, with his own behaviour, perhaps it was the Temporentia Sensium, but he didn’t feel like he needed to explode with anger – not just yet.

“If we’re going to do this, I would prefer that I’m not the only coherent one every time,” Harry said at last, breaking the silence. “And I don’t want to feel like this every time you…feed. It feels like I’ve been trampled by hippogriffs.” He paused for them to offer some form of response, but it seemed he’d stunned them both to silence somehow. They were both watching him curiously, as if he had never acted mature and level-headed before.

Honestly, he thought reproachfully. *You’d think I wasn’t an adult at all…*

“So how regularly does a vampire require blood before he is driven to madness?” Harry asked when they said nothing. This time, Snape answered.
“I have strived to discover all I can regarding Draco’s condition,” he said. “From what I have gathered, whilst he is still new to…this, a minimum dose every three days should be enough so that he doesn’t start to feel withdrawals. In time, once a week will be sufficient, but only Draco will know exactly when he is ready for that.”

Harry nodded, worrying his lip thoughtfully. He wished he could be angry enough to storm out, strong enough to manage it on his own. He felt utterly humiliated at being intoxicated to the point where he squirmed like a whore in front of them both. Malfoy was bad enough, but Snape as well? He shivered. It was too much to bear. He felt quite sick…

“I’d rather you not be present every time,” Harry said abruptly. “I thought the Temporentia Sensium was supposed to help me keep my cool but… I just don’t like this. Any of it. I don’t like that I have to do this, but I will. I’d just rather there’s as few people watching me humiliate myself as possible.” His voice was terse, to the point and he watched as Snape raised a brow at his words.

“The potion takes effect only when your body is under great stress or threat. To remove your ‘humiliating’ reaction to Draco’s…saliva would be imprudent. You need it to make the bite pleasant, even bearable for you. All that the potion does is make certain you are not completely lost to the effects of his saliva, it ensures that you can stop the connection when Draco has had too much. And, like now, calm you when you need rest, especially if what you really want is to rant and rage…”

“Listen, I’m fine,” Harry snapped. “I’m more pissed off that I’m giving to a person who can’t even be gracious about it, than the fact that I have to do this at all.” He fixed Malfoy with a glare. “Fine, once every three days, but I’ll need an excuse as to where I go on those evenings. Hermione and Ron at the very least will ask questions—”

“I absolutely forbid you to tell them!” Draco shrieked, leaping to his feet. “The Weasel would enjoy my suffering all too much and besides which, this is my curse, my secret, the fewer people who know, the better!”

“Precisely why I asked for an alibi you prat,” Harry snorted, “I hardly think the whole world knowing I’m your personal ‘meals on wheels’ is ideal. Bloody hell, I’d have thought you’d be more mellow after drinking your fill, that you’d be in a better mood.”

At that, Snape gave a small chuckle of dark amusement. “That may be, Mister Potter, Draco I believe is of foul temperament due to the lack of satisfaction to his much-provoked sexual appetite.”

Harry’s eyes went wide at that. “Oh,” he said dumbly. “Is…? Are you…? Do you fancy blokes then, Malfoy?” he asked. It would make sense, if he were that way inclined, having another man arch and writhe and come against your body would indeed have ‘that’ effect. And Malfoy hadn’t climaxed, Harry noted.

Malfoy seethed. “Eloquent as ever,” he snapped. “It was friction, Potter. The physical reaction of my body to the touch of another. I have no desire for you, personally. Any red-blooded male would do to sate my needs—”

“But not your appetite,” Harry noted. “If you have no desire for me, why polish me off in front of Snape, hmm?”

If Malfoy had the blood to spare, Harry swore the vampire would have flushed. “If you think I did
it because I wanted to, Potter you have another thing coming,” he snarled, folding his arms tightly over his chest. “The vampire wants you, in every conceivable way. It thinks you belong to it, its first and only. But don’t you confuse my desires with a vampire’s instincts. The vampire wanted to sate your urges as you sated its hunger, but all I want is to get as far away from you as possible!”

Across the room, Snape clucked his tongue in frustration. Clearly he was not in the least bit amused by the hormonal rollercoaster of two teenage boy-men. “Pride and denial are a lethal mix,” Snape murmured, taking up the other cozy chair near the fire and watching them both critically.

Harry frowned at the statement, not entirely sure he understood it. Then he looked back to Malfoy once more. “That makes no sense,” he said. “Surely the vampire and you are one being? Didn’t the summer give you time enough to adjust to that?”

Suddenly, Malfoy’s gaze was glowing with a deadly venom. His fingernails hooked in the fabric of the chair, as if it was by sheer will alone he did not leap from the chair and tear out his throat. “A lifetime would not be long enough to adjust to the constant hunger pains, the knowledge that I will never, ever be human again. I am tainted, imperfect–”

Harry’s jaw set with irritation. Malfoy had changed alright, but some things were obviously buried far too deep. “Tainted by blood, the same way that my father’s pure blood is tainted by my mother’s muggle blood?” He leapt to his feet. “Are you sure you want to drink from something so disgusting? Is that all that matters to people like you?” he demanded. “Blood, lineage? I would have thought that you of all people should know by now that that is not what determines who you are!”

Snape’s eyes were dark and contemplative, as if deciphering that statement, Malfoy, to Harry’s delight, looked more than a little confused.

“Why, whenever we have a conversation do you make everything about yourself?” Malfoy retorted sharply. “The world doesn’t revolve around you–”

“I was merely saying that your blood doesn’t make you who you are!” Harry shouted. And then, “And from what I gather, from now on, your world does revolve around me. Me, your next feed.”

Malfoy grit his teeth, barely caging the snarl of fury behind them. “Playing with fire, Potter.”

Harry raised a brow. “I’m not afraid of you, Malfoy. I’ve faced bigger, scarier things than you. So don’t even try intimidation.” He waited for a moment, to see if Malfoy would silence at last and when he did, he tried again. “Listen, I’ve agreed to do this–”

“Oh, don’t make it sound like you’re doing me such a big favour, Potter, considering you just burst in your pants like a twelve-year-old–”

“I was drugged with your weird vampire drool!”

“Which removes your inhibitions, relaxes your body, it does not create the reaction, you fool!”

“Look, just…shut it, alright?” Harry snapped. “We’re never going to come to any kind of arrangement if we keep arguing. And I, for one, want to go and lie down before my brain starts to dribble out of my ears!”

“Or what’s left of it,” Snape murmured quietly in his corner. Harry decided to ignore that. How
was it *he* was taking the level or maturity when he was the one at the least advantage here?

“Every three days, maybe after dinner so I can just go to sleep afterwards and not have to worry about classes?” Harry suggested, thinking perhaps it might be better for his stomach to be full, also. Malfoy didn’t say anything at all, but the fact that he wasn’t arguing or disagreeing was helpful. He seemed to be amenable to the suggestion.

“I concur,” Snape said then, “And I will arrange for it to be common knowledge that you are both in need of extra lessons given your…significant involvement in the war. I will also see if I can make it look as though Professor McGonagall has arranged it.”

“Y-Yeah,” Harry nodded slowly, it still seemed so surreal, yet the dizziness in his head and the shakiness of his limbs was a constant reminder of the situations genuineness. “Right, fine. And this stays between us.” He used the arm of the settee as a support as he began to move around it, his legs wobbling like jelly. “I suppose I have classes to get to now…”

“Mr Malfoy will escort you to the dormitory and ensure you reach your bed, of course,” Snape replied shortly. “I will send a note to your teachers to explain your absence in some…other way. You are to rest after losing so much blood.”

Harry opened his mouth to argue but said nothing in the end. Hastily he pulled on his shirt and robe, picking up his bag and making his unsteady way through the door without waiting for Malfoy, without so much as a single glance back. Of course, Malfoy caught up with him. Even if he wasn’t a vampire, Harry was too shaky to get far.

“Get off me, Malfoy,” Harry snapped as Malfoy tried to take his arm. He really wished the potion would wear off so he could just explode and charge at Malfoy liked he really wanted to. In all due time, he supposed. The blond snorted then, before making do with taking Harry’s bag for him instead. At that odd act of courtesy, Harry stopped staring at him, his mouth agape. “Just what are you playing at?”

Malfoy scoffed at his words, slinging their bags over his shoulder, walking a few steps before tipping his head back in a show of indifference, his blond locks damp with sweat and framing his slightly pointed face. “Perhaps I am listening to what you said about repaying courtesy,” the blond snapped hatefully, walking on purposefully slow.

Harry scowled, but limped dazedly after him, leaning heavily on the wall. “Bullshit, you just think you have more chance of having your way if you manipulate me with fake kindness!”

At that, Malfoy growled, resisting the urge to turn and throttle his first. “Make up your mind. What is it that you want, Potter? You’re giving me a bloody migraine!” To that, oddly, Harry remained silent and the slow, *torturous* trudge to the Eighth year common room was made in silence.

Thankfully, because of classes still going on, the common room and the entire way leading to it was devoid of life. The common room was dead, the fire gone, the room as cold as Harry felt. He was shivering, shaking all over. He needed to rest. His body was aching. Trembling from head-to-toe, he only just managed to reach the stairs before his legs gave out. His arms flew out, scrambling for purchase on the banister to steady himself, but to his disgust, it was Malfoy’s grip on his arm that had kept him upright.

“Do stop trying to be a blood hero,” Draco hissed, not giving Potter the chance to argue, dragging
him up the stairs and tossing him onto his bed as soon as he’d elbowed open the door to boys’
dormitory. The most amusing snarl left Potter’s lips and Draco raised a brow at the impressive
fury, dropping the Chosen One’s bag by the side of his bed. He lingered there only to humour the
man who seemed to be close to explosion despite the calming nature of the potion. His face was
flushed with anger and Draco swore the tendons in his throat were about to snap.

“Don’t toss me around like I’m your property you arrogant arse,” Potter snapped, righting himself
on the bed, his fingers digging into the sheets.

“I may be arrogant but I can accept help when I need it you pillock, you’d run yourself into the
ground if you were left to your own devices!”

“I’m touched that you care,” Potter sneered sarcastically, “I was left to my devices most of my life
and did just fine.”

Draco shook his head in dismay, turning towards his own bed directly across from Potter’s and
beginning to change clothes. Blood and sweat could be spelled away but his sensitive senses could
still pick up the scent of Potter’s life’s blood on his shirt and he needed to be able to keep his head
clear if he was to deal with Potter’s foul temper. He rooted through his trunk, tugging out a fresh
shirt and shedding his old one.

The room fell oddly silent then and Draco turned as he pulled his fresh shirt on, just in time to
catch Potter’s eyes on him. Of course, those green eyes darted away immediately and Potter shifted
back on his bed, taking off his glasses and setting them on the side table.

No doubt to resist temptation, Draco thought, his cock still hard and hungry in his trousers, not listening to Draco’s
good sense and far too aware of the vampire’s desires.

Draco chuckled quietly at Potter’s determination to avoid his eyes and crossed the room, tying his
tie as he went towards the door. “Don’t do anything heroic like get out of that bed, Potter, you need
to recover before the swarm of irritatingly nosy ex-gryffindors arrive after lessons.”

“Sod off, Malfoy,” Harry sniped, rolling onto his side and closing his eyes, feeling every muscle in
his body still tense and quiver slightly. His body felt unsettled, unwilling to relax still, even though
he was exhausted and the potion was still in his system. Pulling the covers up under his chin, he
tried to drift, tried to fall away but could not. He could still feel the bastard’s greedy eyes on him.

Like he hasn’t had his fill already, his mind spat.

Suddenly, he felt a pressure on the bed then and he went rigid under the sheets. He felt Malfoy’s
shadow over him and he swallowed nervously. “Get off my bed,” he demanded through clenched
teeth. But Malfoy didn’t move, he remained on the side of the bed, leaning over him it felt like.

Harry winced. He’d never really enjoyed closeness in the way that other human beings did but he
never shied away from touch. And ever since the events in the dungeon that day with Voldemort,
he had found it was almost unbearable, but…

But not when you drank that potion and came under Malfoy’s touch like a panting bitch, a very
Malfoy-ish voice sneered in his head.

A snarl of anguish left him then and he flipped over, his arm tearing the covers from his body and
making to swipe at Malfoy where he loomed above like a storm-cloud threatening rain. Harry
yelped when Malfoy’s hands shot out lightning fast, pinning his hands above his head. It didn’t
take a genius to know what was causing the dark glow to those unearthly eyes. Not when there was
a distinct hardness pressing into him, slightly warmer than the rest of Malfoy’s lukewarm body. 

_Heated by my blood_, he realised, revolted at the thought that he had given Malfoy warmth.

“Get off of me, Malfoy,” Harry hissed warningly, his skin humming with restrained magic, “I don’t know why you think me agreeing to give you my blood on a _strict_ schedule changes anything between us, but let me clear something up. I still don’t want your pity fuck or anything else you have to offer me. Is that clear?! Nothing has changed, _nothing_!”

Malfoy gave an inhuman snarl, his grip on Harry’s wrists tightening. His nose was almost touching Harry’s now, his cold breath making the little hairs on the back of Harry’s neck stand on end. “Perhaps you pitying me enough to allow me some of your precious (easily replenished) blood changes nothing, but coming under my touch _does_—”

“One forced the other, you heard Snape, I had no control over it,” Harry interrupted. “Listen, I don’t know why you’re doing it but you’re grasping at straws with me—”

“It’s called adapting, Potter.”

“It’s called surrendering to instincts, the very thing you said you didn’t want to do!” Harry snapped. “It’s called not being able to separate your cock from your brain!”

Fangs broke their cover in Malfoy’s gums then, sharp and white and a hairsbreadth from Harry’s lips.

“So I’m hard, after that shameful display in the dungeons you’re hardly one to talk.” Draco punctuated his words by grinding his hips into Harry’s leg, a shallow hiss of pleasure leaving his lips. _Yes, the vampire groaned in his head, take him, he’s bursting for it. Can’t you hear his heart pounding?_ 

Draco shook his head then, trying to silence that voice. That wasn’t who he was. _He_ didn't want Potter, he was just convenient, and it was _his_ fault that his cock felt like it was about to burst afterall. He could take Potter, and then he would have some power back at least. Potter would probably even _like_ it!

_But you shouldn’t want it, or him_, his conscious mind whispered. _He’s not your lover or your friend._

Suddenly, a spark like electricity burst under his hand. He jerked where he pinned Potter. He swore that it had come from Potter’s skin.

Magic crackled there like a ripple of static and he groaned as it tingled, vibrated through his own dead flesh. _Dead_. He was dead without Potter, he realised, the only time his body felt satisfied, or even _alive_ anymore, was when he was with Harry bloody Potter. _That’s why I feel like I almost want him_, he realised, throwing himself backwards off of Potter with the sheer force of the insight.

He growled furiously, wanting desperately to kick, to bite, to _tear_ into something. But he didn’t know his own strength and barely withheld himself, his nails biting bloody gouges into his palms. Would this be his life now? Only alive when suckling at Potter’s throat and suffering his foul temper, his bitterness afterwards? He shook his head from side-to-side, a crescendo of confusion swirling like a tsunami in his head. He gave a weak snarl at last, snatching up his satchel and
bolting with vampire speed to the door.

“I have a lesson to get to, stay in bed, Potter,” he snapped before flying out the door.

What followed was the most amazing discovery. He shot down the stairs, through the castle towards his Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson – and it was like flying, only without a broom. He felt a clarity, a freedom he had only felt at Potter’s throat since he’d been changed. Every ounce of fury and confusion was blown from his senses at a hundred miles an hour and he almost laughed at the relief of it all.

None of the supposed ‘super powers’ vampires possessed had come to him over the summer. Now he realised why, he had not been feeding and so had not developed. But now he had, now he was developing alright. He felt stronger already, he was faster. He did laugh then, seeing the staircase swirling away from the landing he was on. His muscles tensed, his legs hurled him upwards and he was truly flying then, leaping through the air and landing squarely on the moving staircase.

Draco could see every thought in his head as clear as day now. The sharp breeze created by his speed as he continued speeding down the staircase, it felt like a refreshing storm after weeks of suffocating, disorientating heat. And the fire in his groan was an unbearable heat compared to the usual coldness of his skin he still had yet to adjust to.

His passions had built up like his thirst for blood had, unfortunately, Potter wasn’t as amiable about sating that hunger. He was barely agreeable to keeping him alive, and Draco could trust no one else to get that close any longer. He stopped at that, nearly scaring the life from a second year who had not noticed him flying through. He trusted Potter? That petulant, bad-tempered arse? Draco snorted, continuing up the corridor to his lesson at human speed then, that was a joke. That he would trust someone like that. Why would he?

The answer reached him as he stepped through the doors of the Defence Against the Dark Arts class and took his seat, by himself at a desk.

The fool was so stupidly honest and gallant there was simply no one else anyone could trust their life with. Even if they hated him more than Draco did, which was unlikely. the prat had complained and fought and claimed he wanted his life for his self now, but he had still given him, Draco, his blood. And then, the other, deeper truth - he and Potter were in the same boat, were so similar in pain it was ridiculous. It made perfect sense.

Bloody hell, Draco thought, dragging out his text books and setting them on the desk, waiting for the new teacher to arrive. Whoever it was hadn’t been at the staff table for the first meals and now, pushing the thoughts of Potter and his own momentarily sated hunger aside, he was curious as to who it would be. This would be the person responsible for his final marks and so, his future, after all. A future he was very determined to make better than it currently looked.

Suddenly the door flew shut and footsteps resounded in the now silent classroom. Draco frowned at the aura sweeping through his senses, unnerving his mind and slowly, he turned his head to see the new defence teacher strolling up the aisle between tables. A frown creased Draco’s brow. The man’s robes billowed about him, like a cloud of dark smog, his short, dirty blond locks slicked back so that a pair of murky blue eyes pierced Draco’s.

Why did he feel unsettled around this man? Who was he?

Casually, the teacher strode to the front of the desk, flipping back his sleeve to gesture at the
blackboard with his wand. Immediately, the chalk leapt to life scrambling frantically to write whatever the silent spell had ordered. As soon as the chalk dropped uselessly again, the man turned to face the class, who were silent in their awe. Draco studied the letters on the board, something akin to foreboding rising in his chest.

*Professor Caius Nicodemus Alaric*

The words were like a bad omen in chalk. A shiver ran down Draco’s spine then, as he raised his eyes to Alaric. The man was standing before them all now, studying them all with those cold eyes, eyes that rested far too long on Draco for his liking.

“Eighth years,” Alaric said at last, shattering the silence with his acerbic voice. It was not the soft droll of Snape’s nor the abruptness of McGonagall’s. This voice was smooth but as sharp as ice and Draco watched his every move like a hawk. There was just something about him that made him want to draw his wand for protection. He was powerful, there was no doubt about that. And Draco could not shake the feeling that this man might turn on them at the last minute.

It was the curse of the Defence Against the Dark Arts position come back to bite him for a change, it seemed.

“I understand how important this year is to you above everyone else. It is about redeeming what you lost in the travesty of a war, about proving yourselves in spite of it…about…finding yourselves.” His eyes seemed fixed to Draco then, who finally tore his gaze away and opened his book, browsing the front page distantly. He wished he’d picked a seat farther from the front. He’d picked this one because it had been the only completely empty desk, but it was in the first row.

“I can assure you, I excelled in all of my subjects and am more than academically elevated to ensure your pass in this subject. Times are hard, as we know it. You’ll all need everything you can to get by until the wizarding world settles from the chaos it has been hurled into by a mad man…”

It seemed curious to Draco that this man would be anti-Voldemort. For some reason he had him pegged as a death eater. But that obviously wasn’t the case. Draco couldn’t smell a lie on him, he passionately hated the Dark Lord just as much as he had. But there was something about him, something he couldn’t put his finger on. This man was more ominous than Severus Snape himself!

“We start this term with a brief course of what you learnt last in your sixth year, particularly that which is relevant to what you will learn this year. After the first few weeks we will have a test on the refreshed knowledge and then begin on your ‘seventh’ year education.” Alaric paused there, studying the entire classroom then. “So few of you in comparison that returned. It is…startling. You have all had your lives robbed from you, I will do what I can to ensure that you can take it back.”

There was still silence among the class. No one seemed to know what to make of him, his burning passion and yet his obvious icy soul.

“So,” Alaric stated simply, breaking the tension with a lighter voice, lilting slightly as he pulled a roll of parchment towards him on the teacher’s desk. “I have your sixth year syllabus here…”

The rest of the lesson went by without a hitch. It was mostly revision but everyone seemed to be rusty, they definitely needed this ‘refreshment’ and Professor Alaric, he even began to seem more human as he nattered on. He answered questions, awarding Granger with a slither of a smile when she got his own questions correct, even making sure that the quieter students were learning as well.
Draco, however, rebuffed his one attempt at assistance, and could not help but feel that that offer had been for show more than anything. He seemed oddly fixated on him. It reminded Draco of the sickening hunger he’d seen in the Dark Lord’s eyes before the brute had had the gall to ask for his presence in his bed. The memory still made Draco’s lukewarm blood run cold…

“You are quite handsome, Draco,” the Dark Lord crooned as he rose slowly from his throne-like chair. Only a few of the death eaters remained at the table in the manor now, among them his parents, who sat either side of him, horrified at the approach of their master and his fixation with their only child.

“Beautiful, I might even say,” Voldemort continued in that low, rasping whisper, a sound that made the hairs on Draco’s arms prickle. Sweat broke out across his forehead and he shivered in the cold room, his master’s breath echoing as he approached. Then those icy, long, pallid fingers were on him, caressing his cheek. He couldn’t help it, he flinched.

A low, disturbing chuckle whispered over Voldemort’s lips, that foul breath touching his skin. “You’re beautiful indeed, and you know it. So conceited, so arrogant, bold as brass and yet deep down you’re as innocent and pure as the first few drops of snow.” Those fingers turned slightly, the backs of the knuckles running down Draco’s temple in a feigned loving caress. “I would very much like to take you to my bed.”

There was an unmistakable intake of breath from his mother at his side then, a flinch of his father’s hands on the table and a hiss of seething jealousy from Bellatrix.

“My Lord!” Bellatrix snarled, “that scrawny little brat? I could–”

“Silence, Bella,” Voldemort hissed with all the venom of a cobra, seizing Draco’s chin firmly and tilting his face back towards him, his pale lips lifted into a maniacal, perverted smirk. He liked Draco’s reluctance. Liked that he knew Draco would have to say yes, pretend he wanted to, even if he didn’t. “Who I wish to take as consort is my wish.”

Draco closed his eyes, trying to stop the tears from welling, but when he opened them again, he turned his head away, looking imploringly to his father. The man remained frozen, staring at his son longingly, desperate to help but fear rooted him to his seat. A lump rose in Draco’s throat and he craned his neck to greet his mother’s gaze, his breath catching. That was it.

“My Lord!” Narcissa declared in desperation, throwing herself to her knees on the cold stone floor, tugging at her master’s robes without an ounce of shame. “Please! My Lord, my son, not my son! He’s just a boy, a child, my Lord, please. He is as you say, he is pure, he is afraid. He isn’t ready. Take me, my Lord, take Bella, anyone but my little–!”

SMACK!

The sound resounded through the room. Draco flinched at the collision of Voldemort’s hand slamming into his mother’s face. His stomach churned at the sight of her neck snapping to the side, her body thrown back from the blow. Her chest rose and fell frantically but she was otherwise immobilised by the shock of the blow.

“You dare to insult me this way!” Voldemort bellowed, releasing Draco to stare down at his fallen mother. “You beg for mercy as if my taking your son is the worst punishment imaginable? Are you
so concerned for his petty virginity that you would be so foolish! I am the Dark Lord! He is my servant, you are all my servants! If I desire something you will all strive to give it to me and delight when I receive it, even if it is the head of your newborns! You have crossed me already on matters concerning your son, Narcissa. Be careful not to cross me again.”

With that, Voldemort turned back to Draco again, evidently satisfied that he, Draco was now shaking. The blond in question felt his stomach lurch. He was going to be sick, of that he was certain. “Now, Draco. I wish for you to as my consort. Will you deny me?!?” His voice was demanding, unwavering and Draco shook so hard he thought he would choke on his saliva. He turned his head to the side once more. Seeing his father still in his chair ended it for him then and he lost himself to despair.

“My Lord,” Draco breathed desperately, closing his eyes, unable to face the world that had failed him so spectacularly. “I… I cannot. Please, my Lord. I cannot… cannot do that. I am…” His grit his teeth, shame rippling through his body with his following words. “I don’t want… I can’t do it.”

He had paid dearly for those words, days of torture at the monster Fenrir Greyback’s hand and then ultimately, this, infinity bound to Potter’s blood if he desired to live at all. He had been afraid, had been too cowardly and now he would pay for it every day for the rest of eternity. Without thinking, he ran his fingers over his face, wondering if the scars still remained, and if so, how many.

“Mr Malfoy.”

That cold, icy voice tore him back to reality violently. Draco flinched as he glanced up and found Professor Alaric at his desk, staring down at him with something alarmingly akin to hatred thawing the ice in his eyes. Draco sat up a little straighter, raising his chin defiantly. He was afraid yes, and unnerved, but nothing worse than what he had already suffered could happen to him now. He was already as good as dead with Potter as his only lifeline. He would not betray his fear again. He decided right then, he would not be a coward and shame his mother and father anymore.

“Professor Alaric?” Draco said airily, folding his hands on his desk in front of him casually, waiting for the professor to continue.

Professor Alaric raised a dark brow, surveying him thoughtfully. “It seems we are out of time, class dismissed,” Professor Alaric declared softly, and the students moved about gathering their things and leaving the room, Draco however, was rooted to the spot with Alaric’s simple command of, “Mr Malfoy, stay behind.”

When the classroom had finally cleared, Professor Alaric swept across the room, shutting the door quietly behind the last student. Draco frowned at the foreboding in the fluidness of his movements, and stood from his seat, his limbs tensed, ready to fight back or flee.

“Is there something distracting you from my lessons already, Mr Malfoy?” Professor Alaric asked, approaching Draco slowly.

Draco barely withheld his flinch. It was easier to stay still now he was no longer human, he found. “Things on my mind, Professor,” Draco admitted aloofly. “The war had an affect on all of us. I’m…I’m not used to being back at Hogwarts. It seems like it can’t really be over – the Dark Lord, the war…”
Professor Alaric tilted his head to the side, laying his hands on the table and leaning over slightly. He was taller, much taller than Draco and he towered over him. But Draco did not so much as bend. He watched Alaric’s mouth open then in speech, poised to react to whatever he might attack him with first.

“Dark Lord indeed,” Professor Alaric sneered. “Whether your life was heaven or hell under His reign is irrelevant to me, Mr Malfoy. My opinion was formed of you by a much more specific event.” Those eyes flashed with hatred again, dark and fiery. Draco took a step back but those hands shot forwards, pinning his to the desk top.

“What exactly is it I am supposed to have done to you? I have never heard of you before today!” Draco snapped, trying to yank himself free but failing. It was as if Professor Alaric had heightened his strength with magic somehow without him noticing.

Instead of answering him, however, Alaric’s sneer of disdain grew and he leant even closer. He ignored Draco’s words and asked instead, something completely random. “Where is Mr Potter today, Mr Malfoy?” he asked.

Draco’s eyes widened, but otherwise betrayed no movement. “He came over peculiar in the dungeons and Professor Snape asked me to escort him back to the dormitories. You can ask Professor Snape, you can go check to see if the precious golden boy is still in his bed if you’re so concerned!” The pressure on his hands became unbearable then, he swore he felt his bones grinding together under Alaric’s grip.

“Mr Potter is not my concern, it is what you did today to him that I am asking about.”

Draco winced when Alaric released him to draw his wand. Before he knew it, a flash of light had consumed his vision.

“Legilimens!” Alaric cried. Draco was back there again, in the dungeons, pain laced his bones now as it did then, reminding him exactly what Potter had rescued him from. A flash of shifting between memories then, and he saw Potter, saw him strip and step towards him with shaky confidence. Felt him groan and arch under his tongue as he lapped frantically at his throat. Felt Potter’s cum against his blood-warmed palm…

Suddenly he was thrown back into the present, so roughly that he hurtled across the room and slammed into the desks, knocking them over. His chest was heaving with breath he didn’t need, his body was ice-cold and sweating as it had been before Potter fed him. He struggled to right himself in the debris of wood from the desks, his body throbbing with pain, with desire. Seeing Potter like that again, reliving his pleasure had made his cock harden in his trousers.

It had also made his fangs sprout from his gums for Professor Alaric to see quite clearly.

“Just as I thought,” Professor Alaric snarled, stepping towards him, wand still drawn. “So young and shiny new. Just a hint of blood or arousal from your First and your fangs burst like an adolescent in a wet dream.” He kicked aside some debris from his path, the splinters landing on Draco who now shot to his feet with vampire speed, his fangs throbbing with want for Potter.

“So if you know I am a vampire perhaps you know it isn’t wise to taunt me,” Draco snapped, stepping up to the man now. A hand at his throat stifled his misplaced confidence, however, and it left him dangling off the ground, his body singing with want and pain.
“You’re a sapling. A runt who knows nothing of the world around him,” Professor Alaric retorted coolly. “And you will say nothing of this, of me or the entire school, nay the world will discover what you are.”

Draco’s eyes widened. No that would mean the end of him. Surely. He could not endure that.

“What do you bloody well want from me!?” Draco snapped, clawing frantically at Professor Alaric’s grip on his throat. “You don’t care about Potter or the Dark Lord so what in Merlin’s name is it you want!?”

A cruel chuckle pierced the air between them then, sliding slickly over Alaric’s lips like blood.

_Blood. Yes. Potter’s blood!_ The vampire in him swooned.

“You have wronged me greatly, Draco Abraxas Malfoy,” Alaric purred dangerously. “And I intend to make you suffer for it.”

Draco’s mouth opened with a response, only to slam shut again with the impact of something hard, unyielding and _searing_ hot against his jaw. He staggered back, crying out in anguish and clawing frantically at his face. His eyes flew wide, and he gawped at the sight of his own blood and molten flesh dangling sickeningly off of the knuckle-duster that had suddenly appeared on Alaric’s right fist.

The vampire felt the tattered skin knitting back together swiftly, but it did not appease the searing pain he had felt scarce seconds before. He took a few more steps back, trying to keep out of range. Such pain, he never thought he would feel it again after his torture in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor. That had been his one good thought, and then he had faced the unbearable agony of hunger for blood, and now this.

_I am still weak, still pathetic, no amount of superhuman speed or growing strength will ever save me from that._

“Yes,” Alaric breathed then, shaking the vile droplets of his flesh off his hand like water. “You can still feel pain as greatly as you did when you were human. But the most perfect thing about making you suffer is that you heal faster, leaving me a stunningly pristine canvas once more.”

The demon in professor’s skin dragged his scalding weapon down the length of Draco’s chest, creating a bloody, smoking trail of molten flesh. Draco screamed so loud he swore he felt something in his throat tear. His hands struggled, swiping at Alaric frantically, squirming, screeching, anything to escape this torment. He had never felt pain of this like before. Not since that werewolf.

He set his jaw, grinding his teeth as he fought against the urge to cry. Could he even cry? He threw his head back as the moments, long, agonising moments _burned_ away with each new strip of flesh that grew only to be torn back again. He closed his eyes tight, his entire body tense as if he could _will_ the strength to him, summon it to throw this monster off. But he was still weak, he could still not save himself, and Potter certainly wasn’t on hand to do it this time.

_I will be stronger, _the vampire in him snarled as the pain drove him near to a madness he’d long thought he’d forgotten. _I will come into my strength and then I will not allow anyone to harm me. No one will have power over me, not ever again!_
Suddenly, the sharp, piercing force of a new weapon tore into his left hand pinning it against the wall like a collector might spear a butterfly to its casing. That’s all he was, a bug to this man, to all of them. But that would change. A roar of agony ripped from his lips as the flat blade was twisted and Malfoy jerked as he saw blood rolling down the wall, blood that was boiling from the mere presence of the white-hot weapon.

It was silver, both of these weapons were, Draco realised, recalling that knowledge from his third year Defence Against the Dark Arts class. He could taste the metallic tang in the air. It felt like that blow with it had sapped some of the life Potter’s blood had given him. He had to get out of here.

With vampire speed he drew his wand. Alaric had had the element of surprise before and Draco had not come into his full strength yet, but the professor could not match Draco for speed.

“Avis!” Draco screamed and a torrent of birds erupted from his wand, flying towards the professor like a tide of bullets. He watched Alaric duck and he dove forwards, snatching his bag off the side and flying out of the room. Panic thumped frantically in his chest as he fled the Defence Against the Dark Arts floor, putting as much distance between it and him as possible.

What did this Alaric want from him? Why? What was he?

Another figure trapping him in perpetual, inescapable agony, it seemed. For he could never tell anyone, not if he wished to have even a chance at life, not if he wished for his parents to retain as much of one as possible. He could avoid being alone with Professor Alaric, however. In fact, he would make a point to from now on. If I hope to survive another year at Hogwarts I will have to.

~To Be Continued...
Thankfully no one made too big a fuss about Harry’s diversion from class into bed. He’d said Professor Snape had guessed it was merely a backlash of the spell he’d used to defeat Voldemort and they had just nodded and moved on from the subject. They hadn’t even questioned his mention of Professor Snape excusing him from classes. Their acceptance, no, their lackadaisical attitude left him feeling quite disgruntled for days.

He didn’t know what to say to the realisation that struck him with their indifference – they didn’t care, or at least, he wasn’t at the forefront of their minds anymore. Of course not, he scolded himself, not wanting to sound pitiable, even in his own head. They have each other now and can afford to be together without fearing either one of them will be killed. He bowed out gracefully, remaining quiet as they sat around the fireplace in the common room, him tucked into the corner of the settee, them on the rug below, with Hermione patiently trying to help Ron with their Charms work.

It was the first Saturday of the term and he kept his head down, focussing hard on his letter to Remus and Tonks, allowing his two friends to chat without interruption from him. But the letter ‘home’ was hard. He kept sounding far too forced and then too sarcastic or bitter, and now he had eliminated all of those, there was hardly any body to his simple words.

Bloody fantastic, he thought, frustrated, they invite me into their family and I cant even write a decent letter home to them. He had become an awful, wretched thing somewhere along the line. The words he had once spoken to Sirius echoed ominously in his head. “What if I am becoming bad?” He feared that was exactly what was happening.

“Harry? Harry are you even in there, mate?”

Ron’s voice shook him from his sinister dwellings and Harry glanced down to see both him and Hermione staring up at him impatiently. They had obviously been vying for his attention for a few
“Yeah, sorry…writing to Remus is harder than I thought.” He flicked his eyes down to the paper and back to them again. “It’s not like writing to Sirius, there’s more…pressure to say the right thing. I don’t know why, since with Sirius I always had to write as if we were being watched, but–”

“You’re not used to having a stable family,” Hermione cut across him, her smile warm even though her words sounded far too rehearsed to his ears. He’d barely said a word to them the last few days and when he tried they seemed to head him off. As if afraid of where his words would end up…

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“It’s something you’ll get used to,” she continued, “And Remus and Tonks love you. They understand. It’ll all work out alright, Harry.”

“Just think, Christmas time with them will be amazing!” Ron chimed in. Although, if he’d been paying attention, he would’ve seen Harry wince at his words. That was right, of course, with his own home in Siddlebury cottage, the usual invitation to the Burrow wouldn’t be extended.

"Stop whining you ungrateful git," he spat at himself. "No wonder they don’t want to talk to you if all you do is sit there feeling sorry for yourself. It’s like you’re still living the bloody war!

“Have you seen Malfoy at all today, Harry?” Hermione asked then. Harry frowned, his stomach muscles tensing with wariness.

“No,” he replied quickly, with the truth. Malfoy had been gone from his bed every morning he’d woken up and was already in bed every night he went up to sleep. He would’ve thought it’d be the other way around, being as vampires didn’t naturally walk around in the day. He paused then. How did Malfoy walk around during the day?

“Why? Should I make it my priority to know where the prat is?” he asked defensively.

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “If you want to have a hope of completing your Charms homework you should. And you know that as you were absent for the first Defence lesson you’re his seating partner there as well by default.”

Harry swore under his breath. Yes, he did know, he’d discovered this by finding everyone already
at seats when he stumbled into the next day’s defence class. It was lucky they were only revising, he hadn’t had to speak to Malfoy at all since the incident a few days ago. In fact…now he thought about it, Malfoy seemed to be avoiding him purposefully, practically hanging off the side of his chair to avoid touching him or breathing his air.

“T’ll catch up with the git later,” he mumbled, folding his letter neatly, thereby declaring it finished. “I had better take this to one of the school owls and send it off before Remus thinks something’s happened to me.” He got to his feet, not surprised that they did not move to follow.

“Oh,” Hermione said in an odd voice, “Do you…maybe want to meet back up then?” she asked. “Maybe we can all do our Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts homework together?”

Somehow, the image of the three of them at a table with Draco Malfoy doing homework civilly didn’t work in his head.

“Depends how arsey his royal highness is feeling today,” Harry said. It was only partially true, of course. He could see how uncomfortable they looked. How they wanted to get away to be alone. Bow out gracefully, his mind echoed. And he did.

After talking his way out of the door, Harry slowly made his way out of the castle. The September air was bitter and chilly today and he found himself wishing he’d brought his scarf by the time he reached the wooden bridge. This place made him nostalgic. It made him think of Remus and their first talk about his mother…

He clutched the letter tighter to his chest.

He felt as lost now as he did then, confused, almost hurt. Hogwarts was his home and he was happy to be there, but at the same time, he longed for the subtle comfort of Siddlebury cottage. Then, in all honesty, he was terrified of both, of belonging to either, to any one place. Anything he had ever grabbed hold of, anything he had belonged to or had belonged to him had been torn away. Even his poor owl. Hence the trip to the Owlery.

“Where are you off to, Potter?”

Harry froze as that voice rippled through his ears for the first time in days. It was almost the first time he had been the sole focus of anyone in days. He did not turn but he remained still as the sound of those footsteps carried through the wooden bridge, which was thankfully empty besides
the two of them.

Finally, the footsteps stopped. Harry raised his chin, staring boldly into those rich, grey eyes.

“Not that it’s any of your business, Malfoy, but I’m going to send a letter,” he explained flippantly. “Could you mind out of my way so that I can send this before lunch time?” With that, he made to move past his obstruction only to find it had moved directly into his path. He glared furiously up into Malfoy’s eyes. “What is it now?” he demanded.

Malfoy raised a delicate brow, but now that he was this close and focussing on him, Harry could see it. That skin was so deathly pale that those veins were vibrantly blue beneath it. Those eyes were hungry, his face was gaunt. He understood now, but Malfoy confirmed it in words nonetheless.

“I last fed on Monday, it is now Saturday. We agreed three days but it has now been five,” Malfoy said silkily, his body shifting to arch a hairsbreadth closer to Harry. Harry wanted to flinch back, but forced himself not to move.

“Of course, your fix,” Harry sneered. “Look we didn’t set a specific day. But if you want to be on such strict schedule–”

“Naturally I do when it concerns my life,” Draco interjected. Harry grinded his teeth.

“If you want to be on such strict schedule, we’ll say Wednesday evenings after dinner and Saturdays. Sound suitable to you?” He was trying to sound mature but he could hear the sarcasm in his voice. Strangely enough, however, instead of using it as means of an argument, Malfoy just nodded agreeably.

“I concur,” Malfoy said softly, his eyes dipping just enough to tell Harry that they were drinking in the sight of his throat.

“Hungry?” Harry asked derisively. Draco said nothing. To this silence, Harry shrugged and simply moved around Malfoy to continue on his path up to the Owlery. His footsteps were now shadowed, however. A low sigh tumbled over his lips and he carried on walking. He couldn’t avoid this forever, he supposed.
“We have homework for both Charms and Defence,” Harry said as they passed the stone circle and headed up to the Owlery. He saw Malfoy flinch at the last word, however, and frowned. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing.” Malfoy replied quickly, following behind him. “We can work on our homework after I feed.” There was a distinctive pause in his speech then and Harry knew that his brain was working frantically. He could practically hear the cogs whirring. Then, “If that’s… alright with you?” Draco added.

Harry nearly choked on his spittle at that and almost gave a little smirk. Almost. “You think ravaging my neck in the open is the best idea?” Harry asked.

“Professor Snape gave us permission to use his private rooms to ensure we won’t be discovered – he won’t be there,” he added quickly when he saw Potter’s expression. The rest of the trip up to where the owls rested was quiet after that.

In his silence, however, Draco witnessed Potter’s lost look, his sadness. It was so painfully similar to his own that it made his hungry body ache with the reminder. When he was thinking about Potter, he didn’t usually think about his predicament in life. In fact, this was the first time he had thought about anything other than sex and blood whilst looking at Potter since he’d been changed. Was this sympathy in pain stronger than his thirst? He wasn’t so sure anything could be more powerful. It frightened him sometimes how strong it was…

And yet the pain in Potter’s eyes as he caressed the greying barn owl at the back of the head, it was positively heart-wrenching.

“Didn’t you have your own owl?” Draco said then, confused. “The small white one.”

Potter turned to look on him, his eyes shining treacherously. “I did. She died.”

“Oh,” Draco murmured, not really sure what to say to such a blunt statement. That was another thing that unnerved him about his sudden interest in Potter. It rendered him useless at things he had been previously excellent at. He had always taken pride in his articulate, witty ways. And now…

“How did she die?” he asked, watching Potter’s face harden.
“When I was moved from my Aunt and Uncle’s house for safety on my seventeenth birthday. The Death Eaters ambushed us, Hedwig tried to protect me,” Potter explained, trying to sound unaffected. But the emotion drowned his voice. Potter was incapable of masking emotion adequately. And besides which, Draco could smell his dejection.

Potter turned then, gazing through the glassless window and out into the murky mid-morning that the owl had taken off into. Potter shivered as a brutal breeze burst through the Owlery. He ran his hands up and down his arms distractedly. “Another thing lost because I cared about it…”

Draco watched him a moment more, his dead chest clenching with pained spasms that weren’t truly his own. Potter’s heart was hurting, and had been for some time now.

“Here,” Draco said then, taking off his robe (merely a ornamental to him) and offering it to Potter.

Finally Potter tore his gaze from the horizon, frowning at his offering even as he took it. But did not put it on. He clutched it thoughtfully for a moment, thankfully it was a simple black winter robe, not a slytherin one, or else Potter might have refused it outright and started another row.

“Is it cursed?” Potter asked, a hint of a joke in his voice. Draco barely withheld a smirk.

“I just happen to like my meals warm,” he said simply.

Potter scowled at that, but only to hide the slight blush dusting his cheeks, Draco thought. It was almost to surreal, that they could be having a conversation without animosity.

“The way the Prophet tells it, you live with the werewolf that taught here in our third year, now,” Draco said conversationally as they headed back to the castle. He couldn’t help but wonder why he was even bothering to make small talk with someone who hated him with a passion.

“Remus Lupin,” the man corrected him sharply, a glare accompanying his words as he pulled Draco’s fur-lined robe closer around him. It really was freezing today, he supposed. To humans. “And yes I am, his wife is your cousin, Nymphadora Tonks.”

Draco nodded vaguely, he knew of Andromeda Tonks of course.
“Remus was friends, best friends with my father and godfather,” Potter elaborated.

“So you had nowhere else to go then? I thought you were an honorary Weasel?” Draco asked, expecting to provoke some fire in those eyes, but the mention of Weasley seemed to have him almost as melancholy as the mention of his dead owl.

“I can’t spend my whole life round there. The Weasleys have their own lives and…well, Ron and Hermione are together, they need space. They don’t need a third wheel rolling along behind them.”

Draco understood then, it all made perfect sense. Somehow it had all clicked into place with the snippets of information he had gathered over the last few minutes. “I see, that’s why you’re wandering around looking for somewhere quiet to mope then,” he said. Potter stopped, whirling on his feet to face him. They had reached the wooden bridge again and it creaked menacingly beneath Potter’s steps, heavy with fury. “Ever since we returned to school you’ve been shying away from everything, you barely even talk to those two ‘friends’ of yours. You look like you’re in your own bloody world most of the time, and a world of misery at that.”

“Says you!” Potter snarled, invading his personal space, his body shaking with anger as well as cold now. “The only time you’ve acted alive is when you’ve been shadowing me like a bad smell! Where do you get off judging my life? You don’t even have one! You’re dead!”

Draco gave an other-worldly, animalistic snarl. He threw himself at Potter, slamming him against the side of the bridge, hearing it groan in negation at the force. Potter hissed, his hand catching on the rough splinters of wood and gouging a few droplets of precious blood from his palm. The sweet, musky smell rolled up Draco’s nostrils, steaming up his mind with the hunger he had been struggling to repress for days, the arousal that was still not sated.

The incident with Alaric had made it worse, the hunger. His body would have been able to wait the few days, but after being assaulted like that, his supplies were diminished. He was famished once again, not on the verge of death like before but on the verge of doing something very unforgiveable to Potter if he didn’t put some distance between them. And now!

“Be very careful, Potter, you seem to forget what I am. I’m not the schoolboy you’ve fought with all these years—”

“You’re still the same ponce I’ve been trying to take down a peg or two, you’re still so far up your arse you can’t see sunlight – only now it’s because it’ll kill you if you don’t!” Potter snapped back.
“You’re terrified of accepting what you are, you fight it every step of the way. You don’t even accept that the vampire and you are the same thing! And yet you follow me around because the only time your rotten heart beats is when you’re making my life even more miserable than yours!”

With another growl, Draco seized Potter’s wounded hand, bringing it up so that he could watch the smear of blood run down Potter’s hot palm. So warm, he was practically burning in his icy grasp. If he didn’t know better he’d fear his own ivory skin might melt. He felt himself salivating, panting and was only anchored to reality by Potter struggling to steal his hand back.

“Our lives are equally miserable,” Draco conceded, not lowering that captive hand, in fact leaning closer to sniff the crimson line of fluid like a beverage he must savour. He inhaled the scent deeply before speaking again, his voice husky with want. “But you are just as lifeless as me and as you said, I’m dead.” The latter was so soft a hiss that it was almost lost on the wind, which rippled through their hair, across their skin. It made Potter shudder again.

“And another thing, Potter,” Draco all-but purred, “The only time your bitter little heart shows any sign of life is when I provoke you…” He leant in closer, so that his breath danced across Potter’s cheeks which were flushed with anger, blood just beneath the skin. Yes, he’d never looked more alive. “When I bite you,” Draco concluded and before Potter could say another word he raised that palm to his lips and lapped slowly, seductively at the minute wound.

A sharp intake of breath from Potter and the scent of arousal bolting through Draco’s nose told him exactly how Potter felt about the way he curled the blood on the very tip of his tongue, making sure to tickle that hot palm as he did so.

“N-No!” Harry gasped out, voice raspy. “N-Not… Not here, someone will see us!”

Draco could not help but chuckle at the half-heartedness of that request. He lapped at Potter’s palm a bit more, sealing the wound and tasting his untainted blood a second more before stepping back. There needed to be space between them or he would jump him right there. It was a miracle someone hadn’t come along already…

“To Professor Snape’s private quarters, Potter, or I won’t be held responsible.”

Harry shot down the bridge at a brusque walk, desperate to put some distance between them so that he could compose himself on the way down to the dungeons. No one had ever touched him like this before, that was the only reason seven years of hatred was so easily overcome with a little
zap of arousal.

And Malfoy is a vampire too, he reminded himself, giving himself excuses. His spit does weird things to humans, that’s the whole point, that I can’t control myself...

But you can’t control yourself with the Temporentia Sensium either, the very ‘Malfoy’ like voice reminded him. His flushed skin heated even more and he hastened his steps, feeling Malfoy following at a safe distance behind. Whatever Malfoy may have said about him being the only thing to make him feel alive, Harry was sure this would be the death of him.

His weird spit thing, he told himself over and over again as he headed towards the ominous shadow of Snape’s rooms. That’s the only reason my heart won’t stop beating, why my body feels so hot...

For the first time he wished he’d had the chance to experience sex before now, so that he might compare what he was feeling now to real sex. So he would know if this was just a vampire thing or sex thing.

It took too long, and yet not long enough for them to reach that same dimly lit room they had done that awful deed in a few days ago. It was the same as before. The fire was burning in the hearth, casting a forebodingly warm glow over the room. This time though, there were the additional enchanted candles floating overhead, only adding to his unease. A trickle of sweat dribbled down the back of his neck.

Suddenly, he felt a gentle pressure on his shoulder and he leapt back, nearly jumping out of his skin. Yes. He was far too on edge. Malfoy raised a brow at him, evidently enjoying the sight of him flustered, frustrated and confused.

“Let’s get this over with,” Harry grumbled. He swore his skin was itching with apprehension. Or maybe that was just the heat.

“Drink this,” Malfoy said, pressing a small vial of familiar potion into Potter’s hand. Harry gulped it down, finding it hard to swallow his throat was so dry. Then, came the stunning blow.

“Take the robe off,” Malfoy instructed.
Potter’s eyes went wide. Even though he had stripped off his robe without thinking the first time, it seemed far more forbidden now he gave thought to it. Now that Malfoy was coherent. Now that his cock was already hard from that teasing touch of that tongue earlier. “What?” he asked dumbly, as if Malfoy had spoken in a foreign language.

“It is expensive and I won’t have it sullied with blood,” Draco said, his voice husky now with desire. “And besides which, you’ll be more comfortable this way.”

Still, Potter did not budge. He just stood there gawping at him.

Huffing impatiently, his hunger and lust both roaring in his ears, Draco spanned the gap between them, his hands reaching for the fur-lined robe still wrapped around Potter’s body.

Finally Potter moved. He flinched when Draco’s hands seized the collar of the borrowed robe and pushed it off his shoulders.

“This isn’t a bloody romance novel,” Potter rasped out, the robe sliding off of his shoulders and pooling at his feet. He no doubt felt worryingly naked in only his shirt and trousers now. “There’s no need for all this seduction. I’m just your dinner.”

“Do make up your mind what you want then, Potter, since I am clearly not the only one confused about what I am,” Draco whispered, punctuating his words by edging forwards. His hands slid up Potter’s throat, hovering just above that blisteringly hot flesh. His own was slowly heating in such proximity to that warmth. He watched Potter’s lips move soundlessly, striving for speech. Potter shuddered and Draco drank it in, caressing the shape of Potter’s jaw, then his cheekbones, feeling the flush there warm him. Damn the life he felt flourish in his chest at the feel of him, the taste…

“Careful, Malfoy,” Potter panted, “I might get the impression you fancy me.”

“Never,” Draco growled breathily, “I just fancy the idea of life very much.”

Potter frowned. “Don’t flirt with me,” he warned him, “I won’t be used by anyone again. I’m not yours. I’m not anything to you but sustenance. You have no chance with me, not ever.”
“We’ll see about that,” Draco sneered, his fangs gleaming in the soft light now. He could just see Potter crawling on his knees, begging for a bit of heavy petting. Begging for him. Yes, he quite liked that image of the power he could have over Potter, the most powerful wizard in the world, especially in light of the fact that he needed the idiot’s blood to survive. “We’re one in the same, Potter. Don’t act like you’re better than me.” He stole the breath from those lungs then, seizing the hair at Potter’s nape and tugging his head to the side. All that unsettling intimacy was gone now, he hoped, it made Potter incredibly bad tempered. And it disturbed him how good the prat smelled when he was angry.

_This definitely is a curse_, he thought, the vampire in him disagreeing as he smoothed his mouth over that arched throat. “I’ve been thinking, Potter,” Draco breathed over that sweat-dampened skin, his tongue flickering out to lap at his throbbing pulse. “It would explain a lot of if Blaise’s words from the start of term held some truth.” He felt Potter freeze in his arms, his body angry but not tense. No, it was soft and pliable from the _Temporentia Sensium_.

Draco grazed his throat with his fangs, unable to resist savouring this pre-ecstasy even as famished as he was. The vampire wanted the poetry of it, the seduction. It was its _hunt_. Then, he elaborated on his previous words, “Are you a virgin, Potter?”

Potter’s fingers dug into his shoulders, trying desperately to tear his inhumanly strong skin. Failing. “You prick,” he snarled, fighting the potion in his determination to be angry. “You’re doing the molesting, you sick-head! I’m just reacting to friction and hormones!” He shoved at Draco roughly, still trapped in his grasp. “You just can’t keep your hands off me, can you?” Potter sneered.

Draco saw red then. Nobody had mocked him since he had been under Fenrir Greyback’s mercy. And no one would again if he could help it. He could not help but endure Alaric’s torture if he hoped to retain a low profile, to keep away from dark spells and anything suspicious. But he’d rip out his own throat before he let Potter walk all over him. His eyes flashed with a lethal mix of fury, hunger and lust. A growl of all three flew from his throat. A flash of his fangs were the only further warning before he seized Potter by his hair and sank those fangs into his throat.

A startled groan escaped his victim, and he drank that in as greedily as the blood flowing out over his tongue. His fingers tightened in Potter’s hair and he pulled their bodies tightly together, grinding his hips into Potter’s as he drank.

_So good!_ He thought, his body lost to the frenzy but his mind sharp thanks to the _Temporentia Sensium_. He was fully aware of every little breath that fluttered into Potter’s lungs, every dribble of sweat…

He wanted to speak, to taunt Potter for how his virginity only made him more pathetic, more
vulnerable to his allure. Wanted to torment him for reacting so shamelessly, if only to make himself feel better for enjoying this too much. He wanted to, but was loathe to waste any of this life-giving fluid. This was the only time the pains of hunger ceased, the only time his mind wasn’t weighed down by fear, hatred, confusion, self-loathing…

No. Now he was flying. He didn’t much care where this feather-light oblivion had come from as long as he could have it. As long as he felt something good once in a while.

He felt Potter begin to undulate with his own movements then, felt him grind his cock into his hips with a sensual dance. The pants Potter emitted were pained now, his fingers still clawing at his, Draco’s shoulders as if he were fighting a battle in his head - feel more pleasure or push his captor away.


“I’m not an animal!” Potter screamed then, his voice breaking with the intensity of his fury. Draco’s eyes widened and he pulled back, staring into those fiery green eyes and seeing himself in them, hyper-aware of every fleck in those depths now that he had fed. Now he had been restored from Alaric’s attack.

He could feel Potter’s heat, his anger like it was something solid caressing him, grazing his skin with the intent to harm but not the conviction. They were both panting. Potter with anger, arousal, exertion, he, Draco, with vitality, desire and no little amount of apprehension.

“Did you just read my bloody mind, Potter?!” he demanded, scowling.

“I’m not an animal,” Potter repeated, his voice dangerously raspy. “I’m not. I’m *not*…!”

Draco chuckled mirthlessly, wiping Potter’s blood from his mouth. His eyes were dilated and rich again now, staring at the wasting blood rolling down Potter’s neck where he hadn’t sealed the wound yet. Potter was clutching at it with his hand, still too angry to feel the hurt that would be starting to ebb at his senses with Draco’s saliva drying.

“Struck a nerve, have I?” Malfoy sneered. “You plucked that thought right out of my mind – how?”
But it seemed Potter could not see past that initial insult. It was a raw point with him for some reason. Blood was still trickling through his fingers slowly and Malfoy gave a sigh of indignation, stepping closer. “Let me close the wound at least before you storm off in a mood.”

“I have a bloody wand!” Potter snapped.

“No spell can heal a vampire bite, just as no spell can heal a werewolf bite, not as well as a the attacker’s own saliva anyway. If you want to have a new scar to show your oblivious friends then by all means, run away like a coward.”

That face hardened. “I’m not a coward or an animal. Don’t brand me your own labels to try and make yourself feel better,” Potter growled, tilting his head to the side reluctantly.

Draco scowled, wanting to look (and desperate to feel) revolted as he approached Potter and lowered his head to the crying wound. His eyes fluttered shut and he sealed the wound with his mouth, lathing the pierced flesh with soft, continuous passes of his tongue. The breath in Potter’s chest fluctuated unnaturally, his arms held tense by his side, as if struggling not to push him away or claw at him in ecstasy – or both.

Draco strained to hear some stray thought of Potter’s, strived to make his own mental insults reach Potter again in experiment, but nothing happened. Potter remained rigid under him and when he, Draco pulled back once the wound completely healed, there was still no echo of either of their thoughts in the other’s head. He would have to speak to Severus about this later…

“You’re welcome,” Draco grumbled sarcastically, watching as Potter huffed and started to clothe his upper body once more. He didn’t know which he was more intrigued about, the fact that Potter had somehow stolen thoughts from his head without realising, or the way in which a few little words seemed to get under his skin. Granted, Potter was a hot-headed imbecile, with a temper of the like Draco had never seen, but it was still curious.

Casting a refreshing cleansing spell on himself to eradicate the smell of blood and sweat and arousal, Draco could not help but notice that his arousal, while gone, had been replaced by frustration. It seemed to be the same with Potter. “You composed yourself a bit better this time,” he mused, so that Potter could hear. “I was right, wasn’t I? When I fed from you, that was the first kind of…sexual touch you’d had with anyone else, wasn’t it?”

Harry glowered at him. “I’ve kissed two girls, I wank like any bloke does and then…this,
whatever this is, with you.” He shuddered, as if the very subject was repulsive. “It must’ve been nice for you to have time to think about nothing but sex like any other bloke our age but I didn’t – I never had the luxury. So before you take the piss out of me for being a virgin whose thighs you couldn’t floss between, think really hard about why it was I never had the luxury of half the things most my age have.”

To that, Draco merely chuckled. “‘…Floss between’ that’s a good one, Potter, I’m disappointed that I didn’t come up with that myself.” He reached for the blood replenishing potion that Severus had left, passing it roughly to Potter and watching him down the neatly measured dose. “Care to explain why you’re so touchy about being cast in the same light as me?” Draco persisted.

“Because we’re such good friends that share everything?” Potter bit out sarcastically. “I owe you no explanation. In case you haven’t noticed, there are things about the war, about myself, about Voldemort that I haven’t even shared with Ron and Hermione.”

Draco’s eyes gleamed then. Potter was strong and powerful, beautiful in his sheer strength, but he was not cool and calculating – that was Draco. Like fire and ice, the vampire hissed in his head, opposites drawn together like ends of a magnet. “So this is about the Dark Lord, then.” It was a statement, not a question that left his lips and the way that Potter’s face twisted with fury told him he was correct. “About how you were used by weaker men, forged into a weapon. They made you kill the Dark Lord–”

“I didn’t kill him!” Potter screamed, “I didn’t! It wasn’t me. The spell killed him!” He said the last words with such darkness and conviction that Draco wondered just how many nights Potter lay awake repeating those words over and over again, struggling to convince himself. Fighting to remove the darkness that had swelled within him on taking another’s life. It had not affected Draco when he had ripped the vampire that had turned him apart. He was more changed by the bite, the self-loathing of what he now was than becoming a murderer. Perhaps it was the vampire blood coursing through him now, or the thirst for blood but he felt nothing on taking life. Least of all the life of someone who had ruined his own.

Of course, Potter was a noble, foolhardy Gryffindor, he would of course torment himself over it for the rest of eternity…

Which, lucky for him, he must spend with me, lest I rot away slowly from the inside out, Draco thought bitterly.

“I’m sorry, I just can’t comprehend you being upset in taking a life which was so cruel, barely human, a life that would have meant the death of all those you hold dear,” Malfoy sighed, shaking
“You don’t have to understand it, that’s the beauty of detachment,” Potter replied aloofly, finally dressed again. “No one understands it, not even the people I’m closest to, that’s why I don’t talk about it, alright? Now if you’ll excuse me…” He made to brush past Malfoy then, heading for the door.

“Tell me, Potter, when you pictured life after the war, did it look like this?” Draco asked. He watched Potter freeze, his hand immobile on the ornate, snake-shaped door handle.

“What?” the Chosen one breathed, his voice husky with horror. Horror that Malfoy had managed to strike a nerve again, play all the most sensitive areas of the darkness inside of him.

“You don’t speak with your friends, your makeshift family, you shove everyone away in case you get burned, in case you might get used again. But what type of life has that left you with?” There was no answer. Draco grinned maliciously, darting across the room with lightning speed, pinning Potter to the door with his body. One hand settled on the wrist near the door handle, the other slammed into the door near Potter’s head. He enjoyed the tiny flinch, but enjoyed even more the laboured breathing, the tint of arousal in the air. Oh yes, Potter hated him. Potter was angry, but he was so fucking hard Draco could taste it on the air.

He’s been hard for a long time too, I bet, bound to an unspoken oath of forced celibacy. No wonder he has a bloody awful temper, Draco thought, squeezing the wrist he held captive. “You’re a bitter old man before your time, a shell. Take it from someone whose not allowed to live for themselves – this is no way to live.”

“Y-You…” The stutter in Potter’s voice was mouth-watering. “You think you know me?” Potter demanded shakily. “Just because our lives were both ruined that day in the dungeon, just because we’ve both lost nearly everything, it doesn’t mean you know me.”

“I know you better than anyone in these castle walls, Potter, perhaps beyond,” Draco told him, his voice low and droning, his vampire’s doing, not his own. It was almost instinct to use that voice with Potter now. “What does that say about you? If your school rival knows you better than your loved ones?”

“I-It…it’s better that they don’t know the person that I am now,” Potter insisted, closing his eyes in an attempt to shut out the truth in Draco’s words. “They all suffered as well, they’re entitled to their happiness now, without me trouncing all over it with my problems.” He paused a moment, gnawing on the corner of his lower lip anxiously. “There’s nothing anyone can do to make my
problems better anyway, and when they try it’s...it makes everything worse. I just want them to be happy, and if that means I just fade—"

“Ever the bloody martyr, Potter,” Draco snarled scathingly. “Do you even realise how pathetic that sounds? Who is it going to please if you sacrifice yourself needlessly? If you fade away? Did it not occur to you that your friends want you because you’re pivotal to their happiness? What would it achieve to disappear?”

Potter’s shoulders slumped in misery and Draco snarled again, whirling Potter around to face him, slamming him hard into the door. Not once, twice, wanting nothing more than to knock some sense into him. Everything had been taken from Draco, and here Potter was, with a second chance to start afresh and he was pissing his life away!

“Poor Saint Potter!” he hissed venomously, “Lost his parents, lost his godfather. Everyone loses people, Potter. Granted you had a childhood ripped from you seventeen years ago but what good does it achieve to lay around wallowing in the misery of something that happened years ago?! You lost the first eighteen years of your life, don’t you think it’s about time you started to take some of it back? To live a little? The way those that died would’ve wanted!”

He himself nearly salivated at the thought of when he would come into his full powers, giving him the unrivalled power over his own life. His chest tightened when he thought of the way he had fled Alaric’s office. But he was still not strong enough, not yet, and until he was he would have to endure. And until he finished at Hogwarts, he would have to do everything he could to keep his nature hidden.

The memory of Snape’s words to him as he had first stepped inside the castle this term had stuck with him. He would have to lay low, not only because of what he was, but because of the crimes the Wizengamot had cleared him of not a few weeks ago. He was already under enough suspicion as an ex-death eater. No unforgivables, no fatal curses. If he drew negative attention to himself and the wrong people found out what he was before he could finish Hogwarts...

“I can’t believe you of all people are preaching to me,” Potter snapped, shoving him hard, cutting through his reverie. Draco pressed him more firmly into the door again. “You hypocritical prick. Who was it wandering around griping about not being fully human or perfect anymore! You’re hardly ‘dead’ if you’re still walking around, are you?”

“Do not try to make my problems seem lesser or underestimate them. This isn’t a competition of whose life is more devastated, Potter,” Draco replied attempting to keep his usual, apathetic tone.
“Then don’t throw my parents and everyone who I failed to save in my bloody face you prick!” Potter bellowed. “Like I don’t think about their faces, the lives they could’ve had if I’d just been faster, stronger, better! I killed them, I don’t need you to tell me that!”

“You didn’t kill them,” Draco hissed, “But you may as well have done with the way you’re pissing away the life they fought so hard to save–”

THWACK!

Draco flew backwards, stumbling to retain his footing. His jaw throbbed menacingly, and he rubbed it as he stared at Harry, disregarding the blood that trickled from the corner of his own mouth. Had he been paying attention the movement would not have even made him flinch. It did not hurt him, not the blow per say, but his skin tingled menacingly, as if there had been volatile magic behind that blow as well as a fist. In his explosive temper, his thoughtless rage, Potter had actually wanted to hurt him.

“How dare you use such uncouth muggle conduct to place me? What are you an animal?!” He swore loudly as the fist swung for him again, he was faster, he was physically stronger but Potter’s magic was thick in the air like smoke. It wouldn’t hurt if that fist struck, but there was no telling what would happen if that magic surged beyond the point of Potter’s control. Potter didn’t even seem to realise his own strength.

Just avoiding the next blow, he seized the chosen one’s robes, fury burning in his eyes. Draco sneered, spitting the blood crying from his split lip into the dark-haired boy’s face. The foul deed revolted him but his tactic succeeded, and Harry released him, stumbling back in disgust. “Take out your misplaced fury on me if you will, Potter,” Draco growled, “but don’t dare– use your damn wand!” He shouted the last part as he dodged Harry’s next blow, barely. Though he was not sure how that was help. Even a wand could not channel this much raw power.

“I think a fist is good enough to knock a snotty little snob like you back down a few pegs, Malfoy,” Harry answered through clenched teeth, his clenched hands shaking. This was wrong, so wrong. He hadn’t felt this angry since…since the night he had felt Voldemort’s fury race through his mind. Not his own malice, yet coursing through him like a furious, storming tide. Sirius was dead. Sirius, all of them were gone and Malfoy was…Malfoy was…

Draco frowned, diving into his robes for his wand. “Locomotor Mortis!” He shouted, and watched as Potter’s legs suddenly snapped into stillness, the Gryffindor’s upper-body lurching at the sudden
jerk, nearly toppling over. It evidently took a moment for the dark-haired boy to realise that Draco had used his wand.

“Let me go, Malfoy,” Potter said lowly, dangerously. Draco raised a brow, spanning the distance between them, and dodging a swipe from Potter’s (unbound) arms.

“Do you know that my parents won’t even look at me anymore, Potter?” Draco said his voice indifferent, lacking his once trademark malice. He was staring at him, at Potter with unsure eyes, a glistening look within them as he slammed Potter against the wall and sank his nails into his shoulders. At that spark of pain, at the tone of his voice, he felt as well as saw the power retreat, little by little. He didn’t know if Potter was consciously recovering it or if something he had done had simply broken the mood, the enraged state of mind that had let it loose. But it continued to slowly simmer back with every following word.

“My father has not said anything longer than two words to me since. My mother only speaks to me with her eyes averted – she will not even touch me. I am not their son anymore. I cannot give them grandchildren. I am not pure-blooded. I could not even go out in the sunlight, except that Severus slaved away all summer until he had concocted a potion that would enable me to.”

Potter’s eyes widened with surprise and he, Draco, closed his for a moment, recovering his cool mask of indifference. He would not let the sadness, the loss touch his face. “Yes, Potter. He did everything in his power to enable me to live, researched and is still researching frantically for a cure, or something to make my ‘un-life’ easier. Without him I would be locked away in my room until dusk. Truly dead to the world.” Opening his eyes again, Draco squeezed Potter’s shoulders harder, this time seeing pain cross that face. He felt satisfaction that for once, the idiot was listening.

“I had every reason to give up, but I didn’t – couldn’t. I will not die pitifully in my room, wasting away. I was born to achieve something and I will strive until I can make my parents proud again. Great men don’t roll over and admit defeat just because it hurts, Potter. They take it in their bloody stride, they take that pain and they use it to make them stronger than before.” His grey eyes were shadowed with darkness then, and he tried not to think of the torture Professor Alaric had exacted upon him when he next spoke.

“I am a monster. And though vampires are politically accepted in general, I cannot tell a soul what I am if I hope to remain here. I am loathed by my own parents, I am changed, but I am stronger, faster – I can do this–” He seized Potter by the throat and lifted him up into the air so that his toes dangled uselessly above the ground. Potter choked and spluttered, clawing at his fingers, but he felt nothing. “You see. I am stronger than ever before because of what happened to me. And I will use this to live the life others would have stolen from me.”
After letting Potter choke and struggle for a few moments, he let him down, satisfied that he was gasping for air and rubbing at his abused throat. “Get over yourself, Potter,” he said coldly, opening the door behind them at last. “You’re not the worst off. There are others who have a lot less than you.”

Potter stared at him with an odd expression on his face, confusion, enlightenment, perhaps?

“Snape said that,” Potter said, more to himself than to Draco.

“He was right,” Draco said smoothly, and with that, he glided from the room without as much as a second glance back at the Boy Who Lived.

*                      *                      *

Harry was plagued by his own outburst as well as Malfoy’s words all the way back up to the eighth year common room. The day had brightened up a bit and most of the eighth years seemed to be outside now, leaving only Hermione and Ron, exactly as he’d left them, curled up on the rug by the fireplace. Harry could not help but smile, albeit a little sadly. There was a book between them, but they were close and whispering to each other lovingly, in a way Harry could not help but envy. He would never have that.

“Hi,” Harry said quietly, almost afraid they would hear him. They looked up immediately however, uneasy smiles on both of their faces.

“Harry,” Hermione said warmly, “Did you find Malfoy?”

Harry winced. After Malfoy’s lecture he’d forgotten what he’d originally needed him for. His mind hissed at that. He did not need Malfoy.

Slowly, he crossed the room, taking a seat on the settee behind them again. “He wasn’t as agreeable as I might have hoped,” he said, “I’ll try him again later when he’s in less of a mood.”

Hermione gave him an agreeable nod, turning back to her book. Ron remained silent.
Harry could not help but hear Malfoy’s words in his head, over and over again. They melded with his own thoughts, his own confusing world and he closed his eyes to stave off the pain that threatened to well up inside of him. His entire body tensed as it hadn’t been able to before he had walked off the Temporentia Sensium, but his downfall was the little lost gasp that escaped his lips.

When he opened his eyes again, both of his friends had separated and were staring at him with concern ebbing at their features.

“Harry? Mate, what’s the matter?” Ron asked, looking a little lost himself.

Hermione leant forwards, petting his knee softly. “Harry, we’re your best friends. Tell us?”

Harry shrank back into the settee. He closed his eyes as tears began to well up and tried to swallow them back, but they were already clinging to his lashes. “I didn’t think that…” He choked, he lost his voice, his fingers clawing into his thighs until he thought he’d broken the skin. His head hung limply on his shoulders. He didn’t want them to be this close, to see him this weak. This broken.

* I’m supposed to be stronger than this, he told himself. To no avail. He was splitting at the seams after years of pressure. Malfoy’s scathing words had only just made him realise how bad it had been. But he wasn’t sure what to do now.

“I thought that once we…got rid of Voldemort that it would be ‘happy ever after’,” he breathed. “But it…it’s not. My parents, Sirius, Dumbledore, anyone who I dared to get close to is still dead. None of them are…are here to tell me what to do, how to be strong and I…” He chewed at his lip determinedly, loathe to allow those tears to spill down his cheeks.

“I closed myself off when Sirius died and now I…I don’t even… Oh, Merlin, help me!” Harry gasped, giving a dry sob and Hermione surged forwards, wrapping her arms around Harry, squeezing him tightly. He felt Ron’s hand on his shoulder, squeezing uncertainly, and he felt his insides churn with shame. He was going to be sick, he was sure. But his mouth was still moving, sound was still coming out that he was so desperately clamouring to grab back.

“I don’t know how to let anyone back in, I don’t think that I…”

I don’t think I can feel things like I did before I… Voldemort is gone but I feel just as lost and… Malfoy, he said that… But he was right. I – I don’t…I don’t know how to live…”

There was a moment of silence. He struggled to calm his frantic breathing, the shameful sounds of
dry sobs in his voice. Then, Hermione drew back a fraction to look at him. Reluctantly, he met her eyes.

“Of course it isn’t happy ever after just because He is dead. You endured so much Harry and… with everything that happened in Surrey as well, you just can’t expect miracles. None of us do, we’re trying. We all are. The war changed things, especially you. You were used as a weapon, Harry.”

“It shouldn’t be this hard,” Harry murmured, “Just to get up in the morning. Just to feel anything besides anger–”

“Look, Harry,” Hermione said imploringly. “It’s like the soldiers that go away to war – they are trained, made into killing machines and then when their job is done, they come home and they just… they can’t function as they used to. It can take years for them to find themselves again.”

“Years,” Harry repeated hopelessly. He shook his head, pressing as far back into the settee as he could go. He didn’t want them this close to his breakdown. “I can’t wait that long to feel something aside from anger and misery. I’ll go mad. It shouldn’t be this hard just to feel, not after everything that…” He winced, feeling the despair surging up into his throat like vomit.

“Even this, right now, don’t you feel it?” he demanded. “It shouldn’t be this hard for you to talk to me!”

“Of course it’s hard, Harry!” Hermione cried. “We went through a lot together and you, you’re different. You’re so full of bitterness for what you’ve lost that you can’t see what you have! It’s almost as if you don’t think you deserve to have a life after Voldemort. You’re constantly making excuses to duck away from any kind of comfort or warmth because you’re afraid–”

“I’m not afraid!” Harry insisted.

Beside Hermione, Ron shook his head, finally finding his voice. “Tell that to Lupin and Tonks, mate.” At that, Harry glared, but this did not deter his red-headed friend. “They wanted you in their family, Harry, they spent ages looking for a house they thought you’d like and you don’t even bloody act like you give a crap about them!”

“Of course I care!” Harry snapped. “I care about all of you! I just don’t want to be a burden to you. You’re all… you’re all recovering from what happened in the war so much faster than me. You…”
you two have each other, Remus has Tonks, you all have someone. Whoever I ask for help, I am intruding on something. I didn’t risk my life facing Voldemort so that I could ruin all of your well-deserved happiness.”

“That’s the most stupid thing I’ve ever heard anyone say,” Ron snarled. “You’re our friend! Your problems aren’t a burden you git! We care about you!”

“You’ve barely spoken to me since we got back to Hogwarts!” Harry reminded them. “And I don’t mind that you’re spending more time alone, I don’t. But don’t preach to me that I’m not a burden when I obviously am. You couldn’t even spare time apart to ask me why I was laid up in bed the other day, why it was Snape that had to help me.” He shoved off the couch and up to his feet then. He knew it, they couldn’t understand. “Perhaps it’s just easier on you if I stay away from you,” he said, moving towards the door.

“Don’t try to pull that one, mate,” Ron snapped, leaping to his feet also. “I know you have some martyr complex, but don’t try and spin this on us. We’ve been trying, just like you, except we’re not as quick to give up as you—”

“Ron!” Hermione tried to silence him, but he ignored her.

“No, he needs to hear this,” Ron insisted, turning his gaze back to Harry. “Your life’s difficult mate, but that’s no excuse. A lot of people’s are.”

“Everyone keeps saying that,” Harry growled.

“Because it’s true!” Ron shouted. “If everyone gave up as quickly as you have since You Know Who there’d be no world left! You lost something in that dungeon mate, but rather than try to live long enough to find it, find yourself again, you’re ready to drop dead.”

“Just because someone else might be more wounded than me, it doesn’t make my pain any easier! You know nothing about what happened to me!” Harry screamed. “Nothing!”

“And whose fault is that precisely?” Ron muttered, “You’re right, mate, you’re closed off. But we can’t help you until you let us in. Let someone in! Stop trying to use everyone as an excuse to run away just in case you get hurt or you’ll end up with no one at all!”
Harry winced, staggering backwards towards the door as if struck by a curse. “There’s no in case,” Harry murmured, “Everyone I’ve ever let inside has caused me hurt in some way or another. I’ve got no fight in me left to survive that kind of pain again.” He paused, staring at them thoughtfully. Sadly. Angrily. He could not feel anything else besides those emotions. “And besides, I don’t have it in me to love anything like I used to. And in trying to come to you, in trying to get your help I’ve received nothing but a lecture and a headache. I think this is proof enough of why I’m better off not letting anyone in.” With that he gave them a final look before turning on his heel and disappearing through the door. He wasn’t strong enough to deal with this anymore. He didn’t have any strength left in him at all.

~To Be Continued...
The midnight black sky above was lightless except for the occasional twinkle of a daring star, fighting amongst the darkness of the sky above to be seen. The new moon was lost in the sky and the trees below groaned ominously in the September wind, their branches whipped from side to side in erratic formation. Like furious waves beating against a cliff-face.

Two Shadows moved through the dimness beneath the canopy, quietly, stealthily. The shadows were alive. They studied the life of the forest around them, listening, waiting for something it seemed. “We don’t need to bother with this rubbish,” a sharp, bark of a voice cut through the quiet of the night. The owner of the voice, the largest shadow halted abruptly. Its companion stopped too, turning to face him slowly.

“We do,” the second shadow assured him, leaning against the nearest tree and studying the dark glade they had stopped in. “You were there, you know as well as I that to be overconfident in this is reckless. The Dark Lord himself fell with such mistakes, we will be much wiser than he.”

The first shadow gave a little grumble of impatience and folded his dirty, hairy arms over his muscled chest, also staring around the dell, his gold, animal eyes spotting movement far off in the distance where his companion’s could not. The golden orbs glowed in the darkness and the second shadow looked away, unnerved by the sight of them. He wasn’t entirely comfortable with Fenrir Greyback, despite their unlikely partnership.

The silence that fell was a short-lived one, as a sharp gust of wind ripped through the clearing and with it brought the sound of the others’ arrival. Greyback and the smaller shadow stepped forward into the glade, but kept their bodies tensed, apprehensive of betrayal. One could not be too careful these days. The ministry was under a new rule, the new Minister, Shacklebolt a sight better than his previous three predecessors, and any underground dealings could be sabotaged by an inside spy.

The smaller shadow looked to his larger companion patiently, waiting for him to clarify these new
arrivals were who they claimed to be. “They’re all clean, no intruders that I can tell,” Greyback elucidated, and took the final step forward to meet the newcomers. “You’re late,” he said gruffly.

“We had to make sure we weren’t followed,” the first newcomer said. All three of them were dressed in crimson, hooded cloaks which were drawn up over their heads. The disguises must have been for any potential invaders that might show up uninvited, however, since they knew Greyback was of a species that knew exactly what and who they were without having to see them. Just one whiff with the right wind told him (and hence his companion) who they were facing.

“Aurors were hovering around the entrance to Knockturn Alley, almost caught us on the way in to our apparition point. Still…” The first cloaked figure took a step forward, showing himself as the most important of them all. “We’re here, now tell me just why you believe we would want to join with such…” His nose was twisted with a sneer that was visible to the golden eyed Greyback, even in the darkness, and the werewolf growled warningly.

“Such what? You believe yourself above me you rotten, inbred little ponce?” Greyback snarled. His smaller companion surged forwards, seizing his arm, stopping him in his forward motion.

“Enough, Fenrir, I will handle this,” he said carefully, before turning on their guests. “We do not have to see eye-to-eye, nor even like each other, good sir, but we have similar goals and as such… are both in need of a little more fire power. We have a proposition. You work with us and we will both walk away with what we desire.”

The clearing was quiet but for the low waning cry of the wind, but then, the cloaked man spoke again. “Your business is with who exactly? The Potter boy is ours and our purposes for him are not for public knowledge. What can you possibly want that corroborates with Potter’s capture?”

Fenrir grinned, his animalistic fangs gleaming in the darkness. He chuckled menacingly, but allowed his smaller companion to answer.

“Revenge,” Fenrir Greyback’s companion replied simply, his voice coarse with venom. “Revenge that will, in turn, make your prize of Potter ripe for the taking.”

* * * * *

The rest of Harry’s Saturday was a lonely one. He had donned his cloak and taken refuge in the Astronomy Tower until it was well past curfew. He knew it was his fault as much as theirs that he
sat there in the darkness, invisible to any rogue passers-by, the loneliness slowly swallowing him whole. He knew it, but he also knew now how pointless it would be to return. For what purpose? To even further distance himself from them? No. He had tried to ask for help, they hadn’t understood and it only strained their fragile friendship further by trying to make them.

So Sunday afternoon found him in the same place. Wrapped in his warmest robes with the invisibility cloak over him, shielding him from the world the way James himself might have done for him, or Lily, or Sirius… But they were gone, and he was still here, wasting their sacrifice.

So who do I go to to fix myself? There was no one else left. And the people surrounding him, they didn’t understand how broken he was in the first place. Malfoy seemed to understand him more than them. He shivered at the thought.

“Feeling sorry for yourself still, Potter?” Came a voice from behind him. He half-turned, still concealed by the cloak and saw Malfoy standing a few feet behind him.

“I can’t see you, but I can smell you,” Malfoy clarified. I know that you’re here, you may as well come out.”

Harry remained still, turning slowly back to look over the landscape. The tryouts for the house quidditch teams would be held over the coming week, and while he couldn’t try out he longed to feel the wind on his face again. Maybe he would go for a fly later? Or a walk into Hogsmeade? The Eighth years were allowed to travel into the village as they pleased…

“The rest of your golden trio are looking for you,” Malfoy said, and Harry swore he saw him sniffing the air. Trying to smell me out, Harry thought with distaste.

“You haven’t been at a meal since Saturday breakfast–”

“Which for you was, what? Bed-time?” Harry snarled, tearing the cloak off his head and tucking it into his robe pocket. “I came up here to be alone, Malfoy, by myself.”

“Regardless, here,” the blond stepped forwards, holding out a small package. Harry frowned, confusion and unease ebbing at the edges of his mind.

“Chocolate?” he said in disbelief. “What am I? Your girlfriend? What’s that for?” He watched
Malfy scowl in reaction and the offensive offering was dropped into Harry’s lap. It was a heavy block of what looked like insanely expensive chocolate.

“You and Professor Snape made me aware that when someone does something for you, you are obliged to be considerate in return,” the blond said tersely. “I drained you and you haven’t eaten since. You’re reckless and irresponsible, I thought it more likely you would coat your empty stomach with chocolate as opposed to real food. You need the sugar if nothing else, I was merely acting—”

“Like a prat,” Harry cut across him. “I don’t know what you’re playing at but just stop. You’re a selfish arse, don’t pretend otherwise.”

A dark look overcame those grey eyes then. “So you say a man cannot and should not change?”

Harry couldn’t believe him. Why was he so determined to seek him out when he clearly didn’t want him there? “Not in a few days, no,” Harry said bluntly. “It’s not honest or realistic—”

“I changed the moment that thing bit into me!” Malfoy hissed. “You’re impossible, Potter. No wonder you’re single. You demand a change in attitude and protest when someone tries to comply. Is it any wonder you’re left to your solitude?”

Harry sneered. “Miracles don’t happen in a day.”

“You assume it is a miracle that I show another creature kindness?” Malfoy snapped back, gobsmacked. “Does it occur to you that even before the ‘change’ I had parents whom I loved, a home that I missed when I came to school, a pet I doted on? Just because you hate me, does that mean I can’t have and feel all the same things you do?”

Harry scoffed, turning his head away. “You’re dead,” he murmured, “you can’t feel anything.”

Suddenly, so fast that it made Harry jump, Malfoy dropped to his knees, Harry’s head shot up on instinct and his eyes met with those icy grey ones. Mere inches were between their faces now.

“Oh, I can feel,” Malfoy purred. The sheer, silky tone of his voice made Harry shiver. “I can feel quite well. Better than you, I daresay, a person who cannot see the gift that is his own bloody life.
A gift that many people have died to give him. No, you pretend it is worthless because then you
don’t have to change, you don’t have to work at living. You give up. So easy, isn’t it? Well, if so,
then why are you stinking up the castle with misery?”

Harry’s head was reeling. All of those accusations were conforming into a jumbled mess inside his
head, a screaming, roaring labyrinth of chaos. He dropped his head, staring at the lump of
chocolate in his lap as if it held the answers to these accusations.

“I know I’m not perfect, you arse,” Harry snarled, finding his voice. “And we may have some
unfortunate similarities but I did not ask you to get involved in my life. You barged into it because
you needed me. I allowed it to keep you alive but that doesn’t mean you have a free invitation into
my life.”

Harry watched Malfoy tilt his head slightly when a light breeze rushed through the tower. He
swore Malfoy was trying to taste him on it as he stared at him, considering his next words
evidently. Harry just stared at him, hard. He didn’t know why Malfoy was bothering to put on this
façade of false consideration – he didn’t even know what was even in it for the blond.

“It hurts doesn’t it?” Malfoy said softly and Harry’s brow creased with confusion. His skin
prickled at the supple velvet the blond’s tone had dropped to. His eyes flickered treacherously but
he did not answer. He would not dignify Malfoy’s prying with an answer.

“If it hurts, if you are on the verge of losing your friends, why are you being such a stubborn prat
and keeping any hope of help out?”

Harry rolled his eyes at that. “Oh, Merlin, life advice from a vampire,” he bit out sarcastically.
“Are you suggesting that you’re a hope for me?” he scoffed at the thought.

“Look,” Malfoy said through gritted teeth. “If it’s my ‘uncharacteristic chivalry’ that’s making you
doubtful to the point of idiocy, you needn’t worry. I have a selfish, vested interest in you staying
alive. That’s all. If you weren’t integral to my survival I’d let you putrefy up here by yourself but I
know that if you do that you’ll die of loneliness or something else equally dramatic.”

Harry sat quite still, unwilling to show Malfoy how those words were piercing him, like a
thousand fiery needles in his weak flesh. It seemed like Malfoy had paused for dramatic affect, but
still Harry refused to surrender his emotions to the prying vampire.
“And so here I am,” Malfoy continued at last, his voice almost a reprieve from the silence, even if it was annoying. “I can’t let you die, or I will. It’s as simple at that.”

It was then that Harry’s body finally slumped in defeat. A low, exhausted sigh tumbled from his lips and then at last, when his eyes had fluttered shut, Harry spoke. “At least that was honest,” he breathed tiredly. “I don’t like being lied to, even if someone thinks it’s for ‘my own benefit’. I’m not a child, I can decide what I’m ready to hear.”

Harry saw Malfoy raise a brow at that.

“You’re a peculiar one, Potter,” Malfoy murmured, “You’d prefer to hear the brutal truth rather than a sugar-coated one. What does it matter? I still have to keep you alive regardless–”

“It matters because I was lied to my entire life and I may not be able to control everything but I will control who I converse with,” Harry cut across him, “I have no time for manipulative liars any longer.”

Malfoy just shrugged. “I can understand that given your view, noble gryffindors are incredibly naïve. You believe everything can be solved by being only right and just.”

Harry said nothing to this, but Malfoy kept gazing at him expectantly, as if waiting for him to retort hotly to his snide words. Having nothing to say and everything to think about, Harry gave another minute sigh, turning around to gaze out over the world once more. He felt Malfoy drop down beside him and his muscles tensed to flee but he managed to stay put.

Just then, the sun broke the thick canopy of clouds, the dazzling light beaming over his skin, warming him. Closing his eyes, Harry basked in it for a moment, before the slight sound of movement beside him reminded him that he was not alone.

His lashes fluttered and he reluctantly turned his gaze to Malfoy. His breath was stolen for a moment, throttled by a tightness in his chest and throat. The sun illuminated that pale skin, giving a soft glow to those cheeks and that halo of blond hair. When finally he found his voice, it wasn’t as flippant as he would’ve like.

“You said that Snape invented a potion for you so that you could come out in sunlight,” Harry said. “How did he help you? Aren’t vampires supposed to turn to combust in the sun?”
Malfoy was quiet for a moment before the breath that was not keeping him alive shuddered over his lips in a sigh. “They don’t turn to ash right away, it would burn slowly, like a sluggish acid eating at the skin. If the exposure was too long then death would be imminent, but it wouldn’t happen like that – not like an explosion.”

Harry nodded, no small part of him disturbed by the fact that he was having his first calm, civilised conversation with Malfoy, and it was about death.

“When I first returned home I was driven into hiding in my room by the sun. My world looked bleak at best, doomed to darkness,” Malfoy’s tongue darted over his lips to wet them and Harry flushed when he caught himself staring at that little pink organ. He winced at his own idiocy and averted his gaze to an apparently interesting patch on the stone floor while Malfoy continued.

“Severus spent most of the summer struggling to find a cure, but the best thing he could invent for me was a potion to give me some semblance of my life back. My life may be…dubious by anyone’s standards, but I owe him every inch of it. A potion that if taken once a day gives me back some of my future. Or a chance at it at least.”

Harry thought for a moment, finding Snape’s first name peculiar at best on Malfoy’s tongue. “He’s done an awful lot for you considering you’re just his student,” Harry said, edging around insinuation. But when Malfoy didn’t seem to comprehend, he was forced to continue. “Do you and Snape fancy each other or something?” The answer was quite clear from the almost nauseated look on Malfoy’s face.

“That is quite possibly the most disgusting thing I have ever heard,” Malfoy sneered. “Do you fancy that werewolf of yours?” he demanded. “It’s the same principle. Severus has been a close friend of my parents since before I was born. I trust him with my life.”

Harry snorted at that, recalling all of the times Snape had saved his life. “I trust him with mine too,” he admitted, “but he’s still a git.”

Malfoy turned his head a fraction, Harry noted, now being watched out of the corner of one of those grey eyes. “By your standards so am I,” Malfoy said.

Harry nodded. “You are that. But you’re…more bearable when you’re not trying to be something else.”
Malfoy flashed a wily grin then. “When I’m being honest, of course, how perfectly naïve of you, Potter. Does it not occur to you that maybe it’s all part of my plan to get you under my thumb?”

“I would never be under anyone’s thumb,” Harry said simply. Malfoy’s grin twisted into a worryingly thoughtful look.

“Believe me, Potter,” Malfoy said, honesty sounding odd in his voice. “that’s the only reason you have any of my respect.” With the sunlight bathing that pale face, Harry only just noticed how worn and tired Malfoy looked. The way he looks about a day or so before he needs to feed, he thought, confused. It had only been…what? A day? He’d gone even longer than recommended last time, why was he so worn already?

“You look a bit…well…peaky, more than you should do considering that it was only yesterday that we…I mean that I – well you know,” he flushed at his own inarticulateness, and his pride was only saved by the fact that he hadn’t come last time he had offered Malfoy his throat. “Shouldn’t you be good until Wednesday night?”

Malfoy turned his head to avoid Harry’s eyes. “That is not your concern,” Malfoy said a bit too quickly.

“But…I read that sometimes a vampire might require more blood if he overexerts himself, if he engages in—”

“Your concern is touching but as I am dead I wouldn’t spend too much time fawning over my health,” Malfoy said stiffly, getting to his feet. Harry followed him up.

“For someone who is always saying I have a foul temper, you’ve got one to match,” Harry said sharply. With that, he watched Malfoy turn and fly across the room and down the stairs, out of sight. He left Harry alone with his thoughts, his irritation. His life would become a lot easier if they could learn to tolerate each other at least. If they were forced together until Snape could find some sort of solution to Malfoy needing only his, Harry’s blood, then it would be a lot less exhausting if they could be more cordial towards each other.

*                      *                      *

Malfoy stalked the corridors around the dungeons. Though he didn’t live down here any longer, he felt at home here. It was also quiet and he needed silence right now. The halls, they were so noisy
now with his vampire heightened hearing. His hands were curled into tight fists. The stolen blood was thumping in his veins, reminding him just how little was left. How infuriating that Potter notice his dilapidated state. He hadn’t thought he’d need to come to an excuse, hadn’t thought anyone would notice!

Professor Alaric had cornered him yesterday evening, and the torture that had followed seemed to have increased thanks to his success in avoiding him up until that point. Though his superhuman body had healed all physical signs, Malfoy could still remember the agony that ripped through him and no doubt, he was in for more this week. After every defence lesson? Every time he roamed the corridor alone? Which was often? He only dared to walk here alone because he knew that the door to Severus’s quarters were only just down the hall. He felt, safer knowing that, but not safe. Never safe.

He hated how pathetic he still was, despite what he was. He knew that the more of Potter’s blood he drank, the quicker his vampire abilities would grow. But he didn’t know that even that would help, if defending himself in any way could end in the world finding out what he was before he was ready. He could probably rip Alaric’s throat out with his bare hand once his powers reached their peak. But that would be drawing attention to the presence of a supernatural creature in the castle, and then it was only a matter of time.

Besides, though vampires were politically acceptable, ripping someone’s throat out was still quite illegal. And him, a death eater to boot. How could he do anything? How could he call out for help? To whimper and call for his mother and father as he had done so many times before. That cowardice wasn’t part of who he was anymore. What scrap of pride he had left, he would cling to until he was nothing but dust.

However, up there in the tower teasing Potter, having (what he could only term as) a civilised conversation with Potter, when drank from Potter… It mattered little who it was with, he had felt alive with him as he never felt otherwise. Now, he could only dread the rest of his un-life. Hiding from a lunatic posing as a professor, who had some sort of vendetta against him and only him. And he could never tell anyone, if he hoped to keep his secret. He was doomed to this, this un-life forever, with a few escapes from reality here and there, and only at Potter’s hand…

Potter, he thought, why couldn’t it be anyone but Potter to give me this?

Stupid boy, he admonished himself, wincing at each recollection of his guard dropping like a whore’s knickers in Potter’s presence. He had tried to hide this side of himself, the vulnerable portion of his soul that just wanted what everyone wanted. He wanted to not be afraid to go home, wanted to smile like he meant it, wanted to not have to guard himself and his dark secret against everyone in the world. He wanted to be alive not merely breathing in this pitiful existence. And heaven help him but those fleeting moments did bring him perilously close.
When he reached the first landing on the spiral stairs, he swung his arms against the balustrade and leant on them heavily, closing his eyes so tight that he saw spots in the dark behind his eyelids. How had he fallen so simply from the place of estrangement he had worked so hard for? He had no friends. He confided nothing in his parents. He spoke nothing of his inner turmoil, betrayed nothing of his true self, and hadn’t done since before sixth year. He ground his teeth, fists tightening until his knuckles were white. How did precious Harry Potter reach beyond his iron-exterior so effortlessly?

* * *

Because deep down, you want him to, a dark, vampiric voice cooed at the back of his mind.

* * *

Harry wasn’t sure what it was that had drawn him from his seclusion and into the great hall for breakfast Monday morning, but he had a feeling the clenching hunger pains in his stomach had a lot to do with it. He had to face the world for lessons in any case today, he may as well feed his stomach and mind beforehand. He wouldn’t gain anything by hiding upstairs for an extra half hour.

As usual, when Harry took his seat in the middle of a great gap, Hermione moved to shuffle up nearer to him. She said nothing, just nodded amicably before returning to her dippy egg. Ron was on the other side of her, but he said nothing either. And there was an obvious gap between himself and his friends. Two Dudleys could’ve fit there.

Well you wanted solitude, he thought, remembering Malfoy’s words. They stung him as he stocked his plate with bacon an egg and some toast. His stomach churned longingly at the sight, having survived only on the chocolate Malfoy had given him yesterday. Yes, he’d eaten it. He didn’t want to think on what that could mean either.

The hall was alive and vibrant with voices and yet he felt so very distant from all of their bubbly vitality. He grumbled to himself, dipping a mouthful of bacon and toast into the yolk of the egg before putting it in his mouth. Food didn’t taste as good as it used to…

“Good morning.”

Harry almost jumped at that, and not only because he recognised the voice, or because the owner of that voice had taken the gaping, obviously empty space across the bench from him. Mostly because it was the first kind word he had heard all morning, and it was from Malfoy.
Malfoy who had stormed off when their conversation ran deeper than bloodshed yesterday. Harry looked up at him, watching the blond sprinkle brown sugar over his porridge. “Morning,” he said quietly, not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth. If Malfoy was going to try and behave himself and make this impractical tension between them a bit more cordial, if Malfoy was going to talk to him, he wasn’t going to stop him.

“Hungry today, Potter?” he asked, an edge of teasing to his voice. Harry raised a brow.

“Famished, you?” he replied, really wanting to ask why Draco was eating, he hadn’t read anything about vampires needing real food as well. All for appearances I suppose though, Harry thought, taking another few, large mouthfuls of food. And if his table manners put Malfoy off anything remotely sexual, well, that was merely a bonus.

“What’re you sitting near him for, Malfoy?” the familiar voice of Ron demanded from the side. Harry winced, preparing for what was to come.

“The seat was empty, Weasley,” Malfoy replied coolly, with only a hint of a sneer. “Devoid of red-head, so unless my presence offends Potter, it’s none of your business.”

Harry did not have to turn his head to know Ron had gone pink and was grinding his teeth.

“Your existence offends everyone,” Ron snapped. “Harry has enough to deal with, without you stinking up his perfectly good air.”

Rather than leap to his feet in indignation, Malfoy merely took another mouthful of his porridge before replying indifferently. “Including alleged best friends who I have seen in his company all of three times since the train.”

Ron snorted at that, an elbow from Hermione silencing him, Harry noticed.

“We aren’t in first year anymore,” Hermione said stiffly. “You shouldn’t start a row over nothing. We’ve had enough fighting to last a lifetime. Malfoy was just talking to him, Ron.”

“Exactly,” Malfoy interjected, “no need to get jealous.”
Harry winced at that.

“Jealous!” Ron cried indignantly.

“Ron.” Hermione grabbed his forearm. “I for one think its very mature of Harry and Malfoy to set aside old rivalries and push on with the future. They are partners in both Charms and Defence now, you realise?”

Ron shrugged, evidently vexed that no one had taken his side. Harry felt more than slightly annoyed that they had scarcely spoken to him of late but felt as if they still had the right to stop Malfoy from talking to him. There was fault on both sides, of course, but then, if he was honest, Malfoy was the one who had been the most honest. As much as it hurt him to admit. He didn’t deserve to be snubbed like that. Not lately anyway.

“Which reminds me, we’re going to be in trouble with Flitwick,” Harry said conversationally, looking into Malfoy’s pale face unreservedly. And he didn’t think the urge to talk to him stemmed just from the desire to irritate Ron, either. “We didn’t work on Dual Casting.” He shared a groan with Malfoy at that. It was oddly nice to feel normal for that moment. Even if it were over something bad, it was a normal bad; school, homework. When had they ever been his biggest problem? It was a refreshing change.

They had to wait until the final lesson to find out. But sure enough, Flitwick pounced on them the moment they were called upon to give the first demonstration before the class, and they simply looked at each other, uncertainly. Flitwick’s little face twisted with both disappointment and anger. “I would have thought that two men could set aside their differences and be grown up enough to complete work set–”

“Forgive me, Professor,” Malfoy interjected, surprising Harry with his next words. “It’s my fault, I was preoccupied, I didn’t spare the time for Potter to–”

“Regardless of whose fault it was,” Flitwick cut across him, “You have both lived through a war, I expected more maturity and respect from you both.”

The class was silent, particularly Harry, who was still reeling from Malfoy’s act of taking blame which in truth, wasn’t entirely his.
“We’re sorry, Professor,” Harry said at last, finding his words. He noticed then that, for some reason, Flitwick’s expression softened a little.

“You will both make up the time in detention – tonight after dinner, is that clear?” the little Professor demanded. Both of them nodded and the lesson continued. The students were called up to demonstrate their dual casting in their pairs. A few were alright, but mostly either too heavy-handed or too feeble with their spells. They needed more practice to level with their partners. Harry paid a bit more attention when Ron and Hermione stepped into the centre of the room, before the class. Hermione was always quickest to learn a new spell, but Ron usually had trouble. It made for an interesting pair.

A frown creased Harry’s brow. Hermione had been quiet so far today, now she looked quite pale as well and Harry wondered if she wasn’t feeling very well. He thought Ron was thinking the same too, he looked a bit apprehensive of letting her pressure herself even further. She looked so weak. But as ever, she was determined.

Both Hermione and Ron raised their wands – almost in unison and recited their spell – almost in unison. “Wingardium Leviosa!” The feather leapt up into the air with a sharp jerk instead of the intended gentle motion. Ron jumped and the feather was thrown completely under Hermione’s power.

“Granger isn’t right, Potter,” Malfoy leant in and whispered in Harry’s ear. Just in time, Harry refrained from flinching at his close proximity. He glanced to Malfoy, who was leaning worryingly close still.

“I can smell her sweat, the strain her body is under,” Malfoy elaborated. Just as Harry turned his attention back to his friends, the feather in Hermione’s usually practiced control combusted in a ball of flames.

“I’m so sorry Professor!” Hermione cried breathlessly. She looked like she might collapse and Harry was grateful when Ron began escorting her back to their desk.

“Not to worry, Miss Granger, it can happen when the two powers are unbalanced,” he assured her, moving onto the next pair. But Harry looked to his best friends with concern. He was sure that it had been Hermione’s powers that had been unbalanced alone, not the dual cast. Their notes from the previous lesson let him know that Hermione’s concentration and connection with Ron would’ve compensated for any distortion. Something was wrong with Hermione.
“You said you could smell something was wrong with her?” he demanded of Malfoy in a whisper.

Malfoy inclined his head to look at him out of the corner of his eye as Flitwick began an instructive speech on how they could improve. “Your body is affected by every emotion or pressure you feel. I can smell it on her, she’s worn, shaky, weary and determined to disregard her magic’s way of telling her something is seriously wrong.”

Harry cast a glance back to his friend, worried. “Is she ill?” A fraction of a nod was his answer. He swallowed hard. “But what is it that could’ve come on so suddenly? She needs to see Madam Pomfrey,” Harry whispered, mostly to himself.

“But whether she will or not is anyone’s guess,” Malfoy replied. Before Harry could respond, Flitwick turned his attention to them and they were forced into silence for the rest of the lesson. Though Harry could feel Malfoy’s eyes on him the entire time.

*                      *                      *

“This is serious!” Harry insisted when he caught up with Hermione and Ron as soon as Charms had finished. Hermione was adamant she was fine, of course, but how could Harry assure her of her predicament without revealing how he knew it was serious?

“You never make mistakes like that, ever.”

“I am human, Harry, I am allowed to make mistakes without it being the end of the world,” Hermione replied, going over her notes from Charms where they sat in the library.

“Since when?” Ron snorted. “Anything less than an ‘O’ and you implode with tears.”

Hermione scowled.

“Look,” Harry said, leaning across the table so that his lowered voice would still reach both her and Ron. Madam Pince was glaring at them from across the room. “What have you got to lose? Just go see Pomfrey and put everyone’s minds at rest.”
“I am not ill,” Hermione said firmly. “I don’t get ill and I certainly can’t afford to this year – this is our last chance to repair the damage the war did to our futures.” She sat back then to look at both him and Ron. Her face was flushed now, her fingers twitching slightly where they lay on the table atop her ‘Dual Casting’ notes. “It may not mean a lot to either of you but it means something to me. I won’t let…Voldemort have the victory of stealing any future I may have had. I studied hard for six years and I won’t have them be made a waste.”

“Your health is more important,” Ron murmured.

“What good is it being healthy if I cannot do something with my life?” she snapped. “No. I’ll hear no more of it. I know I am fine. I am simply not grasping Dual Casting as quickly as I might like, however,” she held up her notes, “That is why Ron and I will study harder for next lesson. I suggest you and Malfoy do the same.”

Harry fell back in his seat, he would admit defeat on the subject for now and take it up with her again later. Perhaps when there was more physical evidence. He knew Malfoy’s senses were faultless but he could not use him as proof without revealing his secret.

Malfoy. Harry didn’t like the way he was unsure around Malfoy. He seemed to have a ‘thing’ where he told the truth, but Harry knew he only did so to get something out of it and couldn’t figure out what that was.

“He’s been flapping round you like a vulture,” Ron grumbled bad-temperedly, “I don’t like it, he’s up to something.”

Harry diverted his gaze from them guiltily, just catching Hermione’s suspicious gaze as he did so. Part of him was irritated that they believed they had a say after weeks of neglect. But then, another part was grateful that they cared and didn’t want to estrange them any more than he had already. He opened his mouth to reply, but Ron headed him off.

“Oh, great, there’s the git now.”

Harry frowned, craning his neck to glance in direction of the exit. There he was. Malfoy, as if timing his entrance, was striding towards their table at that very moment. Very convenient, Harry thought suspiciously, getting to his feet to intercept Malfoy.

“We have detention after dinner,” Malfoy said casually, ignoring the glare thrown at him by
Weasley and focussing on Harry as if he were the only one in the room. It made Harry nervous, that kind of concentration. No one looked at him like that, not ever. It was unsettling.

“I remember,” Harry said, though he had actually forgotten the moment he’d seen Hermione’s mystery predicament. “That’s not for a few hours.”

“Flitwick cornered me after Charms and said that we are both to report to his classroom after dinner for our detention. I thought I should inform you since we will be practicing our Dual Casting and I require your presence for that.” Malfoy glanced to Hermione then. “Granger, you look positively feeble. You should get yourself to the Hospital Wing – there’ll be no one to babysit Weasley if you drop dead.”

Ron made to leap from his feet but Hermione laid a hand on his arm and shifted to look at Malfoy. “Thank you for the concern, Malfoy, but it is just a little stress, that’s all. Nothing to write home about.”

Harry sighed, anxiety creeping over his skin. Surely it must be something serious to affect her magic like that? And so soon? He noticed Malfoy step back a little then, and Harry wondered whether it was to escape Hermione’s ‘ill’ aura or the scent of his, Harry’s anxiety. Malfoy reacted badly to his negative emotions, he recalled, even that first time in the dungeon.

“Do you have any plans for the hours up until dinner?” Malfoy asked them (Harry) after a few moments of awkward silence.

Ron snorted in amusement. “Asking Harry on a date, are you Malfoy?” he chuckled.

Harry fought the flush that wanted to rise to colour his cheeks. “Shut it, Ron,” he snapped, desperately avoiding Hermione’s gaze. She seemed to be watching him for something, and he was pretty sure whatever it was, he didn’t want her to see it. Licking his lips nervously, he snatched up his bag. “I’ll see you two later,” he said to both Hermione and Ron, turning and heading towards the library door. He felt Malfoy following closely, but it wasn’t until they were in the empty corridor outside the library that he fell into stride beside him. Thankfully most of the school seemed to be out enjoying the rare flicker of sunshine.

“You don’t seem to know what you want with those two,” Malfoy observed, meaning Ron and Hermione.
“It’s different from before. I’m different. We’re all trying to carry on like before when really we need to learn each other again,” Harry explained thoughtfully, only realising just then that the words that had left his mouth without a conscious effort were in fact true. It felt obscenely eerie to be speaking so freely with Malfoy. Was this just a sympathy connection? He wished it would fade whatever it was. It wasn’t right. He didn’t trust Malfoy with his innermost worries and feelings, even if he required his blood to live.

“Why is it so difficult?” Malfoy asked.

Harry sighed, oddly (exasperatingly) touched by the interest, the near concern in Malfoy’s silky voice. Whether it was because he needed Harry to live or not, it didn’t matter at that moment. Besides, Malfoy needed him alive, yes, but he didn’t need this, didn’t need to care for his well-being and feelings.

Finally, Harry answered. “Because I’m worried we won’t fit together anymore after everything that’s changed.”

Malfoy stared at him for a moment, then said, “that is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. These two are some of the most flawed human beings in the wizarding world but they care about you faultlessly. You shouldn’t piss that away, Potter, it’s a rare thing.” He paused, surveying Harry critically out of the corner of his eye, Harry cringed at the sense in his voice, shuddered against it. He couldn’t understand Malfoy’s purpose here.

“They followed you into the unknown, into a hunt for the Dark Lord,” Malfoy continued, “it is preposterous of you to think they might abandon you now.”

Harry shrugged. “Every human reaches the point where they can take no more,” he said, heading out onto the moving stairs with his head lost up in a dark cloud of when his friends just might reach that point. He was paying no attention to where he was going. He stepped out onto the first landing and carried on walking without realising that the stairs were not there. He stumbled, his body fell forwards and his eyes flew wide. His stomach flipped. His entire body tensed for the long fall down countless flights of stairs.

Suddenly a sharp pain yanked at his arm, hauling him back and up, whirling him into a cool, vampire chest. He froze where he stood, wrapped tight in two strong arms. He vaguely realised there were a few people scattered around the countless moving staircases. But regardless, he couldn’t move.

Harry’s eyes were still wide, his breath coming out in frantic pants and his heart thudding wildly.
Malfoy’s slow, needless breath danced across his ear, reminding him that his blood was also racing madly, right under Malfoy’s nose. Malfoy’s breathing seemed purposeful, as if Malfoy were trying to stay calm even in the face of Harry’s hot, pulsing blood.

“I believe you’ve soared above and beyond the point where you can take no more if you have such a death wish,” Malfoy said smoothly. Briefly, Harry thought he felt long, smooth fingers gliding down his spine. Malfoy’s clean, musky smell filled his nose, clouded his mind. In his silence, he could just hear the sluggish sound of that cool heart beating.

“You’re…you’re not…you don’t need any…?” Harry tried but his words failed him. It was too awkward. Luckily Malfoy understood.

“No,” he said, stepping away from Harry, who looked up at the blond thoughtfully. He really did look oddly paler than usual. Why wasn’t the blood sustaining Malfoy for as long as he’d thought it would? He didn’t look ravenous but he looked weaker, more tired than he should.

“My blood isn’t lasting you as long,” Harry said at last.

Malfoy raised a brow. “Are you offering more, Potter?”

Harry glared. “You absolute arse.” He shoved back from Malfoy a few steps. “I was just trying to be… Look, just forget it,” he murmured, turning and heading down the stairs that were now there waiting for him this time. He tried not to think about the presence of the lower years scattered around the staircases and how his and Malfoy’s interaction must have looked to them just now.

“Where were we going?” he demanded when he felt Malfoy fall into stride beside him again. “You asked me to come with you.”

“Actually,” Malfoy corrected, “I asked you if you were busy, you flounced out to hide your embarrassment and I followed.”

Harry growled under his breath, frustrated with Malfoy’s easy, casual attitude. He was so comfortable with himself all of a sudden. Harry wasn’t sure what to make of it. “Fine,” he snapped, stopping as if to turn back on himself. “I’ll just go back then and—”

“Don’t be obtuse, Potter, for goodness sake,” Malfoy griped, seized Harry’s wrist to stop him
from bolting. His hand was lukewarm, still not icy cold as it would be when Harry’s ration of blood ran out of his system completely. “The lower years are having their tryouts down at the quidditch pitch. I was just wondering if you’d care to accompany me. We’re both missing our favourite sport, I think.”

That stopped Harry’s mind dead.

“What’s your game, Malfoy?” he asked with suspicion. He yanked his hand out of Malfoy’s grasp. “Why are you being so~?”

“Don’t start that again,” Malfoy sighed exasperatedly. “I keep gracing you with my presence simply because you’re necessary to my life and I need to ensure your depression doesn’t eat you into an early grave. Not only that but if you *must* hear it, there’s nobody else in this bloody castle besides Severus that I trust enough to even *exist* around any longer. Not to mention that you’re the only tolerable one left in our wretched year. The war revealed to me just how ‘good’ my old ‘friends’ were.”

Malfoy’s words had been livid, frustrated and had escaped his lips in such a garbled rush that Harry had almost missed half of them. Almost. After a second of processing, he understood quite well and was taken aback by the unrehearsed honesty. The sincerity. He smiled sadly, thinking he could relate to a lot of what had just left Malfoy’s mouth.

Then of course, there was the statement he couldn’t ignore. “You trust me?” he asked, almost confused.

Malfoy stared at him, a look on his voice saying he hadn’t remembered saying that part aloud. He scoffed then. “Of course, you’re so bloody noble it’s impossible you would betray my secret even if I ripped your throat out.”

Harry brushed off the brash attitude and just continued to smile absently, carrying on down the stairs towards the outside. His shadow was absent for a moment. In fact he almost thought Malfoy had not followed until he stepped out into the fairly bright afternoon and felt the vampire’s cool presence at his side, sliding in as if floating on the breeze. “You know, you’ll get along with me easier if you just say it as it is,” Harry said, walking towards the pitch. “I appreciate honesty more than pretty sounding lies.”

“I’ll remember that,” Malfoy replied simply, the rest of their journey down to the pitch was silent. But oddly, it was a comfortable quiet that had fallen. Harry felt *almost* at ease as he hadn’t been with *anyone* in over a year. And judging by Malfoy’s matching awkwardness, he guessed it was
just as unfamiliar territory for him as well.

The new recruits seemed enthusiastic if anything. There were dozens of second years and upwards lining up with hopes of being part of their house team. Harry gave a sigh of nostalgia. He missed quidditch. And by the way Malfoy was staring at the students dressed in silver and green, each eagerly anticipating their turn at trying out, he guessed that Malfoy missed it too.

“I’m sure I wasn’t that small when I started,” Harry mused, mostly to himself. Malfoy looked to him, again, that odd intensity in his eyes that Harry wasn’t entirely sure of.

“No, you were much smaller and a year younger,” Malfoy mused. Harry thought he saw a glimmer of amusement in Malfoy’s eye when a second year slid back off his broom and onto his arse. “And ten times better,” Malfoy added.

Thankfully, the rest of those trying out were also much better than that one lone second year. The sun was still high in the sky, but flicking in and out of the cover of clouds frequently. Suddenly, a sharp breeze whipped through the stadium and Harry shivered, pulling his cloak tighter around himself. It took him a moment to remember why Malfoy wasn’t bothered by the cold.

“Isn’t it weird?” Harry asked carefully. “Not being affected by the warmth or cold?”

Malfoy looked thoughtful for a moment before he answered. “I still feel the warmth, the cold, it just…it doesn’t hurt me one way or another. The cold in particular I am used to. I am at best lukewarm most of the time. Except when I drink your blood of course.”

A flush coloured Harry’s cheeks and he turned his gaze to the potential recruits to avoid those eyes. He thought for a moment about those words, what they meant and why the sound of the intensity in that voice affected him so. His tongue danced out over his dry lips nervously, chancing speech. “What do I taste like?” Harry asked, not entirely sure he wanted to know the answer.

Malfoy tensed, he noticed, and it was a moment before he answered. “There is no specific taste,” Malfoy explained, his voice oddly thick. “It tastes rich and sweet and…hot, like…like…I don’t know, there is no comparison.”

Harry’s face was redder than ever now. He swallowed thickly. “That good?” he murmured dumbly.
“Everyone else’s blood tastes like ash and real food tastes the same as…as when I was human, but I get nothing from it and so it has no appeal for me,” Malfoy explained. “If I eat real food it’s only for show or from habit. It doesn’t give me sustenance and I cannot even digest it without your blood in my system.” Malfoy was looking on him with that intensity again. “Without your blood I cannot function – it powers my dead organs.”

“So you can’t tolerate real food or…or anything without my blood?”

Malfoy nodded. “I cannot even absorb the potion Severus makes to protect me from sunlight without it. When I drink your blood, it does what mine cannot, it powers my body.”

Harry thought for a moment. “So…if someone cut you–”

“My body would heal rapidly – as any vampire’s does, but I would need your blood to be able to do that. Eventually I’d bleed my supply of your blood away in trying to heal myself, and I would need more sooner than perhaps was normal.”

Realisation dawned on Harry then. His eyes widened and he stared at Malfoy. “Someone has been attacking you.” It was a statement not a question. Malfoy tried to look confused, but Harry saw the flicker of fear in his eyes. “Who has been attacking you? That’s why my blood isn’t sustaining you for as long, isn’t it?”

Malfoy snarled and got to his feet.

“Isn’t it?” Harry demanded. “If you need more you can have more, but if we don’t stop whoever it is from hurting you–”

A warning growl left Malfoy’s throat and he turned to Potter with livid eyes. Fury struggled in vain to hide the shame. The fear. “I have no intention of asking for more than we already agreed, so do not concern yourself.”

Harry watched him flounce away but sped after him. The blond wasn’t going at vampire speed, so the pursuit was a short one beneath the empty bleachers. He caught up to him, seizing a wrist and whirling him round to face him. He wondered just how weakened by the nameless attacker Malfoy was if he was able to be moved by him, Harry at all. But that glare had not weakened. Those intense eyes glowed an ominous grey as they focused on him. Harry raised his chin a fraction. Obstinate as ever.
“You said you weren’t too much of a coward to ask for help,” Harry gasped, his chest heaving breathlessly after that sprint. “So ask me! Please! Let me help you–”

“You cannot even help yourself!” Malfoy snapped, stepping forward, spanning the gap between them until he had backed Harry into one of the wooden supports of the quidditch stands. Harry pressed himself as flat to the wall as he could. He was worried what would happen if they touched. The waves of power rolling between them were so potent he could feel them. Malfoy leant in closer, his futile breath skimming Harry’s face. “How can you save me?” Malfoy hissed.

Suddenly, Malfoy’s head tilted. His eyes flickered down to Harry’s lips and then fluttered shut as his mouth descended over Harry’s. The intensity pulsing from Malfoy’s being, from the very air around them choked Harry, clogged his throat and made every muscle in his body clench. He pressed back into the wall so hard the wood dug into his skull and his lips parted with a little gasp of pain. It was enough to make Malfoy pause in his descent, so close that their lips were almost touching.

Harry’s eyes were still open and he watched Malfoy’s flicker again. Those shining grey orbs glistened with vulnerability, power and lust, all at the same time. With hunger and something completely foreign to Harry brewing there, a hairsbreadth from his face, he was only just aware of the cage Malfoy’s arms had formed around his head, pressing into the support beam behind him.

A low, uneven breath left Harry’s lips, breezing over Malfoy’s slightly parted ones and Harry lifted his chin a bit, tempted for some reason to span the gap between them. There was a fire burning in his belly, spiralling up his core and bursting into an inferno in his chest. His heart was thudding wildly and he swore inwardly at it. Tempted, he was very tempted. It felt like an eternity they both stood there, almost touching, both considering crossing the line to who knew where.

Harry tilted his head a fraction again. Closing his eyes, he hovered there just a moment longer and then…

“Oi! Malfoy! Potter!”

They leapt apart. Blaise Zabini was suddenly standing there with a look of suspicion on his face. Harry knew his own face was red, his insides knotted with the humiliation the almost-kiss had left him with. Malfoy was motionless, dangerously so.

“What is it, Blaise?” Malfoy asked, his voice ripe with irritation, his jaw set.
“Flitwick asked if you and Potter could report to the empty Charms classroom beside his office for your detention – said something has come up and he’s asked someone to substitute in supervising you for your detention.”

Harry frowned. “Snape, I bet, perfect.” He pulled the fur-lined robe tighter around him as a chill tore through him. “Err…thanks, Zabini, I s’pose.” He looked uncertainly to Malfoy, not quite meeting his eyes. “Shall we go?”

Malfoy said nothing in reply, simply nodded and lead the way towards the exit of the stadium. Zabini’s voice froze them both in their tracks. Again.

“You two are awfully chummy these last few weeks,” the once-slytherin accused, studying them with critical eyes. He was assessing their closeness, Harry was certain of it and he shuffled back from Malfoy as inconspicuously as possible.

“We only have ourselves to please,” Malfoy snapped, his words as sharp as a viper’s bite. “We have no one else to answer to, least of all you, Blaise.” With that, Malfoy turned and marched ahead, Harry close behind. Harry did not relish the chance to find himself alone with the suspicious ex-slytherin after all. Zabini always had been unnervingly peculiar…

The sun was fighting a losing battle with the clouds for most of their trek back up to the castle, until finally as they reached the main courtyard, it fell behind a veil of grey. Harry followed for once, sneaking a glance at Malfoy’s face every so often, striving to assess the situation. But Malfoy’s face was cold and empty, nothing there but death and unhealthily white skin. Harry couldn’t tell either way. Eventually, however, he could take the uncertainty no more.

“What was that?” Harry asked cautiously. Malfoy kept walking but his expression twisted with a grimace. Awkwardly, Harry continued. “I…I think we almost…” He flushed, not for the first nor last time that day. He was eighteen and he had done it but he couldn’t say it. He kept seeing Malfoy’s eyes shining with want, feeling those lips hovering over his own. It had felt so different to the silly adolescent kisses he’d shared with Ginny and Cho. It had still been clumsy and awkward but at the same time…

*It was better than anything I’ve felt before and we didn’t even touch!*

Harry blinked, trying to veil his thoughts. He had definitely not just thought that about an *almost kiss* with Draco Malfoy.
“Even I know you’ve kissed before, Potter,” Malfoy said rigidly, not stopping. “It could hardly be avoided forever when my entire body does nothing but crave another taste of you every minute of every day. I’m cursed, with you, wanting you – needing you. I can never live without you and it’s not a matter of choice it’s a matter of force.”

Harry stopped dead staring at Malfoy’s back as he too paused mid-step. Malfoy, seeming to realise what he’d said, turned to face him. A flicker of regret was in those eyes, but that did not permeate the mask of indifference he didn’t dare let fall.

“It’s not my ideal either,” Harry hissed, “but if there’s anything I’ve realised in the last few years it’s that some things are inevitable and when moaning about it gets you nowhere, there really is no point in it.” His fingers curled into his palms, biting into the skin there with hurt and anger. A fine mix. “Aren’t you one of the people that told me that?” Harry demanded hotly.

Malfoy met his eyes thoughtfully then, his own face bitter but not touched by anger. “No, I agree I…I lost myself for a moment, that’s all.”

“Which time?” Harry bit out harshly, studying that pale, shaky mask for a crack, a ripple in its calm surface. He saw two gaping weak spots in those darkened eyes, the ones that had been so full of fire a moment ago, now dwindling. A familiar silence fell over them, in which the betrayal Harry felt in his chest gave him the courage to speak frankly. He had almost let his guard down with Malfoy there, and he had paid for it.

“It must be so repulsive for you to consider touching me at all. It must make you sick that you have to drink my blood,” Harry snarled. “Is it so hard to separate your hunger for my blood from a delusional hunger for me?”

A ripple of unease rushed through the dead man before him. “Yes,” Malfoy breathed honestly, uncertainly. He started Harry with his candour and the ease in which he had come to it so greatly, that Harry stumbled back a little. Harry’s tongue darted over his lips and he thought distantly that he could taste Malfoy’s cool breath there.

“Is your interest in me only because you pity me?” Malfoy countered with his own question, his voice harsh with discontent.

Harry considered the tense feeling in his chest, his gut and gave a sigh of defeat. “No,” he replied, his voice still stiff, “not entirely. Confused?”
A small smile broke Malfoy’s mask and he stepped towards Harry, slowly, smoothly, until they were close again. But not like before. This time, Malfoy was more subtle about the way he inhaled Harry’s smell, as if trying to see if Harry was worth more than just a food source. But not only did Harry see his ‘scenting’ but he also saw the reflection of his own confusion in Malfoy’s face.

_Funny how you can find empathy, similarities even in your enemies,_ Harry thought distantly, all conscious awareness whisked from his mind as Malfoy’s breath touched his face, a cool, awakening breeze.

“Very,” Malfoy answered then, his voice as husky as it had been before the almost kiss. “So let’s just leave it at that for now.”

Harry gave a jerky nod. He didn’t have anything with Malfoy, not a friendship or even affection, just…a connection, one that he couldn’t begin to understand. He couldn’t say he really cared for Malfoy even, but he cared about him, he cared what happened to him. And he was grateful that they were similar in their confusion as well as a few of their darker attributes. He couldn’t even give himself an answer to the simplest of questions involving the vampire right now, much less give them to Malfoy himself.

Then there was _that_ gigantic spanner in the works; Malfoy was a vampire. They were drawn together purely from Malfoy’s need for his blood. Nothing more. And he needed more than that. Besides which, there were too many factors to consider, too many thoughts and reasons not to trust the vampire rattling around in his head. It was overcrowded in there right now, his doubts so deafening it made him wince. He was getting a headache.

“We have a detention,” he said, trying to find a way out of the uncomfortable situation they had fallen into once again. He felt he had lost himself for a while this afternoon and he wasn’t certain that he liked that, that he liked how Malfoy was wheedling into his life.

Malfoy glanced up at him from where his head had bowed, seemingly only just remembering that fact. The real world. “We do,” Malfoy agreed.

~To Be Continued...
It was in silence that they reached the spare Charms class. As usual, Malfoy lingered behind a few steps as they walked, and when they reached the door, Harry looked back to make sure he was still there. He was. He had stopped with a peculiar look of pensiveness on his face but he was but a few feet behind.

A rush of unease, of fear was bubbling in his chest. Now that the feel of those lips had faded, he felt his chest compressed with apprehension. It had been frighteningly easy to stand there whilst Malfoy had inclined his head towards his lips. Terrifyingly right to angle his own face to catch the almost kiss. Harry winced as he remembered it, every slow, seductive moment. With his head clear now and not fogged up with vampire pheromones, it panicked him. He had lost himself, lost track of who he was, who Malfoy was – everything.

This is dangerous, he thought, it’s just like allowing Draco to bite me without the Temporentia Sensium. It can’t be done. I can’t trust myself. I can’t afford to trust him.

There was a silence in the hall, and no answer at the door for a fair few minutes. Harry glanced back to Draco with a questioning frown. Then he raised his hand to knock again. No sooner than his knuckles touched the wood, however, than the door swung open.

Harry felt Malfoy go rigid behind him as soon as Professor Alaric appeared in the doorway. Harry had had Defence a few times since that first missed lesson and of course he had seen the new professor in the Great Hall at meal times, however, aside from being directed to take the only remaining seat (next to Malfoy) in his first lesson, the Professor had almost ignored Harry, which worked fine for him. He had had enough of irritating teachers giving him too much of their attention – good or bad.

Despite his vague familiarity with him, however, this was the first time that he noticed how incredibly still Malfoy went in Professor Alaric’s presence. Perhaps he had been too busy trying to
ignore Malfoy to have noticed before but it was so extreme he wondered how anyone could have not seen it.

“We’re here for our detention?” Harry said then, but the tension did not ease from the air.

Professor Alaric’s imposing eyes moved over Harry and then Malfoy. He stepped aside to give them room to enter.

“Professor Flitwick was called away on urgent business,” the Professor explained levelly, his eyes bypassing Harry as he and Malfoy crossed the room to take their seats at the front of the classroom. Parchment and ink sat on the front-most desk, waiting for them.

“Is Professor Flitwick alright, Sir?” Harry asked, taking the seat on the left of the desk, leaving Malfoy to take the aisle seat. He felt Malfoy settle into his chair uneasily, and a frown creased his brow as he saw the blond drop his eyes to where the blond’s hands were curled into fists on the table.

Professor Alaric stopped at the front of the classroom. His broad shoulders blocked out the light as he looked down at them both, and his great shadow fell over them. Harry was not intimidated by any means, that was not something someone could do to him easily. Despite the look of friendliness about this man, however, he could not help but feel uneasiness run through his bones.

“How kind of you to ask, Mr Potter, it was simply a fellow student of yours needing assistance. A Mr Zabini, I believe needing some emergency Charms help.” Alaric all-but cooed, his eerily concentrated stare again merely skimming Harry and coming to rest on Draco. It remained there even as Alaric spoke to Harry. “How have you recovered from the affliction that kept you from my first class, Mr Potter?”

Harry looked to Malfoy, who was meeting Professor Alaric’s glare unwaveringly, a look of sheer obstinate malice crossing his face. It reminded Harry instinctively of how he himself had stared down Professor Snape on his nastiest days. But what was it that Malfoy had to hate Professor Alaric for so thoroughly?

“Err, I’m fine, Professor,” Harry said, at last answering his question. “I’ll be sure not to miss anymore if I can help it.”

“I’m certain you will,” Alaric said in an odd voice. A moment later, he finally removed his eyes
from Malfoy, turning away to the blackboard, where he enchanted the chalk to begin writing for him. “You will write twelve inches before you leave for dinner, ‘I must not neglect my studies.’”

Harry rolled his eyes at that, it was as if he were eleven all over again. Honestly. With a sigh he picked up the metallic quill that had been sitting on the desk for him and began to write. He might as well get this over with, unlike Malfoy, he did need to get something to eat at some point tonight.

Professor Alaric took a seat at the empty teacher’s desk at the front, surveying them both carefully. Harry tucked his head down and started on his second line. He felt Draco take up his own metallic quill and do the same. Harry hadn’t even got to the end of his first inch, however before he felt Malfoy’s left arm tense alongside his right. Those long, pale fingers curled into a white-knuckled fist and he peered up at him from behind his fringe.

“Are you alright?” he whispered. He saw Malfoy’s mouth open with the beginnings of speech before Professor Alaric’s voice cut across him.

“There will be no need to talk,” the professor snapped sharply, “this is a punishment not a date.”

Harry flinched and continued with his lines, but that cold arm against him remained tense. Was being so close to him difficult, perhaps? He knew Malfoy’s most recent ration of blood was low already and he was most likely craving more. Harry shifted his arm to give Malfoy some space, but that did not seem to help.

Resolved to think the best he could do was finish as quickly as possible, Harry continued writing. ‘I must not neglect my studies. I must not neglect my studies…’ It was a long silence that had fallen, in fact he was nearly down to four and a half inches when a shallow hiss left Malfoy’s lips. He jumped at the sudden sound and glanced over to Malfoy. The vampire’s jaw was clenched, the sound of him grinding his teeth strident in the quiet room.

It reminded Harry of a very similar situation back in his fifth year, with Umbridge and the blood quill.

The eerie sense of nostalgia made him look up to where Professor Alaric was now leaning forward, his chin resting on his interlocked fingers. An odd look of twisted mirth was on his face. Harry frowned, before blatantly looking to Malfoy. Was it the same dirty trick that Umbridge had played on him in fifth year? He couldn’t see the words imprinted on his hand but he was a vampire, it most likely healed before Harry could even see it. All the same he swapped his and Malfoy’s quills discreetly. The metal that formed the body of the quill he had taken from Malfoy was startlingly hot.
“Use mine,” Harry muttered and Malfoy grunted under his breath, continuing to write. It made no difference however, his quill seemed to have the same effect on the vampire, who soldiered forward, writing swiftly as if determined to do it regardless of the sabotage. Harry opened his mouth again but Malfoy nudged him with his elbow, shaking his head minutely.

“It’s silver,” Malfoy whispered.

“I am certain that I said no talking,” Professor Alaric declared, getting to his feet. “Do not make me stand over you as if you were infant school children, you will not appreciate it.”

Harry scowled but dropped his head and pressed on, lost for what to do. Was Professor Alaric’s sadistically gleeful expression solely from making them do dull detention, one that they had no chance of finishing before the end of dinner? He couldn’t know Malfoy was a vampire surely? No one knew besides himself, Snape and the three Malfoys. It was impossible that anyone could know. But then…why did Professor Alaric’s seem to have it in for Malfoy? More importantly, what could he do to help? It was most likely that Professor Alaric wasn’t aware of the effect of silver on Malfoy, in which case how could he, Harry help without arousing suspicion?

“Professor Alaric?” Harry asked carefully in a far too ‘Hermione’ sounding voice for his liking. “Malfoy is allergic to silver, Sir.” He watched Professor Alaric’s face twist with a sneer.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he snapped. “I am not the kind to cater to students that believe their class and heritage give them ample excuse for laziness. Mr Malfoy’s dainty hands will be able to handle it until your detention is over I am sure.”

Harry winced at that. A few weeks ago he’d be inclined to agree with Professor Alaric, he could scarcely blame him from forming that opinion. He even still thought Malfoy was a snobby, spoilt little ponce, no amount of empathy or shared suffering or even blood would change that. The only thing that had changed was it didn’t infuriate him as much as it once had in sight of that empathy, that shared agony and blood.

And shared come, his mind supplied. Magic swirled in his core, furious at the torture occurring but a few feet away – whether Alaric was doing it intentionally or not. He grinded his teeth together hard, trying to hold it back. He couldn’t let it out, he just knew it. It would only do more harm than good, it couldn’t help Malfoy. The only thing that could was finished as soon as possible.
He was not even half way and Malfoy, with his super human speed was only an inch or so ahead with his affliction slowing him. Harry chewed the corner of his lip. He could now hear Malfoy’s skin sizzling, smell the unsettling scent of burnt flesh. How much more could Malfoy endure before he was reduced to the blood-famished mess he had been in at the start of term? Harry moved his writing arm to nudge Malfoy’s left in what he hoped would be a supportive gesture, but Professor Alaric’s gaze tightened and Harry didn’t want to push his luck. It would only make things worse for Malfoy.

The blond must have seen his intent, however, for as Harry ducked his head to carry on with his half-finished sentence, he felt something brush against the side of his foot. The subtle touch smoothed along the side of it and then up over his ankle where Harry felt the coolness radiating from Malfoy’s skin, even through his trousers. Malfoy was stroking the length of his shoed foot and ankle with his own.

A little shiver ran up Harry’s spine. He stopped for a moment, letting a low breath escape him before starting a new line and returning Malfoy’s touch hesitantly. What an odd situation to find himself in. In a detention with a teacher that hated Malfoy more than him, worried about the blond’s suffering and playing ‘footsie’ with him right under Professor Alaric’s nose. A little blush dusted Harry’s throat, he felt it burning there and he pulled his collar up to hide it.

Harry wasn’t entirely certain just what it was that made him return the awkward, comforting touch. Whatever inspired him to reciprocation seemed to distract Malfoy from the pain though, if even for a few moments. It was odd to say the least; he was worried for a vampire’s welfare and yet he had never felt so…so very like a normal teenager.

*Only I could be made to feel normal and experience normal feelings for the first time with a vampire,* he thought derisively, resting his right leg against Malfoy’s.

‘I must not neglect my studies. I must not neglect my studies. I must not neglect my studies. I must not...’

The air was tense and thick with unease. Harry did not raise his eyes to the professor again but he knew he was watching. Thankfully the desk disguised their actions, which did not cease even with those sharp eyes on them. When Harry finally reached his twelfth inch, he set his quill down and glanced at Malfoy. The blond had slipped behind a little (possibly distracted by the movements of their feet together) and finished shortly after Harry did. Harry noticed that Professor Alaric did not give him excuse to leave even though he was clearly done.
When Malfoy set the quill down, Harry winced as he saw it come away with sticky, burnt strips of skin from the vampire’s seared palm. The blistering wound, he noticed went a slightly lighter shade of red, but did not heal itself as Harry knew it should. He gave Malfoy a meaningful look but the blond ignored it and turned his grey eyes on the professor.

“We are finished and it is well after dinner as you no doubt intended, do we have leave to go now?” Malfoy demanded.

A loathing sneer crossed Professor Alaric’s pale face. “Do not forget who I am, Mr Malfoy,” he warned dangerously as he stalked towards their desk, snatching up both of their parchments. “Be sure that you both learn from this experience,” Professor Alaric said, glaring meaningfully into Malfoy’s face. Malfoy, Harry noticed, had curled his wounded hand into a fist as if to hide it from view.

*Most likely wanting to keep the true effect of the silver from Professor Alaric, Harry thought. He doesn’t want him to find out that he’s a vampire.*

“You were both given a very precious gift,” Professor Alaric said then. “You will receive the most disagreeable punishment of all for squandering it.” With that, he jerked his head at the door, effectively dismissing them both. But his final words brought a frown of confusion to Harry’s face. He meant their second chance at a career, at Hogwarts and their very futures, no doubt. But Harry couldn’t understand why Draco in particular seemed to vex him. Perhaps Professor Alaric was anti Death Eater, or perhaps he had lost someone to a Death Eater? To Lucius Malfoy even?

“And Mr Malfoy?” came Professor Alaric’s foreboding voice, stilling them both as they reached the door and knocking Harry from his thoughts. “I think you had better bear in mind what we talked about after your first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson.”

Malfoy wrenched open the door in answer and Harry followed him out into the dark halls. Dinner was of course over, he’d have to sneak down to the kitchen and ask Winky for something to tide him over, but that wasn’t at the forefront of his mind right now. His thoughts and eyes were on Malfoy, who was leading the way along the empty Charms corridor towards the grand staircase. He could practically feel the seething rage rising from the blond’s body like steam.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked, fighting back the dozens of other questions that begged to be answered. Malfoy huffed and walked a bit faster, so that Harry was almost jogging to keep up. He seized the wrist of Malfoy’s wounded hand and Malfoy growled warningly, wrenching his hand away but not before Harry caught a glimpse of the blistering wound on his palm. “You need to heal that, let Snape or me—”
“I won’t exactly die from it, will I?” Malfoy snapped as he whirled to face him. Harry had the feeling this was another of Malfoy’s abrupt mood swings where the affliction of the vampire’s curse weighed on him heavier than usual. It startled him because he hadn’t seen a return of this mindset since Malfoy preached to him about wasting his life moping. He had a feeling pain, helplessness, blows to his pride were what made him like this. Malfoy was so unrelentingly critical of himself, even if he’d never admit it aloud.

Harry wondered then how different things might have been, if Malfoy were able to harness his new powers, if his family had accepted his curse. If he’d been able to use the vampire’s curse as an advantage, Harry had a feeling that he wouldn’t mind it making him ‘impure’ so much.

Then he realised. It’s because he’s lost everything he once was. His family, his identity. It’s not the blood or the secrets that bother him. It’s the loss of his bloody pride he treasures so much, his independence. He’s having to forge a whole new life for himself with no one’s help but Snape’s. He saw Malfoy’s gaze harden impatiently. He quite obviously wanted to get as far away from him as possible and as quickly as possible. And the odds and his pride are both against him.

“Why does Professor Alaric hate you so much?” Harry asked. Malfoy sneered but otherwise did not answer. And he calls me a coward for not opening up to people, Harry thought. I’m an open book compared to him! “Does Alaric know that you’re a vampire?”

Malfoy’s expression darkened. “Don’t be ridiculous, Potter,” he snapped, turning to walk away again.

Harry’s hand shot out and he snatched Malfoy’s upper arm. “Why are you in such a hurry to escape me all of a sudden?” he demanded hotly. He didn’t have the physical strength to move or stop Malfoy but the mere touch made Malfoy whirl back around with an animalistic snarl. The blond roared and threw Harry backwards into the wall. The stone groaned and bit at the back of Harry’s head and neck. A low hiss shuddered over his lips at the sharp pain.

All of the tension of the days events were throbbing frantically through Malfoy’s dead veins. Harry felt it in the vampire’s lethargic pulse as those fingers curled around his arms roughly, so hard he felt them bruising. He was trapped between Malfoy and the wall, their faces as close as they had been earlier today with their ‘almost-kiss’. Harry raised his chin defiantly, even at the sight of Malfoy’s exposed fangs all-but glowing in the dim light of the torches lining the walls.

Malfoy’s fangs. The fangs that had sank into his flesh and made him feel…

More alive and human than you have ever felt in your entire life, his mind supplied. He held
Malfoy’s gaze, feeling the way that pale skin absorbed the heat of his breath. It was not the first time that it occurred to him how cruel the world was, that his body was screaming yes at the top of its lungs inside his head whilst he was mentally crying back why now? Why with him?

A shudder ran though him and his blood sang like a plucked harp. He kept his eyes on Malfoy though, on the sharp canines that beckoned him like beacons in a storm. His breath was coming out in husky pants, his body tense, fighting the urge to do...something he knew he would regret, something he didn’t want, not really. But he saw the way those intense grey eyes drifted down, roving the tensed column of his throat. As if aware of its audience, his body betrayed him and a bead of tantalising sweat trickled across the tendons in his throat.

A low croon left Malfoy’s chest.

Harry’s tongue darted out to wet his suddenly dry lips. He tasted Malfoy’s scent on them. It was an unnerving sensation. “You want it don’t you?” The words left his own lips before he knew what he was saying. It was the lust, the delayed teenage hormones stealing control of his speech, robbing him of his good sense. “You want me, that’s why I can see your fangs.”

Malfoy snarled with irritation and indignity, his pride bruised by the truth to those words. He turned his head away and Harry thought he saw a flicker of shame there, swore he saw those lips try to curl subconsciously over the pronounced points.

With all control lost to his blind desires for pleasure it had felt only at those hands, Harry tilted his head, arching his neck and drawing those eyes back to his neck. “Take it.” Malfoy’s head snapped up fully in shock then. Harry shifted uncertainly. “Take it.” His voice was insistent, urgent, almost pleading.

Slowly, after a moments pause, that golden head tipped into the hollow of his throat. He felt the slightly ‘Harry warmed’ breath there on his flesh. Felt Malfoy’s shallow exhalation against his frantic, desperate pulse that throbbed under the vampire’s touch as if to say take me, take me…

Suddenly, a growl of frustrated agony cut through the cloud of desire and Malfoy ripped himself away, almost throwing himself back at the opposite wall. “You play with fire, Potter;” Malfoy gasped, his voice raspy and harsh with his inner demon’s fire, fighting to be free.

Harry remained flat against the wall, his chest heaving, his heart pounding frantically in his chest. He didn’t even know why he’d done it, enticed Malfoy. It had just felt…right, his body had been in the driving seat and it had driven recklessly into Malfoy’s clutches. It had had a taste of pure, unadulterated pleasure in his grasp once and ever since it had hungered for it. It had hungered for

“You might long for the temporary freedom the release gives you, but there are more problems that will arise than benefits if you chase me,” Malfoy warned, sounding as if he was trying to rein his vampire back in the way Harry was now trying to conquer the dark power swirling in his gut.

Harry just stared at him. “You are the one that shadows me wherever I go,” he reminded him, his voice hot with embarrassment for his own actions from but a moment before. “Make up your mind. Do you want me or am I a curse? Are you my friend or my enemy–?”

“Never friends,” Malfoy cut across him, his eyes shining darkly, his fangs still capturing Harry’s gaze. “Never friends, Potter. I could never be a friend, you have a choice of one extreme or the other.” Slowly, Malfoy glided to his feet, righting himself and locking his gaze on Harry.

Harry shook his head as if to shrug off his insistent adolescent desires. “See, you’re confusing me,” he said. Malfoy grinned maliciously but did not approach, seeming to be anchoring himself to that one spot lest he do the unthinkable. Harry loathed that a large, undeniable part of him wished that he would. His body was picking a bad time to experience his delayed, unruly adolescent desires.

“Adult situations often are more complicated than you can comprehend,” Malfoy taunted.

“Fuck you,” Harry snarled. “You are one extreme to another, you either can’t live another minute without a taste of me or you can’t get away from me fast enough! Make up your mind!” His voice quivered, no, rumbled like a volcano threatening to explode. Sweat broke out on his skin from the effort to contain the power, and it burned as if it were lava. He wondered, as the magic crackled ominously in his core, just how big a mistake it was to have come back to Hogwarts before he had had chance to test his control in a stressful situation…

A pause followed in which Malfoy, evidently oblivious to Harry’s struggle for control, turned his gaze away from the chosen one, as if he could only think clearly without him clouding his mind. “I am trying to make the most of this curse, trying to forge a life for myself in spite of it,” he explained quietly. “I have to keep a level head and with you around it is impossible.” His tongue darted out over his lips. “But, I cannot stay away. You’re like a bloody magnet! And aside from that I am trying to rise above this demon, use it for my own devices but I am thwarted at every turn!”

“So let me help you!” Harry cried. “Tell me who and what is hurting–”
“I cannot tell you!” Malfoy bellowed, “I am not your next ‘mission’, Potter, fix your own bloody mess of a life before you stick your grubby nose into mine!”

Suddenly a heavy, powerful wave of electric heat rolled up Harry’s chest like a building tsunami. His entire body went rigid. He couldn’t draw breath! Dimly at the back of his mind he registered Malfoy’s approach. He heard his voice, perhaps calling his name but it didn’t matter, he had to get away. The magic had been roiling in his gut, surging higher with every word and now it was like a riled up tiger fighting to escape the bars of its cage.

Harry’s hands clenched into fists, he clapped his mouth and eyes shut as if the magic might escape him there. “Get away,” he tried to whisper. “Run,” but the words would not form. He was hanging on by a thread and then, suddenly he felt Malfoy’s hands on his shoulders. His vision exploded into a blinding white light.

*                      *                      *

The world was deathly quiet, the only sounds a strange, disconcerting buzzing of the white noise of the room. His head throbbed and his every limb ached forebodingly, as if promising agony dare he move them an inch. At first he thought he was hovering in a black abyss, lost for who he was and what had happened. All he knew was it felt like he’d been thrown off the astronomy tower ten times in a row. Then, slowly it all came back to him and he opened his eyes.

The Hospital Wing came into view, very blurry but recognisable. He had been there so many times after all. Where were his glasses? He reached out towards the bedside table and snatched up his spectacles, sliding them on his face. A small collection of familiar faces were gathered at the end of his bed, but none of them were Malfoy. Where had he got to?

“Welcome back, Potter,” Madame Pomfrey said softly, sweeping around Ron, Hermione and Professor McGonagall (who were gathered at the end of the bed) to reach him. The healer took his right arm and waved her wand over his pulse, clucking her tongue in a displeased sort of way. “Not even a few weeks into first term and you’re already paying me a visit,” she tsk’ed, “haven’t had enough adventures for one lifetime?!”

Harry struggled to sit up, ignoring Madame Pomfrey’s insistent demands that he had to rest. He looked to his friends and McGonagall, allowing Pomfrey to continue to examine him with her wand, but not lying down again as she would’ve liked.
“What happened?” he demanded, “I remember arguing with Malfoy after our detention and then–”

“You flipped your lid, mate,” Ron cut across him.

“You were overwhelmed by your magic,” Hermione explained a little more finely, watching him with a look that suggested she was displeased with his recklessness. “Why didn’t you tell us you’ve been struggling to keep it under control?”

Harry winced. “You can talk for someone who was claiming she couldn’t get sick earlier. Do you really have the right to lecture me?” he snapped, not meeting her eyes as he continued. “I had it under control. I’ve been practising since I…since Voldemort died. It only becomes a burden like that when I’m upset or angry.”

“Oh, well that’s just fine,” Ron snorted sarcastically, “because that doesn’t happen very often.”

“Up yours,” Harry snarled. “I didn’t tell you because I was handling it. I didn’t want you all to panic, like I knew you all would because some of His power has been transferred to me.”

“Did you think we’d believe you were going to be possessed by him or something?” Hermione snapped. “You think we’d send you away or have you committed to St. Mungo’s? You should know us better than that!”

“There was nothing you could do!” Harry cried, his fingers knotting into the sheets on instinct to withhold his fury, to anchor himself. For all their sakes. “I was trying to save everyone from a lot of useless worry!”

“That is enough!” McGonagall snapped, eyeing them all critically before settling her gaze on Harry. “Whatever your intentions, this is an extremely serious matter. Your body is containing what is probably the most unparalleled, virile supply of magic in the world. And it has come to you suddenly, not gradually, meaning you never had time to adjust, to learn control before it became too great. Had you not been so powerful beforehand I doubt you would have lasted this long. You are, again, a very foolish but fortunate young man.”

Harry stared at her for a moment. He knew the power had been great but he had no idea it was so potent. He could do someone serious damage if he got upset or lost his temper again like with Malfoy. Perhaps the fact that he had been ‘donating’ some of his blood to Malfoy had helped in keeping his power under wraps? Filtering some of it away into Malfoy’s body unintentionally, and
in doing so, giving him a fraction less strength to fight against. The magic was in his blood after all.

Malfoy.

Harry’s eyes widened. “What did I do to Malfoy?” he asked, gazing around the room as if expecting to find him there. “I was arguing with him and I sort of…exploded. Is he alright?”

“Mr Malfoy was the one who brought you here,” Madame Pomfrey explained, pushing a glass filled with a calming draught Harry was all too familiar with into his hand. Harry downed it quickly as he listened. “He carried you in here and then vanished as soon as he had helped me to get you on the bed. He seemed well enough, a little shaken, concerned but unharmed.”

Harry frowned. “But I was right next to him,” he insisted. “How did he…?” His voice faltered, of course he already knew. Or thought he did. He couldn’t kill Draco like that because he was a vampire. But if it had been someone else? Someone human…

“I’m dangerous,” he breathed, grinding his teeth wretchedly. “I could hurt someone with this…”

A gentle hand laid on his shoulder suddenly and he looked up to see McGonagall giving him a slight, reassuring smile. “It is dangerous, to yourself as well as others. But control can be learnt and if anyone can harness this, it is you, Potter. There are no spells or potions powerful enough to contain your power completely, but a strong calming draught should help to take the edge off of your emotions. And I will ask Professor Snape to assist in this matter.”

Harry made a face.

“None of that, you know he is the best for the job and you are far too old for such childish grudges.”

“I’m not the only one that holds the grudge,” Harry protested. No, in fact in discovering Snape’s memories when the man had helped him to end his own life on the horcrux hunt, his hatred for the man had dulled considerably in light of his understanding of him. It was Snape whose pride has been wounded in the accidental sharing of those memories, him that was on edge and testy, not Harry. At least, not recently. Nevertheless, with a great sigh he surrendered. “Fine, I’ll have ‘Remedial Potions’ again, shall I?”
McGonagall gave a flicker of a smile. “An excellent idea, Potter, you don’t want to fall behind in your studies—”

“Especially since you will remain here for the rest of the day to give your body time to recover from that little panic attack you gave it,” Madame Pomfrey interjected, forcing his shoulders back to the pillows and not removing her hands until she was certain he would stay there. “No arguments, Potter, you must rest.” Next, she rounded on Hermione and Ron, “Now, out with you. You may meet him for breakfast tomorrow, shoo.” They and Professor McGonagall soon complied.

Alone moments later, Harry was left to ponder his situation. His fingers drifted absently over the marks on his throat, the scar from Malfoy’s bite. He couldn’t help but recall it all, every word he’d breathed. “Take me…” He cringed at the memory. That wasn’t him surely? He would never pant so…wantonly at anyone much less Malfoy. The thought scared him.

The mark on his throat was inflamed now where he had rubbed it so much. That was it. The bite. Malfoy had done something to him, of course! He didn’t know why the embarrassment of begging Malfoy to take him bothered him more than his unstable powers. More than the possibility of imploding with the sheer strength of his magic. That was obviously part of the curse the bite inflicted too! It was so obvious he didn’t know why he hadn’t seen it before!

The solution to this ridiculous problem, to his aberrant, shameless behaviour where Malfoy and his mouth were concerned, it was simple. He’d find the answer if he looked up vampire bites, or even vampires and their ‘Firsts’. Malfoy wouldn’t have looked any further once he’d discovered he was doomed to drink from Harry and only Harry for the rest of eternity.

Yes, there was always an answer, always something, this couldn’t just be it, just be him forever more. He glanced down the side of the bed and smiled when he saw his satchel. Malfoy must have brought it down here along with him. Harry tried to push the image of Malfoy carrying him bridal style from his mind. A flush still coloured his cheeks, however at the disturbing thought as he checked that his invisibility cloak was still in the secret pouch on the inside of his bag. It was.

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Long after the castle had fallen silent under a veil of darkness, Harry made his move. Or more accurately, several small ones. He edged out of the Hospital Wing under the cover of his cloak and crept up to the deserted library.

A few of the more rebellious books were fluttering around the shelves as he closed the iron-grate
door of the restricted section behind him. Most of them jumped back onto their shelves as he stepped forward, but a few rogue volumes flapped their pages at him petulantly before zooming toward his head. Harry swore, ducking down and wincing as a loud **THUMP** sounded. The book had slammed straight into the wall. “Serves you right,” he said, tucking his cloak under his arm.

Walking the dusty aisles, Harry scanned them with his eyes. One book jumped as if poising to strike but he fixed it with a glare and directed his wand at it. “Don’t even think about it,” he warned and it slumped back on its pile with a hiss. A buzz of unease rippled through Harry as he approached the ‘magical beings’ section. ‘Beings’ not creatures, for Malfoy wasn’t exactly a monster, an animal, despite all appearances. Slowly, quietly, he searched the shelves.

Animagi... Furies... Incubi... Shape-shifters... Succubi... Undines... Valkyries... There. Vampires.

After a few moments of indecision and apprehension of what he may find, Harry plucked the three heaviest, most ancient of tomes from their shelves and sat down at the nearest bench. He had all night. If he heard someone approach he would simply throw his cloak over himself.

The first book was filled with debase history and sickening rituals that required vampire parts and was useless to anyone of a sane mind. The second smelt worryingly of decaying flesh and was written in thin, dark red calligraphy that Harry feared was blood. It had some interesting facts about potions and rituals on becoming a vampire, becoming a ‘stronger’ vampire though and was worth a look. He stowed it in his bag for later and opened the third book.

“I am beginning to think you are nocturnal,” came a dark, droll voice from behind him. Harry jumped and whirled in his seat, his wand drawn but still shining with the harmless light of **Lumos**. His heart plummeted into his stomach and his eyes widened in horror as they locked on the sight of Professor Snape, emerging from the shadows and coming under the light of his wand.

Snape watched him for a moment, his dark eyes gleaming in the dimness. “A little late for research, isn’t it, Mr Potter?” Snape asked, approaching the bench Harry was sat on and turning his nose up at the text. “That will tell you nothing but how incredibly foolish some scholars and theorists are. A waste of even your time, Potter. Now, Gristlebeck’s tome on ‘The Vampyr and Their Humanity’ is a valuable one indeed.” He glanced at the book just visible in Harry’s still open bag.

Harry swallowed hard. “Sir,” he said shakily. He wasn’t afraid of Snape but he definitely didn’t want to be kicked out of Hogwarts and he most certainly didn’t want Snape to know what he was looking for.
Then, Snape spoke with a voice that was almost trying to be…reassuring. It made Harry uneasy. “Far from me wishing to give you a shortcut in learning that difficult lesson but while even Gristlebeck’s is a riveting tome of fact, you will not find the cure in there.”

Harry frowned, but something inside him, no, inside those cavernous eyes told him Snape already knew.

“This is not an otherworldly affliction, Mr Potter,” Snape continued. “Unfortunately, you are but a normal eighteen-year-old. One who has been deprived of ecstasy and now that you have had a taste, you cannot get enough.”

Harry’s skin flushed a vibrant crimson. He was mortified. Hurriedly, he averted his gaze, edging his cloak into the bag (hopefully without Snape seeing) and picking it up, but not daring to move or even get to his feet. He might catch Snape’s eyes accidentally. For the first time ever, he was grateful for his stunted growth and short frame.

“I encourage your wanting to know more about the situation you and Draco have found yourselves in. However, do not blame Draco or what he is for these feelings that you have. Just because they frighten you and are startlingly new to you, it does not make them any less normal. Your experience is simply a bit more delayed than in most young men.”

Harry winced. This was sounding frighteningly like the ‘birds and the bees’ talk he had never had from either of his parents, or anyone for that fact. His brow furrowed then, as he wondered how he had come to know anything about sex at all really. But as for right now, as much as he wanted to lunge at Snape and call him a liar, he recognised the truth when he heard it. Snape was right. And he was more terrified of that than any lethal magic fluctuation.

Then, suddenly, his mouth was moving without his permission, as if the dam holding his questions and concerns in had been cracked. “With all due respect, Sir,” Harry said, for the first time without any sarcasm or malice, “I cant help but be concerned for my mental health when the first thing I get hot and bothered over is a man and a vampire.”

“Draco is not a thing,” Snape said stiffly, but did not sneer or glare. He just looked down on him with a thoughtful look crossing his pallid features, Harry’s wand light still the only thing between them. “And as I believe many people have told you before now, Potter, you are attracted to danger, it makes a poetic sort of sense that you would remain cold to all but the most inappropriate suitors.” He regarded Harry closely then and Harry was taken aback by the flicker of emotion in those eyes, by the humanity he saw in that face. “But if you never listen to another word I say, Potter, listen to this. Caring for Draco is not the worst fate that could befall you. He was raised a spoilt, beloved brat but he has had his share of suffering. He is a good man.”
Harry looked up into the Professor’s face pensively, those cavernous eyes still shadowed by the ghosts of his past, even now. “Like you, Sir?” Harry asked, with no ounce of hatred or maliciousness in his voice. Snape remained silent. Harry shifted his bag onto his shoulder and took a few steps away from the professor.

“When will my detention be then, Sir?” he asked, confused when Snape merely raised a brow in answer. “For my sneaking around into the restricted section after hours?”

“Providing you are found back in bed within the next ten minutes,” Snape replied quietly, “and that you read Gristlebeck’s findings thoroughly, I neither saw nor heard you, Potter.” With that, the professor whirled around and was swallowed up by the shadows. That left Harry to creep back to the Hospital Wing under his cloak, his bag heavier and his head filled with confusion. The night had given him more questions as opposed to answers, it seemed.

He had absolutely no intention of sleeping though, too riled up and anxious to even think of it. No, he would tuck himself up in bed and begin his quest through ‘The Vampyr and Their Humanity’. His plans, however, were dashed when he crept back into the Hospital Wing and pulled the cloak off his head, only to see Malfoy sitting rigidly in a chair beside his vacated bed.

“Been out for a walk in the moonlight, Potter? Or were you sleep-walking?”

“I could say the same for you,” Harry snapped back quickly, setting his bag down by the side of his bed and climbing into it after kicking his shoes off.

“I am nocturnal,” Malfoy said with bitter amusement. “And besides which, I am not a patient of this ward that has been confined to bed. You didn’t see yourself earlier, Potter.”

Harry avoided his eyes and pulled the covers up over himself. He wasn’t sure exactly what he thought of Malfoy right now, not after what had happened earlier or what Snape had said. He wanted more barriers between them until he was sure. “I’m touched by your concern but you’ve got nothing to worry about, your precious blood plant will live to replenish you another day.”

Draco shot forwards so fast Harry recoiled back into the pillows. Those arms landed hard on the sheets either side of him and he swallowed. “Don’t be an arse, Potter,” the blond snapped, his voice quiet but fierce. “You scared the shit out of me. One minute we’re talking, the next your magic was exploding. You were screaming and you nearly blew me and the Charms corridor to Kingdom Come!”
Harry considered him for a moment, their closeness not disturbing him half as much as that image. He had nearly killed Malfoy and taken a chunk of the castle with him. “You look alright to me,” Harry said slowly, scanning the vampire’s face for visible marks. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“Merlin, Potter,” Malfoy groaned, leaning back so that he was sitting on the edge of Harry’s bed instead of looming over him. Harry breathed a small sigh of relief at some of the regained personal space. Malfoy seemed genuinely concerned for him for whatever reason and had brought him here, had somehow saved him from himself. He deserved a little more information – more from him.

_He deserves to understand just what is endangering his life every time he is around me_, Harry thought. Yes, he hadn’t become such a jaded, selfish fool that he couldn’t see how unfair and distrustful he was being of everyone. _How many times does he have to prove himself to me before I give him a little back in return?_

“I was one of Voldemort’s horcruxes. There were a few as you no doubt read in the _Quibbler_ but what I didn’t tell them, or anyone else besides Ron, Hermione, Remus, Tonks and Snape, was that I was one. Before I could…before Voldemort would die I had to die, I was resigned to it. But Snape turned up and helped me to…to kill the horcrux inside of me instead. It nearly took me with it, and would have done were it not for him…”

It was then that he had accidentally shared Snape’s memories, but he wouldn’t betray that to a soul, not even Malfoy, who Snape obviously cared for. He edited out how he had been thrown into a limbo where Dumbledore had spoken in cryptic riddles and Snape had emerged to take him back to the living. Or more accurately, to return his soul to his waiting body. The trip back had been a kaleidoscope of images for them both, but it was there that Harry had been exposed to Snape’s most deepest secrets. Secrets regarding Snape’s past, Lily, Harry’s mother and Snape’s reasons for joining and betraying Voldemort…

“…Snape and I met back up with Hermione and Ron, who had destroyed Hufflepuff’s cup and then there was only one thing for it. As soon as they turned their backs I walked straight into Voldemort’s hands.”

“And mine,” Malfoy added quietly, staring at him with a look of longing crossed with nostalgia in his eyes. “How is this relevant to your little explosion?” he asked.

Harry winced. The part he loathed most, his connection, his immortal ties to _Him_. “The other part of the secret is that when I… When Voldemort died, the spell I used, it… I didn’t realise but in the backlash, some of his power passed to me.” He paused, looking up, waiting for Malfoy to fly back from him in disgust or fear, waiting for him to react _somehow_, but he didn’t. He barely blinked.
“Don’t you have anything to say about that? Why aren’t you more…shocked?”

Malfroy cocked his head slightly, as if thinking over the reasons why he wasn’t surprised or horrified. “I suppose on one hand, you have always seemed powerful to me, whether I liked it or not. And on the other hand, I was there, I saw how powerful the spell you used to kill Voldemort was. It’s little surprise there were after-effects.”

That and nothing could shock him anymore, not after all he had seen and not now he was in tune to everything down to the little brownish flecks in Potter’s eyes. He had tasted something different in Potter the second time he had tasted him, although he hadn’t known what. He had felt stronger, more virile on his tongue – more resistant to his instincts. Though he wouldn’t tell Potter that. He thought…no, he knew somehow that it would put some idiotic and ridiculous notion into Potter’s head that he had changed. For some reason, the idea of him causing Potter anything more than carnal pain had become abhorrent to him over the last week or so.

“What surprises me, Potter, is that you thought you could handle such an influx of magic all by yourself,” Draco said suddenly, shoving any emotional thoughts related to Potter to the back of his mind, or at least, trying to. He had taken some of Potter’s power each time he fed, explaining his growth spurts in strength and speed, it was not hard to figure out. That tiny slither of relief had probably made all the difference. But had had not tasted even a fraction of that power, he could sense that.

Potter glared as if insulted. “I didn’t realise how reliant on my emotions the control I have over my magic is. It’s become even more sensitive since the…influx or whatever you called it. I’ve been trying to train myself to manage it more easily but I’ve never been faced with such…stressful situations since…”

A small grin touched Draco’s lips. “Do I stress you out, Potter?” he asked.

“I’ve been miserable and even a bit lost this summer, but I was never… I never lost my temper like that. My control was never tested until I came back to Hogwarts and was forced into dealing with you.”

Far from insulted or hurt, Draco was still grinning slightly. “You also weren’t living until you started dealing with me. Face it, Potter, you’ve never felt more alive than you have when you’re with me.”
Potter turned his head, as if pretending to be interested in the milky shapes the moon painted on the walls. Anything to avoid Draco’s penetrating gaze. “That may be true but it isn’t right, what I feel when you bite me, it’s…it’s unnatural, all a reaction to the stuff in your saliva. Anything you bit would react the same. You reacted the same to the vampire in the dungeon—”

“Do not cast him and me in the same light,” Draco snapped, his voice dangerous now. “I am not a monster, I am not him.”

Potter flinched at the iciness to that voice but kept his head up and his gaze averted. He most likely hadn’t meant to do any such thing, but he could understand how Draco would be offended by the idea, no doubt. After all, too many times had Potter been cast in the same shade as Voldemort before now. “In any case, they aren’t my real feelings—”

“Oh, how wrong you are,” Draco growled, leaning in so that Potter could not avoid his eyes any longer. How many extremes could one man – barely a man take him to in a few short minutes? He had just been prey to a foolish grin at Potter sharing secrets with him, then angry at the man’s carelessness with his words and now he was feeling a mixture of lust and frustration. This man resolved and yet confused him in so many ways that he thought he might’ve been bewildered into an early grave – were he alive. He paused then, still inches from Potter. Why did a passing thought like that not feel as…spiteful, as biting as it once might have?

When Potter was finally looking at him again, he said, “You told me that you read up on vampires over the summer? You must’ve been too busy trying to get your new powers under control to do much reading, however, if you are naïve enough to say something like that. I believe my reading was more extensive than yours. Did you know that a vampire chooses to keep his First (if they have one) usually because they are a lover, someone they wish to be their soul purpose of living? Over time, exposure to my blood and saliva could elongate your life, even forge a ‘bond’ of sorts between us, it’s terribly interesting.”

He leant in so that his face was near Potter’s at that point. Those green eyes followed the path his own tongue made over his pearly white teeth. “You really should read up on that part at least, but regardless, my saliva only releases your inhibitions and enhances sensation. It also heals you, as you may have noticed, but it does not create emotion where there is none.”

Harry could not help but remember Snape’s diagnosis from earlier. That couldn’t be all it was, surely? They weren’t his feelings making him crumble when those fangs sank into him, making him beg Malfoy for more. Making him crave more. He closed his eyes then, wishing nothing more than to escape this prison of overwhelming emotion.
But there were cool, long fingers on his shoulders, hooking into his pyjama shirt, not allowing him to retreat into himself. There was no hiding, not from Malfoy or himself. He didn’t know whether that was a blessing or a curse. “It’s not me,” Harry gasped, his voice raspy. “These aren’t my feelings.”

“Just because they are new, just because they aren’t ‘proper’ and ‘moral’ doesn’t make them any less yours,” Malfoy explained huskily.

Harry could feel those hands tightening on him, tugging him in closer. His body tensed, it wanted to go with it, to melt into Malfoy’s arms, but Harry resisted, just barely.

“I don’t understand what this is, why you… I don’t understand any of it,” Harry mumbled, squirming for freedom. Yes, these feelings, the fervour in Malfoy’s voice, the cool comfort of his forced embrace, he was scared and confused by all of it. “You should let me go,” he said, “if Pomfrey catches you–”

“She will simply think I am a suitor that has appeared to comfort you. I was the one who brought you here, after all.”

Harry shoved at Malfoy’s chest hard, gaining more breathing space but not his freedom. Malfoy’s arms still forged a cage around him. “It’s been a little over a week,” Harry protested, determined to escape before his teenage body betrayed him. “Whatever you think you’re feeling, it isn’t real, just like my feelings aren’t–”

“I have been plagued with thoughts of you, memories of you, memories of how you felt against me,” Malfoy countered breathily, his eyes shining with passion. “Haunted by your taste, for weeks, all summer you’ve been all that’s filled my bloody head, Potter! It has been more than a few days.”

Harry tensed, frustrated that Malfoy had a counter-argument for every reasoning. “But that only proves that you’re only interested because you’re a vampire! You’re not here because you care about me, you’re here because I’m food!”

“You think that because I’m a vampire I’m incapable of caring for anything except in terms of my next feed? Your Lupin is a werewolf isn’t he? And Weasley’s sister-in-law a veela, all of them magical beings like me, does that mean their feelings are invalid? False? Can’t I want you as a man as well as a vampire?” Malfoy gave a sharp tug and Harry was pulled tight to his body.
Harry raised his chin to show his good sense and resistance still remained. Malfoy tilted his head to his until their noses were touching. “I can feel just as well as any human, better even.”

“You’re very comfortable with being a vampire suddenly,” Harry retorted. “Regained your sense of self-importance so soon?”

Malfoy snarled, his fangs visible now and gleaming in the dimness. “Don’t mock me, Potter. And do not make light of my affliction simply because I am learning to cope, learning to use my misfortunes for my own means as opposed to your method of wasting time whining about how bitterly unfair the world is. My life–”

“Or lack thereof–”

“Is far from perfect,” Malfoy cut across his interruption testily, “But I have a great deal of power and skill that if harnessed could be most beneficial to me. I will turn this into a blessing, I won’t waste my time wallowing and crying ‘poor me’!”

Harry sneered at the blatant reference to him. “Well, I won’t be one of your perks, Malfoy,” he snapped. “I don’t want you, dead or alive. I’ll help you as agreed but nothing more. Whether you think me bursting in my trousers was because I fancy you or not, whether you think you give a shit about me outside of blood or not, it’s all irrelevant because I wont give into you.”

“You’re grasping at straws with me, Potter,” Malfoy accused, “You’re finding every and any excuse to hide away. It only proves how confused you really are.” Malfoy seized a fistful of Harry’s hair then, tugging his head back hard until the perfect column of his throat was pulled taut. Malfoy purred with delight, leaning in to press his nose to the hollow of Harry’s honey-hued flesh, drinking in his scent heavily. “I’ll settle those confused desires of yours, Harry,” Malfoy panted, his lips ghosting over his skin as he spoke.

A choked gasp left Harry’s lips, his entire body tense as if a tidal wave of ecstasy was coursing through it. Malfoy inhaled him so deeply, so powerfully that the action sounded almost like a feral groan rising from the vampire’s chest. Those lips pressed into the hollow of Harry’s throat, where that nose had been and the soft teasing scrape of fangs greeted his skin. He shuddered and Malfoy’s grip on his hair tightened, as if worried the tremble might be a move of escape.

Escape seemed impossible right now to Harry, who had never been held or touched or spoken to so ardently. Malfoy’s mere presence, it was like an overwhelming tide of warmth and electric pleasure that he felt right down to the roots of his hair. His eyes glazed over and then closed. His fingers tensed on Malfoy’s shoulders and froze there as if contemplating pushing him away. But he
didn’t. That saliva hadn’t touched him yet, did that mean that this was all Malfoy?

Suddenly, Malfoy growled and pulled him sharply so that Harry was straddling his knees, the sweltering heat of Harry’s groin rocking into his. A guttural grunt left Harry’s lips at that. He felt Malfoy grin against his skin, those fangs making love to the scar they had created the first time.

“Yes,” Malfoy encouraged huskily, his nails of his hand at the small of Harry’s back clawing him gently. “Give in. Why shouldn’t you let yourself have this, be touched like this?”

Magic swirled in Harry’s gut along with white-hot arousal and Harry thought he could’ve thought of a million reasons why, were his mind not clouded with lust. Lust, that’s all it was. But it felt bloody fantastic. “I don’t… I can’t trust these feelings, or you, or myself.”

“Who could you hurt? Which of your precious friends could possibly deny you this simple pleasure?”

“Whatever this is, it isn’t… isn’t simple,” Harry panted, his fingers digging into Malfoy’s shoulders to anchor himself to reality. “And my…” His tongue flickered out to moisten his lips as if that would aid him in making sense. Malfoy followed the motion, looking as if he wanted to pursue that tongue into his mouth. Harry clamped his lips tightly shut at that thought, even as Malfoy rolled his hips up into his own tauntingly. Harry gave a shallow hiss. “My friends would all deny me this if they knew it were you–”

“Then they are pitiful friends,” Malfoy cut him off, tugging his head back wickedly to silence him. “I told you, stop grasping at straws.” With that, Malfoy raised his head a fraction to allow the hand not immersed in that dark hair to glide across that sun-kissed, golden collarbone, sliding into his shirt to molest the smooth skin there. It was spattered with light hair and a low, inhuman sound of appreciation left him as he studied it with his hands. Harry jerked in his arms when his fingertips aroused a tight nipple.

“No!” Harry cried out. “Y-you – if I get too… I could kill someone – my magic, I–”

“Everything is an excuse for you not to enjoy yourself, a reason for you not to be happy, isn’t it?” the vampire snapped, pinching the nipple in punishment. Harry gasped and his cock throbbed against Malfoy’s through their fabric prisons.

“W-Who says I’m happy? This is… is lust, not anything more. I won’t risk others’ lives for my own
shallow pleasure.”

Malfoy growled darkly and both hands flew down to grasp his buttocks, squeezing and pressing their groins together so hard they both saw stars. “This isn’t shallow,” Malfoy told him, whispering harshly against his ear. “This is blood—no bone deep. Stop being such an overly moral prude and let yourself live for the first time in eighteen years!”

A low, guttural groan tore free of Harry’s lips and he arched into Malfoy’s hips in reaction to his overpowering touch, before wriggling for freedom. Or trying to. “I’m—I’m not yours!” Harry grunted, shoving at him. “You’re nothing to me, just a charity case! Nothing more!”

Draco chuckled lowly, grinding his prick into Potter’s in a thorough rhythm that made Potter still in his struggles, even as the fire of protest burned brightly in those brilliantly bright green eyes.

“There are a million reasons why you—we should stop,” Potter insisted, despite the desperate throbbing of his cock against Draco’s. His organ was so hot that Draco swore the heat would melt him, even through the barrier of their trousers.

“And there is one very good reason that you should lie back and enjoy it—because you want to,” Draco argued, punctuating his words with a sharp thrust of his hips. Potter choked and Draco grinned. He didn’t know why he needed Potter to give in but he was sure it wasn’t entirely to do with the all-consuming hunger for blood or sex. Although his instincts were always craving both more than Potter’s human lungs craved air. All Draco knew was every fibre of his being was humming, singing at this exchange. He was bursting with vitality as he had never been before, even in life.

Potter’s lips twitched, a fluttering, minute movement to any human but the centre of his, Draco’s world. There were definitely some advantages to being a vampire. He inhaled Potter’s breath as it danced across his skin. Then, suddenly, he spanned the gap between them to chase the source. He stole that air as his mouth met Potter’s soft, pliant warmth. Oh, it was so perfect. He groaned at the blissful sensation and sank forward. But that mouth remained a tight seam of nervousness.

Slowly, he withdrew but a hairsbreadth, his next words making his lips brush across that tense line. “Open your mouth,” he urged quietly and dove back down to take that orifice again. No sooner had he felt Potter’s lips shudder apart, however, than the doors to the Hospital Wing flew open.
“A little bird told me that Mr Malfoy was out of his bed,” the cool, indifferent voice of Professor Alaric cooed as he strode into the room. Draco fought the instinct to fly across the room and rip his throat clean out. Severus had told him that as he drank more, his powers would grow and eventually come into his own. He would be able to stop this perhaps without revealing himself – one day. Especially with the raw power contained in Potter’s blood. Yes, one day soon, but not now.

If he had engorged and drunk himself stupid as most new vampires would have in their first few weeks of new ‘life’ he would have been in his element by now. Severus had suggested that if his First had been anyone less powerful than Harry Potter, he would not be coming into any sort of power anytime soon. The only thing that dampened that thought, that darkened the brilliant prospect of potent power, was the feeling he was getting of his instincts creeping to the forefront of his mind. The instincts he was fighting less and less…

Quiet footsteps across the floor cut through his reverie. He glared at Professor Alaric, slipping back off the bed and onto his feet, allowing Potter to recover some of his dignity.

“You have returned to Hogwarts with a rebellious attitude, haven’t you, Mr Malfoy?” Professor Alaric asked, stopping at the end of Potter’s bed. “Detention in your first week and now accosting an ailing student in the Hospital Wing while the matron sleeps – after hours, when you should be in bed.”

“I do not have a bed time,” Draco said darkly, not allowing fear of potential pain to touch his face or voice. “I was just checking up on Potter—”

“It looked more than that from here,” Professor Alaric cut across him, looking to a rather flushed Harry at last. “If he is bothering you, Mr Potter—”

“If he were, I could remove him quite well myself,” Potter assured him, his voice terse with a mixture of his own shame and his mistrust of the men in the room with him. “It was my fault Malfoy was out of bed, punish me if you’re looking for justice.”

For some reason the mention of that word gave an odd glint to those cold blue eyes. “Your gallant sacrifice is not necessary, and Mr Malfoy will get more than a detention if he is not in his bed in ten minutes.” With that warning, Professor Alaric moved over to the door, waiting.

As soon as his back was turned, Harry glanced to Malfoy. “Are you…is he making you…?”
Harry’s voice faltered at the warning look in Malfoy’s eyes. Those pale lips opened to reply but did not get the chance to release their words.

“Come along, Mr Malfoy,” Professor Alaric demanded and Malfoy’s mouth closed without an answer. Harry watched with confusion and foreboding as the vampire blond and the professor shut the door closed behind them. Malfoy was weaker than he should be and acting…odd, if one could tell the difference. Harry grit his teeth, catching his lower lip between them and startling at the tenderness there. He remembered how that barely-there kiss had felt, those words whispered gently against his mouth until he almost swallowed them.

He shook his head, struggling to clear his head of such things. He didn’t like the way Malfoy’s close proximity made him feel, it was unsettling, unbalancing and whenever he tried to catch himself afterwards he couldn’t help but fall flat on his face again. Still, Malfoy’s expression haunted him…

He quickly made up his mind. Whether out of determination to prove this was just a charitable act of heroism or for another, deeper purpose, he was not sure, but he hopped out of bed regardless dragging on the invisibility cloak and hurrying silently after them. He didn’t have to go far.

“Have you forgotten my promise so soon, Mr Malfoy?” Came the slow, warning drone of Professor Alaric’s voice. Harry held his breath to remain as silent as possible as he crept round the corner. His eyes widened when he saw Malfoy pinned to the wall – literally. Silver spikes pierced his wrists, nailing them to the stone.

Thick blood rolled down Malfoy’s wrists. Harry cringed at the bloody holes that had been torn in those pale wrists where Malfoy tried to fight against them. Smoke was rising from the tattered flesh. Malfoy’s face was drawn tight with horror and agony badly masked.

Harry edged forwards, seething, his hand sliding into his pocket for his wand – that wasn’t there. He cursed himself. Never, not since Voldemort had he made that mistake, but no matter, he’d throw Professor Alaric off with sheer physical strength if he had to. But then, Malfoy spoke and the sound halted his every movement.

“Potter isn’t an idiot. What he is is a foolhardy, nosy Gryffindor through and through.” Malfoy garbled out, his voice drawn taut with pain, tense as if it might snap like elastic under too much pressure. He growled at the agony that seized him when he tried to wrench free again.

Alaric gave a wicked laugh. “Then I shall have to ensure Mr Potter is not in a position to stick his self-righteous nose in others’ business.” There was a dark threat in his voice. Suddenly, a furious
scream filled the air. Harry barely refrained from leaping back in surprise as Malfoy threw himself forwards in fury, his roar turning into a cry of pain as the nails tore further into the skin that was desperately trying to heal around the silver searing his wounds.

“I am his business. Potter is mine!” Malfoy declared raggedly, his chest heaving with useless gasps. Harry’s back went up at that but he bit his tongue and bided his time, waiting, watching. So Alaric was the one that was hurting Malfoy? Why hadn’t Malfoy just told someone? Then it hit him. The silver, now and in the detention. Alaric knew what Malfoy was. And Malfoy doesn’t want anyone to know, at least not until he is in a position to use it to his advantage. So how could he stop this? Help Malfoy without his secret being exposed? He bit his lip as panic brewed in his chest.

Then, suddenly, Alaric’s hand shot forwards a silver knuckle-duster gleaming ominously on his fist as it slammed into Malfoy’s throat, burning him. Harry winced, edging closer, readying to make… a move and consequences be damned. He couldn’t let this continue. No decent man could. Malfoy sank his exposed fangs (exposed in response to the pressure on his body) into his own lips to withhold his screams.

“I will make your life unbearable,” Alaric promised darkly. “There will be no sunshine in your glorious un-life, that I promise you. Anything that makes your existence bearable I will exterminate.”

Malfoy writhed like a wild animal in a net, gnashing his fangs at the professor as if longing to tear into him. So much power, Harry thought, he could see it burning away, perhaps Malfoy had not reached his peak yet but he had the power to stop this and was too afraid to. Surely nothing was worth this torment? Then he remembered something, the sound of Hermione’s voice speaking the kind of sense only the ambitious could.

“…this is our last chance to repair the damage the war did to our futures… I won’t let… Voldemort have the victory of stealing any future I may have had…”

That cold stranger had taken everything from Malfoy that night, together with Fenrir Greyback he had stripped him of his pride, his family, the pureblood heritage he had been taught to cherish. Everything but the potential for it to get better, everything but a future. If people found out he was a vampire… Yes, grown, mature vampires who earned their respect were awarded their place in the wizarding world, but young, impetuous vampires, mixed in with a school of vulnerable students…

They would kick him out before he could say quidditch, Harry thought, finally seeing why it seemed so easy for Malfoy to just sweep everything aside and press on. It wasn’t easy, he just wanted it badly enough, wanted to live, wanted to succeed, wanted a future where he had his respect and family and pride back. And he wanted it so badly that he would come to terms with
anything to get it, even endure *this*.

Then, suddenly, Malfoy’s voice drew him back from his revelation.

“There, hurt me, punish me and leave Potter out of this,” Malfoy snarled, the sound almost liquid with the blood building in his throat.

“Or what? Young *vampire*, will you seek revenge on me for harming your *First*?”

“I won’t need to,” Malfoy choked, his lips twisting into a feral grin. “He’s the bloody chosen one, you fool. He always wins.”

That, Harry felt, was the best cue he could’ve asked for. Later, when he had time to ponder it more, he would wonder if Malfoy had smelt his scent or something had given him away, but that didn’t matter because it was then that he had moved.

The fire, the barely contained magic roiling in his gut rose up, pounding on the walls of his rib cage like a deranged prisoner frantic for release. His head was throbbing suddenly with the overwhelming humming of sheer power coursing through his being. He closed his eyes, breathing in deeply, calming the rattled beast, or trying to.

The night around him shivered in dark anticipation. Letting his arms fall limply at his sides, Harry stretched his fingertips out, felt the magic back up and tense, like a tiger waiting to pounce. *Concentrate*, he hissed at himself, his jaw clenched tight. He visualised what he desired with all his might and then, he let the magic loose.

Wind burst from nowhere, sharp and fierce like talons it sliced through the corridor, ripping Alaric from his feet and hurling him through the air until the far wall stopped him with a hard *thud!* The magic howled in victory, in celebration of its release, the very stone of the castle *quivering* at its mercy.

Harry stood untouched by it, still hidden under his cloak but struggling frantically to call the power back. He seized it, clawed at it with ragged fingers, drawing it back into the cage of his body. It snarled like a live animal, writhing for freedom at any cost necessary.

“No!” Harry gasped, choking with the effort of commanding such rebellious magic. “Stop this
now!” I am the wizard, the one in charge. I order you, come back! The ground trembled with his voice and he wondered what kind of privacy charms Alaric had put on this corridor for the whole castle not to hear the explosion of power.

A wail of defeat cut through his thoughts, a hollow howl as the magic spiralled back into him with the force of a tornado, slamming him brutally into the stone hard floor. He grunted, his body shaking in a nauseating aftermath, still hidden by the cloak. So...much...power, he thought, just before his vision twisted and faded into black.

A groan of pained relief left Malfoy’s lips as the nails popped free of his arms and gave him the freedom to slump to his knees on the floor. After he’d gathered himself, he turned his gaze instinctively to the enemy and found Alaric, who was lying unconscious against the far wall, drooping there like a lifeless doll. Not lifeless though, Draco thought, unfortunately.

The residue of silver in his wounds slowed his healing. His wounds would take at least until tomorrow to heal properly. I’ll have to glamour them, he thought with irritation. When he drank from Potter it imbued him with insurmountable power but now that his consumed supply was limited, complicated glamours would quickly drain his reserves. But then, he would be feeding from Potter tomorrow night…

Potter.

“Bollocks,” he cursed as that scent wafted up his nostrils and he quickly realised what must have happened.

A low hiss tore from his lips as he dropped forwards onto his hands, searching the ground with them hastily. “Come on,” he growled to himself and then, his hands collided with something. He blinked. There was nothing there, or at least, nothing he could see. Gripping the invisible cloak with his fingers, he revealed Potter lying there unconscious.

Carefully, Draco pulled him up against his chest, his brow furrowed with a frown. The magic that had torn Alaric away from him was the most potent he had ever felt within a mile of him. That included the countless tortures he had watched the Dark Lord perform. He dreaded to think what that kind of power could do to Potter if he had messed up the spell he had used somehow. “Potter?” he asked, smacking the side of his face. He did not awaken. That heart was beating, but just barely, those breaths dangerously shallow.
“Don’t you die on me, Potter, two power overloads in one day really is too much!” Honestly, after earlier, did Potter really believe he could harness such raw, ferocious magic with no training or help? Bloody Gryffindor. Draco cursed again, his fangs still out and biting into his lower lip in frustration. Blood welled there, filling his mouth until it ran down his chin. And with that, his instincts whispered the answer to his plight. Deep down, he knew what to do.

Clamping his lips tightly shut, he pulled Potter’s body up higher in his embrace, tilting that head back. Potter’s lips parted slightly in unconscious reaction. Perfect, that’s how Potter looked right now. Draco forced back the odd desires surfacing, subduing them once again for the sake of the present crisis. Slowly, careful not to spill his mouthful of blood, he lowered his lips to Potter’s.

~To Be Continued...
Blood drizzled through his lips as he parted them slightly, thick and lukewarm. Nothing as hot and glorious as Potter's potent lifeblood. No, but it held just as much magic, and certain properties beneficial to humans when combined with his saliva. His hand slid up the side of Potter's face, cupping a fiery hot cheek before dipping down so that his thumb massaged the subtle bump of his adam's apple, coercing the swallowing motion from Potter's unconscious body. Swallowing his blood, his saliva. The notion might sicken any ordinary person, but he had known for some time now that both he and Potter were extraordinary.

Besides which, Potter was in no position to have any opinion on what was happening.

A soft sigh shuddered through those lips pressed against his own then and he moved to retreat, only to hear that sigh turn into a guttural groan. An arm hooked around the back of his neck, tugging him closer, deeper into the kiss. Potter's lips opened, mouthing his own with an unpractised, clumsy urgency.

His saliva had arousal inducing properties, Draco had known that already, what with the way Potter had writhed under his bite every time he had had him. But to feel a man whose life has been slipping away suddenly come to life, feel him flush darkly and burn hot in his arms, it was a disorientating feat. Even for a vampire.

The surprise didn't stop his cock from rising in his trousers, however, pressing hungrily into Potter's leg that had so generously placed itself at just the right angle to thrust against. That body undulated beneath him like a charmed snake and he groaned back into that mouth, lashing Potter's tongue with his own. Strong fingers knotted in his hair, tugging, pulling, but in a way that conveyed desperation as opposed to negation.

Then, suddenly, those fingers tensed, wrenching his head back until he fell backwards onto his arse. Quickly, he found Potter straddling his legs and grinding into his tented arousal. The air was
full of hot, gasping air from Potter's lungs, his own skin warmed by the frantic exhalations. He reached out, cupping Potter's arse and assisting the needy thrusts into his hips.

Those hands were tightly gripping his shoulders now, steadying the thrusts he was returning with equal, impassioned vigour. Draco looked up and saw Potter, his hair mussed as always, cheeks flushed and eyes lidded with passion, focused somewhere in the clouds of dark lust that had settled around them. He looked positively reckless, as if he had thrown his concerns to the wind and was now riding the tide of sheer, uninhibited pleasure in wanton abandonment.

The moans of bliss turned to cries of confusion suddenly, of frustration and he felt Potter's need. This wasn't enough to sate either of them. One of Potter’s hands reached down between them, fumbling with the fastening of his own trousers until his flushed cock broke free. It wasn’t that far short of Draco’s full length and it was only a little slimmer. The pink head peeked out from his foreskin and it arched slightly up to Potter’s body. Draco almost licked his lips. He didn’t think he’d be able to say it was mouth-watering to look at if he were still human, he could appreciate the perfectness of every slender inch much better with his vampire senses.

Potter cried out in sated bliss and resumed his shameless rutting against Draco, his body now practically wrapped around his, riding him into oblivion. Soon, Draco noticed, the heated pants turned to husky, broken gasps in his ear.

“H-Hot!” Potter groaned, his voice sounding almost tortured. “I'm so...so hot...I...I need... I can't breathe... Kiss me. Fuck me. Bite me!” His hip movements were hard and frustrated now as if nothing would ever be enough and he would be lost to this potent, insatiable fire forever. He'd given Potter a lot of his blood as well as his saliva, he realised. Perhaps too much, but he had been uncertain of how much the magic had weakened him. Better to overdose on pleasure than die altogether.

Draco squeezed Harry's arse cheeks roughly, rocking him hard against his cock in a mimic of their clumsy tussle earlier. This was not elegant or practised, what it was, was raw and passionate and yet delectably innocent and awkward. Potter had never done this with anyone before. Draco felt a rush of arrogant pleasure at that thought. He arched his hips up against Potter’s exposed cock, feeling it pulse where it was squeezed between his clothed erection and Potter’s stomach.

Potter panted in his ear, lost to ecstasy and craving more, more until he exploded and the inferno of desire overcoming him was finally sated. This deliciously mindless rutting was not enough, Draco could feel that from the distress in his eyes to the nails clawing into his back. Making his mind up suddenly to comply with Potter’s perfect request, Draco reached between them.

A desperate whimper passed the chosen one's lips when Draco’s hand merely bypassed that leaking arousal, ignoring it in favour of releasing his own erection from its tight cloth prison. An
inhuman groan left him, a vibrating sound that built in his chest and shook the air around them. Potter made another piteous sound and Draco drew him back to his body, pressing their naked cocks together. He felt Potter hiss in delight against him.

“Oh!” Potter panted, his arse clenching when Draco squeezed harder, his prick throbbing against Draco's, dousing it with a glob of pre-emission. “Yes. Fuck me. Bite me, now, hurry.”

Draco pressed his face into the hollow of that honey-hued throat, inhaling the smell of his musky arousal, chasing a bead of sweat with his tongue. His fangs had long since emerged, and joined his appreciation of that flesh. Barely, just barely, they refrained from breaking that skin.

“Now,” he heard Potter growl. “I'm going to burst. Bite me, please!”

“I can wait until tomorrow,” Draco began, his voice husky and half-hearted against Potter's neck.

“But I can't!” Potter growled, his fingers sliding up to knot in blond locks, arching his own neck even further. “Bite me!”

“Wasteful indulgence–”

“You want it,” Potter cut across him. “I can feel your fangs. You want to, do it before I go mad!” When Draco did nothing, Potter groaned in despair and arched his neck harder into Draco's mouth, those fangs pricking the skin just slightly. Draco had but a moment of panic seize him, a fleeting second before blood trickled from the punctures and he lost all self-control. He locked his lips around the wound, sealing the connection.

Something very odd ripped through them then. Potter half-groaned, half-wailed, his body arching forwards, taut as a bowstring, his cock hard and wet between his and Draco's stomachs. Draco tensed, lathing the painless wound with his tongue, his fingers clawing at Potter's arse and back with a frantic possession. His chest tightened and his vision exploded into white.

Magic burst inside both of their bodies. Their skin was humming with an intensity neither had known the like of before, positively glowing with warmth and want. And then, suddenly, images overwhelmed the whiteness that had surmounted Draco's vision. Feelings ran through him until his chest felt like it may burst with emotion – Potter's emotion.

A menacing looking dog chasing a scrawny young boy with knobbly knees up a tree. A brutish, round man, red in the face and screaming at the top of his lungs. A lone boy he had first seen 7 years ago in Diagon Alley, only this time, that boy was peering through slats in some dark, small prison. Watching as beyond the grate a fat boy was showered with mountains of gifts beside a
pristinely decorated Christmas tree…

Hundreds of images ripped through his mind, plundering his soul with Potter's feelings from every moment he was seeing. Diggory's death, finding Sirius Black for the first time, then losing him, a Christmas with a red-headed horde of Weasleys. Not all sad but most of them terrifying. They were the images that were most important to Harry's – Potter's being, whether for better or worse. They rolled forwards like an out of control muggle film reel until at last, the memories exploded into that same white-hot light, overcoming him with what Potter was feeling now, right now.

Draco felt the tightness, the unbearable ecstasy in two-fold and lapped at the wound until it closed. Not yet, he thought as he sucked the escaped blood from Potter's shoulder and neck. Hold on a bit longer, Potter, I want you to come when I do.

“I can't,” Potter gasped out, as if he had heard his thoughts. Had he? How was it that…?

Oh God, he heard Potter's voice whisper through his mind. I want you. I want… Want to be covered in you. I to feel all of you, everywhere. Fuck me, please!

Yes. He'd heard those thoughts loud and clear. Somewhere in a coherent corner of mind he remembered that that had been a concern of his before now, except his mind was currently incapacitated with such potent passion that any coherency was bleached out by a light as hot and as powerful as the sun. “Coming!” Potter cried suddenly and Draco followed him. Both of them burst over the edge like water breaking over a dam, spilling their essence over each other as they peaked.

They lingered in bliss, the tingling in their skin easing as the sweat slowly dried. Draco held back on the habit to breathe, knowing it was needless, in favour of listening to Potter's panting breaths. Delighting in the wild pounding of his heart, he pulled him close, their bellies sticky with sweat and come. Draco's tongue darted out to lap up the final bead of blood from that shoulder. There was no name for how wonderful it tasted.

Slowly but surely the warm glow of oblivion dwindled. Potter's breathing eased, his heart-rate returning to normal as he lay limp in Draco's embrace.

And then it all went to hell.

Potter tensed. A sharp snarl tore free of his lips and he shoved hard at Draco's chest but was not strong enough to move the rejuvenated vampire. Instead he rebounded off of diamond-hard skin and his arse slammed back onto the cool stone floor. Scrambling back up to his feet, Potter used the opposite wall to steady himself on shaking legs.
Green eyes were brilliantly bright with anger and humiliation, staring at Malfoy as if he were the cause of all evil and corruption as he tucked himself away hastily and pulled his pyjama bottoms up. Malfoy did the same with more poise, more collective calm and didn't tear his eyes from Potter for a moment as he did so. The man was still pink with the aftermath of arousal, his hair mussed and yet his body on edge. So rigid he was shaking with it.

“What did you do to me?!” Potter snarled at last, cutting the silence.

“You once again overwhelmed yourself with magic,” Draco explained levelly, feeling an odd sense of calm pounding gently with the renewed, sluggish beat of his heart. He inhaled the scent of Potter's anger as it permeated the air and drank it in greedily. What had just happened between them? That intense connection, what had it been? He thought he had an idea. “You wiped the corridor clean with Alaric and then passed out on the floor from magical exhaustion. I had to feed you my blood to—”

“You poisoned me!” Harry declared heatedly, “You drugged me and then you took advantage of me!”

Malfoy stared at him. “You would rather I'd have let you die? You fool. Your heart was barely beating. It was the only solution I could think of to save you,” he explained simply. “Granted I didn't mean to give you so much that it'd overwhelm you like that, but surely sex is preferable to death?” he asked, bemused.

Potter snorted. “That wasn't sex.” With an air of over confidence, Potter strode into the middle of the hall. It was as if it were all a display to show how very unafraid of Draco he was. The man picked up his father's cloak where it lay on the ground and dusted it off almost casually before carefully folding it under his arm.

Draco waited until Potter was still and met his eyes again before he replied aloofly, “because you're such a good judge? You, a prudish virgin.”

Harry seethed. “That was a mindless rut,” he clarified, voice harsh. “I don't need to have had sex to know that that was nothing more than raping a drugged victim.”

Draco chuckled with bitter amusement. “As much as you claim innocence and that role of victim you so desperately like to play, it was indeed sex, Potter. Sex counts as any act of passionate intimacy between two people,” he explained, almost as if to a child, mocking Potter’s self-righteous morals.

“Nothing about the way you just raped my mind and body was intimate,” Potter snapped, “and the only passion I felt was hatred! Hatred for you, your blood rushing through me like…like a fire inside me, making me feel things – say things that aren’t real. Nothing you make me feel is honest
or true, it’s all a lie made from vampire powers!”

“My, my, we are poetic post-orgasm,” Draco drawled, “And delusional. I gave you my blood to save you, I knew it contained arousing properties but I thought you might be able to control yourself. It is not my fault vampire blood is so potent to ripe young virgins like you.”

“You’re bloody disgusting,” Potter retorted in repulsion at the imagery.

Abruptly, Draco began moving in on him. Ignoring the way Potter’s glare darkened, he said, “You’re missing the much larger picture here.”

“More important than the vampire I've been trying to help taking advantage of me?”

Draco laughed again. “There you go again ‘take advantage’ – are you a young maiden, Potter?” He shook his head in amusement. “Is the mind blowing bliss all you remember from our encounter? I'm flattered…”

“What are you talking about Malfoy?” Harry demanded, still staring hard at the vampire. Those eyes were a bright, lively grey once more. There was a soft pink tint to his lips and skin. His instincts had been sated it seemed, in both ways this time. And at my expense, Harry thought, his bitterness interrupted by Malfoy’s voice.

“We shared memories, Harry,” Malfoy said plainly, voice husky and careful, as if he were trying to quiet a capricious horse. “Memories, emotions. You heard my thoughts, again.”

“That's just another reason to be wary of…this,” Harry said, gesturing to both of them, “Whatever this is between us. I want it to stop–”

“I'm not exactly doing it purposefully,” Malfoy cut across him, evidently not liking being accused. “That is the second time you’ve heard my thoughts during the bite. I would like to know how you knew exactly what I was thinking. How I saw your memories, heard your thoughts. You can’t avoid it this time.”

Harry scoffed at that, turning his gaze away, to anywhere but Malfoy with a small shrug. “I don’t know why or how, it just happened when you sank your fangs in. It was like an echo in my head, your voice. I knew what you wanted and I saw your memories, felt what you felt.” He winced. He didn't want to be tied to anyone like this, didn't want to have his life decisions made by ‘destiny’ or any such nonsense. He certainly didn’t want to live Malfoy’s worst and best memories while the
vampire took a trip through his own mind. “This is too much,” he said at last, “I was meant to be free after Voldemort was finished.”

Malfoy stepped forwards, piercing him with a contemplative stare. “It’s bigger than just a feeding session now, Harry,” he began. The way in which his tongue wrapped around his first name with such familiarity made Harry's muscles tighten. And Malfoy didn't stop. “I've been in your head, seen into your soul and you mine, surely you see that this is something that must be explored further?”

“Why? To what end? I don't want you, I don't want to be a…a sex slave, much less to a vampire and understanding why your blood and fangs mess with my emotions and body isn't going to change my mind.” Harry's expression was resolute, steady. He only wished he could say the same for his voice.

“Why?” Malfoy repeated, as if it were the most ridiculous question in the world. “I have someone that can understand the things I endured, the person I am, the way I live. Why wouldn't I pursue that?”

“Because this isn't real! Not that connection you speak of – none of it! It's all only come about because you're a vampire and I'm your favourite bloody snack! Not because of who I am at all! It's been decided by your instincts, not you, not me and I won't allow that!”

Harry stormed around Malfoy then, trying to put as much distance between himself and the scene of his humiliation. Oh Merlin, that ardour had been so strong. He had begged Malfoy, begged him for sex and blood and… His control had been ripped away without the Temporentia Sensium. He wouldn't allow that to happen again.

Suddenly a sharp tug on his arm whirled him around to face Malfoy. Those fangs had retreated now but his vampire strength was threat enough as it pushed him into the archway he had nearly reached. “You rubbed against my cock earlier of your own volition,” Malfoy reminded him darkly, “It wasn't the blood then. It wasn't the vampire, it was me. Are you so afraid of being out of control, of being weak for one moment that you'd throw away the kind of passion others would die for?”

“They can have it!” Harry snarled, trying to shove Malfoy's hands off of him and failing. Instead he glared into Malfoy's face. “That kind of insane, all-consuming fire, that's not what I want from my life. I want quiet and peace and somewhere to belong–”

Malfoy studied him carefully, it seemed. His grip on Harry's shoulders became less painful but not any less firmer. Then he said softly, “and I couldn't give you that because I am a vampire – a monster, is that right?”

“Your most fervent desire is for my blood and body – how could that ever bring me peace? A home?”
Malfoy's calm expression turned into a sneer. “You're a slow one, Potter, you cling to the most stupid morals and desperately avoid any chance of happiness.” His fingers tightened on Harry's arms then, making sure he had his full attention when he said, “But I'm not getting any older. I can wait. I won't let you deny this along with everything else you are afraid of.”

With that, Harry snarled, ramming his fist into Malfoy's jaw. The blow made his hand ache but it had been a surprise enough that Malfoy stumbled back regardless, releasing him. “I am not scared,” Harry spat, clutching his shaking hand close to his chest. It felt like it was vibrating in aftermath of the blow.

“You're terrified!” Malfoy snapped darkly, “Of losing your friends, terrified of your own magic, your werewolf’s family welcoming you; you're fucking terrified of your own feelings because they are new and more powerful than even your magical core. You're scared of that all overwhelming you but even more so, you're scared that you'll like all of it too much and lose it all, and be hurt all over again.”

He towered over Harry more than ever before, he had a few inches on him and used them wisely, staring down into his face with a concentration that made Harry too startled to even blink. “I'm right, aren't I, Harry?” he demanded, soft and dark as a shadow. “Tell me that I'm wrong.”

Harry gave an exhausted sigh and closed his eyes. “Even if you were right, that wouldn't justify you in hounding me for more until I drop,” he replied quietly, opening his eyes again and looking to Malfoy, studying his cool, calm expression. A calmness he had gained by sating himself with his body. “Why are you pushing this?” Harry asked. “Why can't you accept that I don't want you, like any normal person would have by now?”

Malfoy offered him a small, flicker of a smile in answer. “I'm not like any normal person,” he replied smoothly. “And I don't believe your claims that you're not interested – I felt your interest in more ways than one tonight.”

With an aggravated growl, Harry scratched the back of his neck, unintentionally ruffling up his untidy dark hair even more. “That was a reaction any human would've had to any vampire. Not because of any feelings I may have for you, they aren't real.”

“There you go again,” Malfoy said quickly, barely giving Harry the time to finish. “And the time you have spent with me besides my feeds? The way you look at me every time I move, as if you can't help it—”

“Your health is my responsibility! And you've been acting strange. I was just bloody worried for you, you absolute w—”

“Does it occur to you that aside from Severus, you are the only person in this school that actually
worries about me? The only person that pays enough attention to me to notice that I am not myself?” Draco demanded. “You have feelings for me outside of fear and pity, Harry. Any fool can see it. Why do you think that Weasel and Granger have been looking at you so strangely? Even they can see it. Bloody hell, even Zabini saw it so don't you dare deny it!”

Harry gave another exhausted sigh, fiddling with the upper-most button of his pyjama shirt distractedly – anything to distract him from Malfoy's words and how they sounded frighteningly like the truth. “Why do you even want someone that infuriates you so much? Why am I so appealing to you?”

“As I said, you are one of the few people to even notice my existence. You look at me and see a man not a monster or a Death Eater. You don't avoid me like the plague, you care about my well-being and you have sacrificed even your beloved morals to help me.”

“I would do that for anyone that needed my help,” Harry argued. All the reasons Malfoy was listing were all wrong. Malfoy's eyes darkened with a cross of amusement and emotion. His gaze lingered on the scar he had left on Harry's neck, before looking back to his face again. “Those are the more polite, innocent reasons. I was trying to spare your delicate sensibilities but if you insist.”

Harry's only warning was a whoosh of air dusting his cheeks with Malfoy's swift movement, before the blond dove in, taking his mouth. And Harry was ashamed to feel his own face tilt up without much struggle to meet him.

That tongue swept through his mouth, thoroughly violating every inch as if wanting to leave his taste in Harry's mouth. Those lips pressed with bruising fervency into his own and he groaned despite himself when one hand seized his shirt, the other cupping the nape of his neck, both pulling him tight to Malfoy's body.

After a moment, when Harry felt his better judgement fight to the forefront of his mind, he shoved Malfoy back. Despite his strength, the vampire only moved back a fraction. Harry could still feel his lukewarm breath on his face.

“Why would I not want anyone that could make me feel like that – that I could make feel the same? You're stubborn and strong and you'll fight me every step of the way which means my victories will be worth that much more. You match my passion, my desire – though you feign ignorance.” Malfoy accented his words with countless caresses, long smooth gestures with his slender fingers, along Harry's collarbone, his neck, his face. When they touched his faded scar at his forehead, however, Harry flinched out of habit and Malfoy's hand dropped away considerately. But the intensity in his eyes did not.

“You are my equal and yet, you are also everything else that I am not. You are my perfect match and I will not miss out on that for the sake of our explosive past or your priggishness. Your
irrational fear of losing anything that you come to love. Why wouldn't I want you? Everything I have ever done has revolved around you since the day you refused my hand in friendship. What is Draco Malfoy without Harry Potter to challenge him?"

Harry couldn't help but flush at the conviction in those words. It was so hard to show indifference, to seem unaffected by the first person who had ever treated him like this. Ever desired him. He would not permit himself the escape of looking away, however and kept his chin raised to resist the temptation. “And why should all that change my mind?” he asked, trying to sound flippant but his voice wavered.

Malfoy raised a brow, as if he had expected Harry to explode with anger, again. “Because I am the only person who wants Harry Potter, stubborn, reckless, self-deprecating Harry Potter rather than the golden, all-powerful, faultless chosen one,” Malfoy replied smoothly, confidently. His hand raised again, but more slowly this time, with more restraint as he brushed the very tips of his fingers over Harry’s.

The gentle caress teased Harry’s hot palm and he felt his own fingers twitch uncontrollably in reaction. The touch paused, fingers hesitating for but a moment before they wrapped carefully around Harry's wrist, Malfoy’s cool thumb pressing against his pulse. And Malfoy still wasn't done. “I neither want nor expect a hero and a selfless fool, I want the tarnished, tired troublemaker.

“And moreover, I am the only one that can be your equal, the only one that would dare push you back with equal force. Why wouldn't you want someone on your level? Someone who understands and focuses solely on you?” Malfoy sounded perfectly confused then, as if he honestly couldn’t comprehend why Harry wasn't surrendering and relaxing into him like a bad dream had come to an end at last.

Harry narrowed his gaze. Well if he's half as sincere as he sounds, he wouldn't want me to give in so easily regardless, he thought. “Why is it that you seem to be acting as if having me will solve all of your problems?” Harry asked, trying to convince Malfoy of the ridiculousness of this situation from another angle. “Like I'm your deliverance. Because I’m not. I'm not your salvation.”

“You are my only bloody hope of feeling anything real, and I am yours as well,” Malfoy retorted. “We're both tainted, imperfect and both have bigger problems than each other.” His voice dropped an octave then, to a smooth whisper, “But we’re the only ones that can understand each other's problems, even your pet Weasel doesn't get you like I do.”

“It really pisses me off,” Harry began sharply, “When you act like a few weeks pining for my blood, then barely two weeks talking to me about how fucked up I am somehow means you know me better than anyone.”
Malfoy seemed like he was fighting back a laugh. “The truth does seem to irritate you, it does not make it any less valid however. Time means nothing to some–”

“Please,” Harry interjected, barely refraining from making a gagging sound. “Don't even start talking about that love at first sight tripe, I may just piss myself.”

Malfoy looked disgusted with his words but did not comment on it, he merely said, “Don't flatter yourself, Potter. You cannot claim I am incapable of emotion and then insinuate I am in love. You cannot have it both ways.” He sighed then, releasing Harry's wrist and stepping back a fraction. “You're wilfully misunderstanding everything I say, intentionally trying to push me away and deny the truth. Fine. I have eternity to wait for you to discover your folly.”

Harry watched as Malfoy began to turn, felt that oddly soothing coolness leave his skin as Malfoy put more and more distance between them. It felt, wrong somehow to let him go like that. “How is it that we never shared memories and thoughts before now?” Harry asked suddenly, abruptly turning back to the matter they were both concerned with before this argument had turned more personal. “Only the last two times did we… Why not before?”

Malfoy turned to fully face him, his face devoid of emotion. His mask had settled back into place it seemed. “I have an inkling, an… intuition provided by my instincts, but you will not like the way it discredits your claims of detachment. It counters your insistence that they are not your feelings…”

The way he was purposefully drawing the revelation out made Harry bristle and he frowned. Evidently seeing his irritation brewing, Malfoy finished with, “I am certain that it is because you willingly gave yourself to me, to the bite. You allowed me your body in more ways than one and that is why we made a connection deeper than blood. This… bond we share grows, offers more perquisites over time. For both of us, the sharing of our thoughts and memories while we are joined is just the beginning.”

Harry shuddered. “Don't sound so excited about us having no mental privacy. Or the possibility of taking further advantage of me…”

“But don't you see? You could take advantage of me back if I tried to misuse you!” Malfoy insisted. As if that made it better.

Misuse. The word stuck in Harry's throat. He was not a thing, a possession to use or misuse. He was not a toy, a weapon for others to amuse themselves with. “But that’s just it. I don’t want that. I believe that thoughts, memories, feelings should be offered freely to someone you care for. Not plucked out of my head at will, it doesn't mean anything that way!”

It was Malfoy that snarled in frustration this time, surging forwards and barely refraining from
seizing Harry's shoulders it seemed. He watched those longs fingers clench. He saw the raw emotion in those eyes in that second when his defences were down. “Then tell me what it is that I have to do to earn those thoughts and memories and feelings?” Malfoy breathed heatedly. “I cannot help that I have seen and felt them, anymore than you can help sharing mine, but I’ll do something to earn it if it’ll make you realise the truth that much quicker.”

Harry wasn’t sure what to make of the honesty, the readiness to give selflessly that shined so brightly in Malfoy’s face. He knew one thing for certain, however, that he would have to push Malfoy, test him to see if this man standing before him was able to be trusted any further than he had trusted him so far. And if there was anything he had learned in the last seven years, it was how to push Draco Malfoy.

“Anything?” Harry asked, trying for a level tone once more. But Malfoy, whether he really did know Harry as well as he’d claimed, or had just sensed the plotting in his voice, narrowed his gaze in suspicion.

“Within reason,” Malfoy replied carefully, “I would expect respectful requests from someone to whom I offered such an opportunity so trustingly.”

Harry wondered if that meant that Malfoy was going to try and wriggle out of it, but decided in the end, he had nothing to lose by trying. “I want you to leave me alone for tonight,” Harry said, challenging him to keep his promise. “That’s what I want. And if you trust me, then tomorrow you will discuss with me how best I can help…help you with your problem, Professor Alaric.”

Malfoy’s eyes narrowed. Harry knew he knew he had been about to say ‘help save you from’ Professor Alaric. Malfoy would not have appreciated that. But then, suddenly, Malfoy’s head whipped around to glance behind him. Following that gaze to the empty corridor behind them, Harry realised that that glare had not been aimed at him. Professor Alaric’s (previously unconscious) body was gone.

“I didn’t even hear him move,” Malfoy cursed under his breath. “I’m a bloody vampire I should’ve heard him breathing much less scrambling out of sight like a coward.”

“In fairness, your attention was mostly on me,” Harry tried to assist him, feeling more than a tad uncomfortable with admitting that aloud and using it as a means of making Malfoy feel better at that. Suddenly Malfoy whipped around to face him again, seizing his arm and all-but dragging him up through the halls. Harry cried out in protest (as loud as he dared, for he could feel the privacy spells had vanished now), struggling to wrench his arm out of Malfoy’s grasp.
“Listen, you said it yourself, your powers will grow, give it time and all of your senses will be as faultless as–”

“Alaric might not know you were involved in what happened,” Malfoy interrupted, not ceasing in his movements for a moment. “You must get back to the Hospital Wing before anyone notices you are gone, he mustn’t know that you know about him.”

“And what about you?” Harry demanded, “It’s you he’s been torturing with an unlimited supply of vampire-tailored weapons. Surely your reputation isn’t as important as being safe.”

“It is, when all I have is my reputation. When I will never have anything more if I do not salvage that reputation,” Malfoy answered quickly, “And all the power in the world will not help me if I do not use it wisely. I need to finish this year of Hogwarts if I am to have any of that. Which means remaining here. I heard personally what the governors said when they discovered what Lupin was in third year, do you think they would be anymore chivalrous towards uneducated, newborn vampires?”

“But we have to do something to stop him!” Harry argued coming to a halt suddenly a few feet from the doors of the Hospital Wing. “He can’t do this to you.”

He watched Malfoy’s lips seal in a tight line, and then, as if in slow motion, the vampire turned his head, apparently having seen something Harry had not. Harry glared at him, irritated that the blond himself had forced this conversation and now was trying to escape it. After a moment though, he followed Malfoy’s gaze and his stomach plummeted at what he saw.

Ron stood before the doors of the Hospital Wing, his arms crossed tightly across his chest, his eyes narrowed. There was an odd, dark expression on his face and Harry instinctively took two steps forward, putting himself between Ron and Malfoy. “Ron?” Harry asked, wondering what he was doing down here at…whatever time it was, and with such a stern expression on his face. “What are you doing down here?”

“I think the question is, what are you doing out of bed when you nearly blew yourself and half the castle up today?” Ron retorted, his ears red. “And with Malfoy? What the hell is going on with you, Harry?”

Harry blinked. What excuse was there to give? The truth was certainly out of the question. He was lost for what to do, what to say to his best friend who had been worried about him and wanted answers. “…I couldn’t sleep that’s all,” Harry said lamely, “nightmares…you know how it is.” There was a shred of truth at least. He had scarcely had a night of sleep without nightmares plaguing him. He tried to sound a tad embarrassed about them, hoping that Ron would be content with this half-truth.
But he was an awful liar, always had been. He glanced up to Malfoy in hopes of seeing an answer in his eyes, but the blond's expression was vacant as he stared at Ron. Like the calm before the storm, Harry thought uneasily.

“Malfoy came down here to see Pomfrey about a sleeping draught for himself and I just… I went for a walk and he accompanied me is all.”

Ron glared at the two of them, no doubt taking in their dishevelled appearances. Harry shuffled another few paces away from Malfoy and adjusted his pyjamas inconspicuously. He wished he wasn't so transparent.

“Is that why you've been with Hermione and me less and less, then?” Ron demanded. “We're not good enough to share your confidence anymore, you can only trust him? What is he now, your boyfriend?!”

“No!” Harry insisted, a little too quickly, “I told you why I've been distant lately. I'm not proud of the reasons but they were just—”

“Excuses,” Ron cut across him, “Complete bullshit you made up to cover for shagging Malfoy, is that it? Is he why you dumped my sister too? Why didn't you just tell us the bloody truth?”

“Because I'm not shagging him!” Harry insisted. “I'm not shagging anyone!”

Ron snorted at that. “One lie after another. You act like you're some bloody moral saint but you're full of shit, mate. So why couldn't you tell us about Malfoy being your whipping boy then? Too ashamed? Did you think that I'd be disgusted?”

“Ron,” Harry said firmly, “That's not…”

“Because I am,” Ron snarled, with raw, bitter anger that Harry had not seen since that fateful day on the horcrux hunt. “You've changed, mate. So much. You lied to us, you're sharing things with Malfoy that you won't share with us. You're distant and… And I don't know how else you might have changed. What you might do next. How can I trust you if I don't know who you are anymore?”

Harry visibly flinched at those words, something inside him curling up like a fallen leaf in the frost. Those were the words he had feared most from them. His eyes wandered over to the side thoughtfully. “Listen, Ron, it’s not what it looks like. I may be different but you know why that is, you know what I've had to do, can you really expect me to be the same after that?”
“No,” Ron replied rigidly. “But you also can't expect me to understand if you don't bloody let me in either.” He paused then, turning the full force of his glare on Malfoy, who didn't so much as blink. “I'd just like to know what someone you used to hate can possibly do for you, can possibly **understand** that your best friends cant.”

Harry’s lips moved soundlessly for a few moment. And then he found his voice. “Me and Malfoy, it isn't what you think but it’s complicated. Ron, if it were my secret you **know** I'd tell you in an instant but its not mine to tell.”

Ron sighed. “I just don't know that you would tell me, even if you could tell it. I don't know anymore, mate.” Sadness tinted the bitterness in his voice and Harry wondered, not for the first nor last time that night, if chasing after Malfoy and Alaric had been the best thing to do. **What's the better alternative then?** A snappy voice whispered, **leaving Malfoy to suffer just to keep yourself and your friends happy**? No. That was impossible for him to even contemplate. He paused then in that train of thought, as a realisation suddenly hit him, brought on by the mourning look that overcame the anger in Ron’s face.

“Where is Hermione?” Harry asked, not certain he wanted to know the answer. “Why are you down here, Ron?”

Their eyes met then, and Ron chewed his bottom lip for a moment before he seemed to find the right words. “I was with her, we were trying to practice for Charms and it kept going haywire so we just started arguing. About everything, about us, about Charms about…**you**. Then she just…”

Harry frowned, forgetting Malfoy and his qualms with both him and Ron. “Where is she?” he asked again, his voice raspy and panicked. Ron gestured to the doors with his head, unable to say the words. Harry's eyes flared and he shot past Ron, bypassing him and Malfoy both as he shoved open the doors. He froze on the threshold for a moment, horrified by what he saw.

Hermione was lying on a bed just a few feet from Harry’s, a small crowd that consisted of Madame Pomfrey, Professor McGonagall and Snape gathered around her. Snape was passing potions to Madame Pomfrey from the supply he had arranged on a table at the side of the bed, whilst McGonagall turned her eyes to Harry, narrowing them as she did so.

“**Need I remind you** that you are an adult now with **adult** responsibilities, Mr Potter?” she snapped. “**It was incredibly reckless** of you to…” Her words faded into the background as Harry's attention focused solely on Hermione. He stepped forwards, McGonagall’s scolding falling on deaf ears and he came to stand at the side of Hermione’s bed. Her skin was almost as white as Malfoy’s, she shivered even in her unconsciousness but there was a film of sweat across her brow.

“**What's wrong with her?**” he asked in a quiet voice, not tearing his gaze from her. He felt Snape’s eyes on him, calculating his expression. “**She…is she going to be alright?**” Harry whispered.
Suddenly, McGonagall’s scolding silenced and the headmistress looked to Madame Pomfrey, who had paused over Hermione, her face fraught with concern. “It is not yet clear what ails her,” Madame Pomfrey said slowly. “And until I am certain of that, I cannot say when or if she will recover.”

Harry winced, for once in his life wishing for the sugar-coated truth he was otherwise so opposed to. Why did he have all this power if he could do nothing with it? Nothing but nearly blow himself up, nothing but watch his friends get hurt. So much power, and yet he was helpless.

“Is it a curse?” Harry asked, thinking that it was highly possible for countless reasons. “A poison?”

Madame Pomfrey looked at him and then McGonagall carefully, as if contemplating the right response. “There are endless possibilities, things that may have caused this. Her power was erratic and uncontrollable – much like yours except her body was not strong enough to withstand it.”

Harry frowned. “But mine was an influx from Voldemort, Hermione was nowhere–”

“Quite astute, Mr Potter,” Snape interrupted. “Whilst your lack of control stems from a surge in power, Miss Granger’s comes from an imbalance. A disturbance in her magical core. Hundreds of magical and non-magical sources could have altered her equilibrium, she must rest until we can find out which it was.”

Harry nodded slightly, his eyes on Hermione again. “Will she wake up?”

A hand rested on his shoulder then, long, cool fingers gripping him gently. Malfoy's presence was all too prominent behind him. It was almost like Malfoy wanted to tear him away from the distressing scene but Harry remained rigid. He couldn't afford to relax or indulge, couldn’t afford to be weak when Hermione was just lying there looking almost…almost…

“There is no telling yet, Potter,” Madame Pomfrey said softly. “But you see what can befall even you if you do not comprehend the gravity of this situation? Get back into bed at once and I may forget that you blatantly disregarded the dangers, and to head off gallivanting at night to sate your raging hormones, no less!”

Harry flushed darkly, he knew she had seen both his and Malfoy’s tousled appearances and had put two-and-two together. “He's not…I'm not… I was just walking and Malfoy was there! I didn't…he's not my boyfriend or anything.”

Madame Pomfrey pursed her lips. “Whatever your situation, you need to rest for the safety of yourself and those you love. Get into bed.” Harry opened his mouth to argue, but at that moment a
distressed frown creased Hermione’s brow and Harry surrendered, circling around Malfoy without looking at him. Kicking off his shoes, he climbed into bed and stared vacantly at the end of it. Malfoy had been right after all, there was something very wrong with Hermione. And whatever caused it will have me to answer to, he snarled mentally, his fingers clenching in his sheets. I'll do whatever it takes to find what did this and kill it!

Madame Pomfrey and McGonagall’s voices faded as they made their way into Pomfrey's office. Then, in the dull quiet, a shadow fell over Harry’s bed. Harry stared obstinately at the bump his feet made in the covers, refusing to look up.

“I expect to see you in my office tomorrow, Potter, for your training to begin,” Snape said in a low droll.

“I thought I needed to rest,” Harry griped. He could hear the way Snape’s crooked mouth tipped up in a not quite smirk.

“You know as well as I,” the potions master began, “That if you aren’t given something practical to do, you will only sneak out again and get yourself into more trouble.” With that, he whirled away in a flurry of blackness.

Nevertheless, Harry was still not alone. He tipped his head back with a sigh, closing his eyes to prevent the tears from building. He needed to be alone for a while to process this, to come to terms with the horror in order to find the thing that had hurt Hermione. “What do you want, Malfoy?” he growled out in barely concealed despair. “I want to be alone.”

A moment's quiet, and then, “But what you want and what you need are two different things,” Malfoy said, his voice feather soft. A cool hand slid across the covers, moving as if to touch Harry’s hand. Harry snatched it away at the last moment and righted his head to glare at the vampire. “I don't need you – I never need you. What I need is time to myself to sleep and to—”

“To brood and wallow in misery as thick as sinking sludge until it swallows you whole and suffocates you,” Malfoy finished for him, his unfathomable grey eyes almost glowing now, more awake and vivacious than ever before. Vampires did not sleep. They had periods of relaxation where they reflected on and mulled over the events that had passed, but that was more like a state of meditation than slumber. Malfoy did not need to sleep, nor eat. Only Harry’s blood and sex could give him that healthy, effervescent appearance. In remembering that, Harry's shame came back with all the force of a hurricane, intensifying the already bitter edge to his voice.

“To allow myself to process all of this so that I can be more…calm, more reasonable and rational. I need a clear mind to find what did this to Hermione,” he corrected Malfoy tersely, his jaw rigid.
“Potter,” Malfoy tried, “Harry, you can’t let yourself—”

“If he wants you gone then I reckon you’d best make yourself scarce, Malfoy,” Ron said as he appeared from the hall and moved to Hermione’s bedside, glaring malevolently at Malfoy. “No one else wants you here, you only cause trouble. Go.”

In that moment Harry watched Malfoy’s entire face warp with venom. He wondered how the blond had managed to hold his fangs at bay, but the moment was short lived as he saw him *stalking* towards Ron. Harry’s arm shot forwards, reaching out and seizing Malfoy’s wrist. His strength did not stop Malfoy in his paces. His *touch* did. He knew this somehow, but pushed that unsettling thought to the back of his mind with the rest as Malfoy turned to face him. He couldn’t afford to be selfish and think only of his own problems right now. Hermione needed him, Ron, even *Malfoy* needed him. They were all right. He’d wandered around all summer moping and feeling sorry for himself, that wouldn’t help him though and it certainly wouldn’t help those around him.

_They need me to be better than this self-pitying brooding fool_, he thought, releasing Malfoy’s wrist hastily. _I need me to be better than this._

“Listen,” Harry said, his voice steady but hushed so that he knew only someone with Malfoy’s powerful hearing could catch his words. “You asked me what I wanted and this is it. You need to leave me alone to be with my friends right now. They need me—”

“And I don’t?” Malfoy whispered back harshly, ignoring Ron’s inquisitive gaze wandering over to them it seemed and leaning over Harry regardless. “I assure you I desire and need you in ways your little friends could not even begin to *imagine.*”

Harry forced himself to bite his tongue, breathing deeply to try and control his temper. It wouldn’t do to explode into a row right now. “They’re important to me, they’re like my bloody family and they’re also irrelevant since what you asked was what I wanted and *this* is what I am asking. Leave me alone tonight and tomorrow…tomorrow come back and we’ll talk about how best to help Hermione and how best to stop Professor Alaric.”

~To Be Continued...
Set Fire to the Rain

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

Hey all. This chapter was written whilst listening to the song 'Set Fire to the Rain' by Adele. She has such an inspirational voice. I hope that you are still enjoying the story! We're really getting into the main plot now. Also, I made up 'Dumensio' as a charm to make things 'pocket-sized' if you will. I know there is Reducio in the books but that's a counter-spell for Engorgio. And I know a lot of authors use that for a shrinking spell but I thought I'd have a different one slipped in here, just because I felt like it lol. If you wish to use/borrow please ask and credit me because it's mine.

:: chapter eight ::

SET FIRE TO THE RAIN

It had been a hard request to grant, Draco was not ashamed to admit that it had taken an enormous amount of his restraint and patience to acquiesce with Harry's demand. But there had been a stubborn, impatient fire in his eyes as he had made his demand. It had made Draco's insides glow warm almost with desire. He wanted to see more of that wilful fire. He wanted more.

That was all he had thought about for what had been left of the night, all he was still thinking about on the way down to the Hospital Wing that morning. Harry had said tomorrow, and tomorrow it now was. He would bend to Harry's fiery gale but he would not break under it, he wouldn't change himself completely, just as he wouldn't want Harry to change himself at all for him.

And just when did I begin to call him 'Harry' I wonder? He stopped then on the moving staircase, but not because of his thoughts or the odd notion of calling his first by his given name. It was the feeling of a familiar presence, a scent or a mixture of smells even. Potion ingredients, both good and bad. He sniffed the air a few times and smelt the faint aroma of scotch underneath it. He smiled softly. His vampire abilities were growing with every taste of Harry he got.

“Severus,” he identified, turning slowly to face him only when he’d spoken, wanting to show
“Loathe as I am to interrupt your journey to exasperate Potter, Draco, it is time for your 'check-up'.” He spoke as if he knew more than he was saying. *More about me and Harry,* Draco thought, giving his favourite professor a minute nod. Every week since his transformation, Severus had examined him, logging changes to his physique, his reactions and abilities, tracking his change and any appearance of vampire abilities or traits. He had also been known to take samples of hair and blood to use in his experiments of trying to find a cure for the 'curse', although there had been no luck so far, not since he had invented his cure for Draco’s ‘reaction’ to sunlight.

Draco pondered that gracious deed as he followed Severus down into the dungeons and towards his office. *He has already done more than enough,* Draco thought. *I will already be forever indebted to him, I cannot ask for more than he has already given.* He glanced up from behind his curtain of gold hair, Severus’s face was tinged with apprehension. *Yet it seems even though I will not ask for more, he will never stop trying.* Severus was the one person who had not judged, pitied or feared him since he had been turned. Even his own parents could not look him in the eye, their only child…

The door to Severus’s office opened and Draco stepped inside, ushering away that self-afflicting train of thought as the door closed behind them. It would do him no good to feel sorry for himself now. *And if I rise above this better than before, then Mother and Father will see me as their son again,* he thought determinedly. They will accept me back when I have shown that this curse will not twist me or the family.

He took his usual seat in front of Severus’s desk and stripped off his cloak, setting it over the back of the chair out of the way. “Let's get this over with quickly?” Draco asked. “I don't want Potter squirreling into classes and escaping me as I know he will try to.”

Severus shook his head with mild amusement, arranging the same familiar flasks and instruments on the desk beside him. “You speak as if he were your prey trying to 'escape' you,” Severus mused, now tracing his wand over Draco’s body slowly. A quill leapt to life on the table, frantically scrawling down the readings the wand was taking onto a spare bit of parchment. Draco noted that his physical readings were the same as before, although his reactions had all heightened. He smirked up at Severus as the man stood back as if to say 'impressed’?

“It is odd that your speed, strength, hearing, sense of smell…all of it has all jolted upwards in the last few days,” Severus said. “It must be due to you finally getting the sustenance your body needs. After all, you received no nutrition from any of the things we had tried over the summer.” His expression twisted oddly then as he took a few steps back. “It seems that Potter truly is the key to keeping you healthy. I surmise that for the first few months you must feed regularly to reach your full potential and then once you have reached it, you will most likely be able to wait longer between feeds.”

Draco nodded, that made sense. “Like a child that's still growing and needs all its vitamins. Once I have matured as a vampire I will not only be at my peak of physical condition but also–”
“Have more control over when you drink,” Snape finished for him. “Yes, and independence from Potter.” He stared at Draco then, a mix of mild revulsion and protectiveness on his face. “You and Potter have been intimate, I can tell by his clumsy cover-up stories.”

Draco shifted uncomfortably. “I have, because I wanted to not just because the vampire feeds off of him. I'm still a red-blooded male even if that blood is cold. Is it any wonder I come to desire a person when he ruts against me every three days?”

“I think you must know by now that you and the vampire are one, Draco,” Severus said, taking his own seat across the opposite side of the desk. He folded his fingers together and rested his chin on them as he surveyed Draco. “The notion seems to bother you less and less with each passing day,” he noted.

Draco sat up straighter, staring straight into the potions master's eyes. “If it can benefit me, what sense is there in complaining any longer? I am coming into my powers, that will allow me to seize everything back that this curse stole from me at the start. And then some.”

“Potter will not succumb easily, he will blame any ounce of feeling or bliss on your 'condition' and so try to escape from you at every turn.”

Draco smiled. “I know that. I enjoy a challenge. How boring would it be to pursue someone who was not as obstinate and headstrong and fiery as Potter is?” He rolled his tongue against his front teeth, against the place where his fangs were hidden. “Besides I have an advantage over him – I can give him everything that no one else has been able to thus far.”

Snape pulled open one of his drawers and began to search within for something. *My sunlight protection potion*, Draco thought, knowing that he was due for his next batch now. “Do not get cocky, Draco, noble fools like Potter do not see it as an admirable trait,” Severus warned.

“He will take me and as I am, it might take years but those are years of intriguing pursuit I am willing to use. I have other goals beyond him that I wish to reach sooner for the sake of my own comfort of course, a career, a stable station in politics and society and my parents' respect. But Potter is one that I can afford to languish time over. He will, after all be the greatest prize.” The smile dropped from his face when Snape finally looked up from his search in the drawer, a look of horror twisting the man’s expression. “What's…what's the matter?” Draco asked uneasily, not sure he wanted to know the answer.

No reply came immediately, only unnerving silence and the sound of Severus’s cloak swishing as he moved fluidly to his feet. Draco watched as the man checked the shelves around the room silently, before vanishing briefly into the door that Draco knew attached to his personal potions supply cupboard.
Long fingers wrapped around the arms of the chair, the digits tense with unease, anticipation. He found that since his turning he'd been able to remain perfectly still, poised always like a predator waiting patiently for prey. Now, however, he felt distinctly unsettled and fidgety. It was most unbecoming of a Malfoy, even a dead one. He was just about to get up and pursue his professor when the man emerged from the storage room, allowing the door to close behind him with a foreboding thump. The look on his face made Draco’s gut lurch. “What is it?” he asked, gliding to his feet and facing Severus fully. “What's the matter?”

Severus simply shook his head, walking past him as if he had not spoken and sinking into his own chair behind the desk once more. It unnerved Draco most of all when the potions master held his head in his hands. It was a fleeting sign of despair that Draco had never seen in his professor in all his years.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, even to a vampire, the older man spoke. “My pre-prepared vials of your sunlight potion have vanished,” he said, his voice tense.

Draco's eyes widened. “But…you can just make more,” Draco tried.

Severus looked at him levelly. “That I would, however it seems that whoever stole the sunlight potion has taken all of the necessary ingredients as well. All of them.”

Draco swallowed hard. That potion was the only thing that enabled him to go about the day to his classes. Without it he'd be…

“I can order more,” Severus said hastily, as if seeing the downward spiral Draco’s mind was falling through and was determined to save him from it. “But it could take days…weeks until they arrive, the most important ingredients are imported from… But I can get them, Draco.”

“And whoever it is will just steal them again,” Draco hissed, his hands curling into shaking fists at his sides.

“I will protect them better this time—”

“You shouldn't have to!” Draco snarled, cutting across Severus’s reassurances. “I shouldn't… Why did they take nothing else? Someone knows that I am a vampire and they are going to make sure that I can't seize my future the way that I…” His voice trailed off then as he realised what had happened.

That man's words rushed back, ricocheting off the inner walls of his skull. 'Never see sunlight.' He knew exactly who had promised that, who was determined to condemn him to darkness for reasons unknown to him. Caius Alaric. Draco needed to attend his classes, he needed to reassert himself in society if he ever wanted to be half of what he was before. But he also needed to be here, needed
his education to get a job that would enable him to do that.

Draco got to his feet, heading for the door.

“Where are you going?” Severus asked, moving as if he might stop him.

“I need to see Potter,” Draco replied quietly, opening the door. Even now, the sunlight potion was burning away through his system, his last precious drops. He could feel the presence of day now, was hyperaware of it as he had been in his first few weeks of ‘unlife’. It made his skin itch.

“Odd priorities, given that come tomorrow your last dose of the potion will have worn off and you will vulnerable to the sun once more.”

“Just order the ingredients, Severus,” Draco replied stubbornly. He needed to see Potter. He wasn’t entirely certain but he was sure he could help…somehow. “I…I’ll need somewhere without sunlight to–”

“You may stay in my chambers, of course. Be back before sunrise tomorrow,” Severus assured him. “But if it is Potter you seek, I believe that I have a suggestion for you.” Draco gave him a fraction of a nod, not raising his eyes, not looking at him as he turned back to face him fully. He would listen, Severus deserved that much, and besides which his suggestion had been foreshadowed with such a tone as Draco’s curiosity could not resist.

But at the back of his mind, even as Severus talked, his mind was boiling over with a torrent of worries. There had to be a way that he could stop Alaric, one that didn’t allow him or anyone else to reveal what Draco was. But whatever it was, Severus could not help him find it, no matter how desperately he would wish to – if he knew about this situation. No, no one could help. He couldn't involve anyone else, go to anyone else. There was no one else except for Potter. He only wished that he felt more disturbed by that fact.

* * * *

Harry decided the moment he woke up that he loathed being a teenager. A late blooming one at that! Oh, he’d had wet dreams and his voice had deepened and though the hair on his body was sparse at best – he had it. But this unquenchable thirst for sex, he’d never felt that before. Perhaps if he’d been older, more experienced he could’ve pushed the stupid, senseless recollections of Malfoy’s mouth devouring his away. Perhaps he could’ve forgotten easily the feeling of that body grinding against his. But he couldn’t, and the dream that had overcome him last night when he had finally fallen asleep had only made matters worse.

He rolled over slowly, pressing his aching cock into the hard mattress. It didn’t matter if these
lustful urges were his or only an affliction from the bite mark at his throat – it still burned so deeply he thought he’d cry in frustration. *This is just all new,* he reasoned with himself, even as he rubbed his hardness into the mattress. When the novelty of being wanted and being touched wore off, his unruly urges would vanish, of that he was sure. No one could *enjoy* the kind of intensity Malfoy offered forever, it would exhaust anyone after a time.

Harry pressed his head into the pillows. Yes, this was what he needed. Not Malfoy, not anyone. His own hand could sate his infuriating urges as well as anyone else could. He felt his prick drooling between his stomach and the sheets and barely withheld a groan. He was glad that the privacy curtains had been drawn around his bed. Catching his lip between his teeth he rocked harder into the mattress, feeling his balls draw up in anticipation.

*Fuck you, Malfoy,* he thought victoriously as his belly tightened. It was so good! Rutting away the tension that had built in his body until he could feel it running away like the sweat gathered on his skin. This was all he needed, not Malfoy. No. He didn't need anyone.

His climax took him by surprise, barrelling through his core and seizing his insides roughly before expelling itself in three sharp jerks. A low, breathless sigh left him then and he slowly relaxed into the sheets. “Nice,” Harry murmured to himself, reaching for his wand and casting a brisk cleaning charm on himself. That would do him until he got to a shower later.

After a moment of basking in the lack of tension, Harry sat up slowly, running a hand through his mussed hair in an unconscious attempt to tame it. Pulling back the privacy curtain, his stomach jerked feebly at what he saw there. He had forgotten about Hermione in his sleepy daze but there she still was, lying a few beds away, unconscious. He dressed himself in his school robes hastily before approaching his friend's bedside. Ron had gone but the chair he'd occupied last night was still there. *He's probably only gone to wash up before breakfast,* Harry thought as he stared down into the face of one of his best friends.

“What's happening to you?” Harry asked her, knowing full well she couldn't answer. He shook his head slowly. Whatever it was, he would find it and make it pay for hurting her…

“Ah, Mr Potter.”

Harry spun on his heel, jumping in surprise upon finding Madame Pomfrey standing not too far behind him. She gave him a small smile before coming closer to the bed and performing a few murmured cleaning and stabilising spells on Hermione. Harry watched her in silence for a moment, then he took the seat Ron had vacated, staring at his friend's motionless hand.

“Surely you must have your suspicions of what it is doing this to her?” he asked the matron quietly. “Is there anything I can do? I want to help.”
Madame Pomfrey was silent as she began her spells to empty Hermione's bladder discreetly and efficiently. If she hadn’t done it to Harry once before when he’d been incapacitated here for some injury or other, Harry wouldn’t have even realised what she was doing. Eventually though, she answered him. “I personally feel it is not just one thing that is responsible for this. And the only thing that you can do to help is to honour her wishes and study hard so that she may be able to catch up once she awakens.”

Harry snorted at that. He had a feeling that the first thing Hermione would ask is how much work she’d missed. Her education was the world to her. He’d have to make some decent notes and get some work from her Ancient Runes teacher…

“You think she will awaken then?” he asked hopefully. Pomfrey's smile faded but she nodded still. “Isn't there a potion?” Harry added. “A spell to help Hermione's magic stabilise?”

Pomfrey looked thoughtful. “Not one that will work with another spell or poison fighting against it. Professor Snape has said that he would work on something to at least get her awake, if not up and about. A miracle worker with potions, that man. He has his hands full already though, I fear.”

Harry nodded. Snape was a teacher of now eight years of students and also trying to help Malfoy, he knew that and it was only right. Malfoy was more important to Snape than Hermione, after all. “Thank you, Madame Pomfrey, can I…can I come back to see Hermione later?” She gave a sympathetic nod and with that, Harry regretfully tore himself from Hermione’s side. He had a mission now, something physical that he could do to help. He had classes to attend so that he might take notes for her. She would be most irritated if she awoke without work to catch up on.

Yes, he’d ask the teachers of the classes Hermione was in without him for work too. But then later, he had a potions master to see for that training session. If I can channel this power into something that can help Hermione, maybe it will have a use after all…

* * *

Rain beat hard down on the windows outside, thundered against the glass as the wind howled. It had turned violent outside by the time Harry made it back to the dormitory after his final lesson. He glanced out of the window as he set his bag and the stack of books down on his bed. Clouds were dark and billowing, as if hungry. It was practically black outside.

There were still a few hours until dinner and yet the house elves had already set all of the lights. Candles and a fire burned warmly in the room and Harry felt comforted by it. It almost felt…welcoming, homely. A low sigh left his lips as he slumped into his bed for a moment. He had moved non-stop today but he had worn his body down despite it being on edge all morning without using magic. Hopefully control was a lesson he would prove good at, he didn't much like not using magic.
The stack of books he had been running about all day to acquire were for Hermione of course. He planned to see her after dinner. Perhaps he could see Ron there too, since the red head had been absent from all of his lessons today. *First term and we're already missing classes for mortal danger,* he thought exhaustedly. It had been too much to hope for a peaceful final year, it seemed.

Suddenly the wind outside gave a great howl and Harry jumped to his feet on instinct, whirling around just in time to see lightning flash across the sky. Movement bashed against the panes. Harry flew across the room, intending to investigate the movement just as the dormitory door opened.

Malfoy's eyes seemed to rivet themselves to him the moment he saw him. Harry gave him a small nod of acknowledgement but otherwise ignored him and carried on his path towards the window. He pulled the window open, throwing all of his weight into it as he fought against the wind.

No sooner had he forced it open than a dishevelled, exhausted looking school owl dropped onto the sill, shaking wearily where it had landed. It was the very owl Harry had sent to Remus with his letter. He petted the owl thankfully, seizing some of the crackers Ron had left at the side of his bed and offering them to the bird. It gobbled them voraciously. Harry took his letter, leaving the owl on the sill to rest. It would fly back to the owlery when it was ready and when the storm had eased.

“I waited for you at the end of Charms,” Malfoy said suddenly, breaking the silence as he closed the door behind him. Harry had almost forgotten he was there.

“Did you?” Harry asked, clutching Remus's letter and staring at the handwriting on the outside for a few moments, before putting it in his pocket to read later.

“Yes,” Malfoy said stiffly, “and transfiguration. And–”

“Sorry, I was getting work for Hermione,” Harry cut across him stiffly. What right did Malfoy have to be getting brash with him? “I wanted to take it to her after dinner. It’s not like I knew you were waiting.” He stopped at the end of his bed, looking to Malfoy at last. He seemed fine, Alaric hadn't got to him again yet. Though come to think of it, he hadn’t seen the reputed Professor all day…

“I have… There is something I must speak to you about,” Malfoy said, in a voice that sounded like that had taken a lot to get out. A great expense to his pride.

Harry frowned, trying to remain distant and apathetic but he could feel his face twist with concern. His emotions were pitifully easy to read. He would need to work on that. “Are you alright?” Harry asked then, wondering what could've been so important to have Malfoy forgoing his pride for. Malfoy sighed, the notion capturing Harry briefly, who knew that Malfoy didn't need to exhale, or...
inhale for that matter. It was curious how he could be gaining so much in supernatural ability and yet remain so...human.

“Someone broke into Severus's potions stores – all of them. Even his private collection. They stole the potion that he makes for me, the one that protects me from sunlight, along with all of the ingredients. Severus can order more but it will take time and…” His jaw clenched and he glanced away, staring at a particularly interesting portion of floor. “And come sunrise tomorrow the potion already in my system will have run out completely. I'll have to take sanctuary in Severus’s private quarters, but I…” He trailed off and Harry realised then that as Malfoy had been talking, he, Harry had been walking towards him and now found himself stopped just a foot from the vampire.

“It was Professor Alaric,” Harry said tensely. Draco gave a short, unsteady nod.

“Who else?” It was a rhetorical question and Harry had no intention of answering it regardless. He studied Malfoy's face. There was the same worrying look there that he had first seen in sixth year, all those times he had followed Malfoy without realising just how much trouble he was in. Well, he knew exactly how much trouble the blond was in now, vampire or no.

“He said he would take away my 'sunlight','” Malfoy explained through gritted teeth. “This must be his interpretation.”

Harry's tongue felt like it had swelled to fill his entire mouth, he was stuck for words. What could he say? He had been so worried about Hermione that he'd forgotten about Malfoy's situation. *That just proves that he doesn't mean as much to me as he tries to claim.* Harry thought with an odd sense of satisfaction. Malfoy was hurt, yes, but he must realise now that Harry didn't care for him the way he'd imagined. *Of course not,* he thought, not liking the way it felt like he was trying to convince himself.

Suddenly, movement from in front of him drew Harry back to reality. Malfoy was distinctly closer now, there was barely any space between them.

“Severus and I believe that we have found a way to manipulate one of his more complicated healing potions to help Granger,” Malfoy said, the sudden change of subject making Harry frown. Why was Malfoy talking about ways to help Hermione when he'd obviously much rather talk about himself? *That's another thing,* Harry thought, *I could never love – or even fuck someone that was so selfish.* Yes, he was definitely trying in vain to convince himself now. He could tell by the way those most recent thoughts repelled him. Malfoy had been anything but selfish lately. Malfoy's eyes were hooded with that familiar intensity again and Harry shifted nervously.

“By adding a few particular ingredients and some balancing agents to keep the potion stable, we can make a potion to heal whatever damage has been done to Granger without even knowing what it is.”
Harry's brow creased even further. “What are you talking about, Malfoy?” he demanded, not able to help but notice that the way in which he used that surname was no longer as biting as it had been. It was more now like a pitiful shield between them both, one that Harry found himself reaching for when all else failed. Malfoy called him Harry now, but Harry wasn't willing to return the favour. It was an intimacy Malfoy would take far too seriously.

The vampire in question stepped even closer, a few strands of golden locks falling forward and brushing Harry's skin in a slight, ghost of a touch that made him shiver. “My blood and saliva has the ability to heal, even strengthen you,” Malfoy explained. “Like last night. I gave you too much, of course, but it worked. With the right dose, a healing potion altered to incorporate my blood and saliva will heal her, whatever her problem.”

Harry must've looked dubious, because he felt it. “If it’s such an all-powerful cure why doesn't the wizarding world know about it?” Harry asked.

Malfoy raised a disbelieving brow. “Because vampires have no wish to be farmed into extinction like the muggles hunt tigers for medicinal and pelt purposes. Some vampires are in highly esteemed positions – in the very Ministry itself thanks to the names they have built for themselves. They do not wish to lose what they have.”

“You seem to know a lot about vampire politics all of a sudden,” Harry muttered.

Malfoy's face remained blank. “I don't have to be an expert to know that no one wants to become a hunted experiment. I plan to bring brilliance to my name as they have, I will not have that future threatened. So, while I will do this, Harry, no one except you and Severus must know what was in the potion.”

Harry was thoughtful for a moment, the letter in his pocket suddenly feeling heavy now. He wished he could've known what Remus thought of all of this… He missed having an adult's input. He hadn't truly had that since Sirius and Dumbledore had died. Not that he needed it, he was a man himself now but he couldn't help but wish he had that almost ‘parental figure’ back.

That's what Remus is, idiot, he reminded himself. He sighed heavily. Things weren't as simple with Remus as they were with Sirius. It would take time to reach that level of comfort. He had become too closed off a person to open himself that easily again. Yet here was Malfoy, still staring into his eyes silently, as if he expected Harry to collapse into his arms with a swoon. It made Harry's neck prickle with irritation.

“Why are you so suddenly concerned with Hermione?” Harry asked suspiciously. “Why do you even care? You hate her and Ron for that matter. Why would you give your blood and…spit to help her? It wasn't even a year ago that you wouldn't have pissed on them if they'd been on fire.”
Rather than being irritated by Harry's brash tone, Malfoy only smiled slickly. That only irritated Harry more. This display of selflessness wasn't real, he was doing this to gain something for himself. “You're only doing this to get closer to me, not to help Hermione,” Harry accused, taking a step back to put a more comfortable amount of space between them. Malfoy's smirk broadened a fraction as a low chuckle drifted through his lips.

“Does it matter why I am doing this as long as she's better?”

With a sharp glare, Harry looked away quickly. The pile of homework he'd collected for Hermione was sitting right there in his line of sight. Even if Malfoy was only doing this to try and manipulate his way into his trousers, Harry just had to hope that his restraints would hold against the pull of a debt owed. He would owe Malfoy something, and he felt that no matter how much blood he gave him, he would have to offer Malfoy something more than that. But he would worry about that later.

Whatever price he had to pay he would pay it and tenfold if it got his friend awake and healthy. _And then I will find whatever did this to her and annihilate it_, he thought determinedly, meeting Malfoy's eyes again. “What do we have to do?” he asked. “How quickly can the potion be made?”

Malfoy's expression looked satisfied briefly, before he managed to find his complacent mask again. “It is a complex potion, but nothing to Severus. All I have to do is spill my blood and saliva and all you will have to do is feed me again a few days earlier than expected.”

Harry's jaw set. His response hurried out of his mouth before he could change his mind. “I'll do it. Let's go now, I want Hermione to be well as soon as possible.”

Draco just gave him a small nod and stepped to the side to allow him to go first. Harry kept his head up and his back straight as he walked past him, not able to keep from noticing the way that Malfoy 'accidentally' brushed his knuckles against his arm as he passed.

It was endurable, well more than that as far as his body was concerned, but he had a feeling that this was simply the lure Malfoy had chosen, the sharpest hook he could find. Harry would find himself reeled in even tighter after this no matter how he struggled. It was bait that Harry was unwilling to refuse even if it looked suspicious. Malfoy was playing a good game, but that was ok. He would fight back with equal force.

When they reached the dungeons, Malfoy pushed open the door to Severus's office without knocking, heading first into the room. Harry followed this time, he had a feeling he would never shed this unease he felt upon entering Snape’s office. Too much had happened now to cement that discomfort. The door swung shut by itself behind him and Malfoy, and he heard a telltale 'whoosh' of privacy and protection spells securing the room. With a cursory glance back at the sealed door, Harry turned his gaze to Snape, who was standing by his desk, watching them both with an
Ever the Gryffindor, it was Harry who broke the silence first. “Malfoy told me everything. I want you both to make this potion for Hermione. I want you to save her.”

“Indeed,” Snape acknowledged, his long fingers tapping thoughtfully on the surface of his desk. “The most difficult part of the potion is ingredients, the brewing should pose no trouble to someone with experience such as mine. You will, of course, have to replenish whatever blood Draco donates. But that is a small price to pay for your friend's health isn't it?”

Harry glared venomously, he should’ve remembered he was dealing with slytherins. He wasn't ready to be…to be that close to Malfoy again. Still there were more important things than his comfort. “That's fine,” he said simply, “I'll need the Temporentia Sensium though, and a blood replenishing potion – I didn’t have either last time and the experience wasn’t one I wish to repeat.”

Snape nodded. “Of course,” he murmured, crossing the room to lead them into his own potions lab. It wasn't as immense as the classroom, of course but it was still as dim, still as ominous. And the company doesn't help either, Harry thought, settling onto the stool farthest from the potions bench as Malfoy and Snape began. Snape was, of course, the main brewer and Malfoy his eager assistant. Too eager.

I don't get why he wants me so much, Harry thought, he could understand it if they had anything in common, if he were good looking or even spectacularly talented or witty. But he was a gangly, short man-boy with glasses, messy hair, and he hadn't even been particularly kind to Malfoy. Yes he had helped him as much as he could, they had even had a few cordial conversations but they weren't even really friends. He said I was the only one who treated him like a human being though, Harry recalled. I suppose I can understand that part of it, at least...

Soon the room was full of potion fumes. The room must've had spells set already as a precaution though, because as overwhelming as they were, Harry didn't so much as splutter. He watched intently as Snape worked swiftly through the instructions he had written for himself. After a while he looked up, beckoning Draco over from where the blond had been tidying the used instruments away. The vampire gave a small sigh before rolling up his robe and shirt sleeve to expose his pale, milky skin.

Harry caught the odd little noise that had been about to escape him, but only just. He could see the dark mark on Malfoy's arm, faded like all the other Death Eaters’ marks but stark against his milky skin. Harry shifted, uncomfortable at any amount of Malfoy's flesh being exposed before him. The two other men, however, didn't seem to even notice his discomfort.

“Relax your arm, Draco,” Snape ordered, holding his wand over the crook of Malfoy's elbow. A wince didn't even cross Malfoy's face as blood was magically drawn from his veins and reappeared in the flask before him on the desk, slowly filling it. Harry swore he could see Malfoy's skin
whitening with each drop that was extracted, but said nothing, nothing that is, until Snape just nodded and stepped away, whisking the blood he had drawn towards the bubbling cauldron.

Slowly he trickled it into the piping hot mixture, mixing it in with precise, careful swirls. Harry looked to Malfoy then, feeling oddly moved that he had let Snape take so much, and for Hermione no less. No, for me, he thought, not sure what to make of that knowledge. “Thank you,” he told Malfoy softly. “I…I appreciate what you're doing. Hermione is important to me.”

Malfoy said nothing, just watched him with dark, deep eyes until Snape returned to his side once more. The potions master pressed a small vial into Malfoy's hand. Harry could not help but be drawn to the way those long fingers curled around the shape with such precise care. It was almost as if Malfoy was having to train himself to use the minimum of his now flourishing strength. He thought about that for a moment, about how just as he would have to learn to control his magic, Malfoy would have to learn to control his instincts and abilities as they rapidly grew.

Another thing we have in common, Harry thought with a pang of irritation, realising just how wrong he had been when he had thought they had no similarities. He didn't want to be like Malfoy, to be drawn to Malfoy without any decision on his part. He didn't want to lose himself the way Ron had accused him of yesterday.

Suddenly, a sharp, sickening sound snapped Harry back to the present just in time for him to see Malfoy spitting into the vial. The blond grimaced distastefully, handing the vial to Severus who then glided back to his cauldron.

“How long will we have to wait until we're ready?” Malfoy asked, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Harry was confused by the 'we' in that statement, but kept quiet so that he could hear Snape answer.

“A few hours. Normally a healing potion such as this comes to completion in just forty-five minutes,” Snape began, not once looking up from his cauldron, a look of admirable concentration overcoming his face. “However, potions masters have very few concoctions with vampire elements in. The vampires are very secretive about their abilities, and bodies for that matter, it makes any knowledge of them hard to come by. In consequence I am not sure how your blood and saliva might behave if heated too quickly. I wish to brew slowly to be safer. Three hours maximum should be all I require.” He looked up at Harry then briefly, his dark eyes glistening with thoughts Harry could not even begin to guess at. “And then you may take the potion to Miss Granger, Potter.”

Harry just nodded. What was there to say? They may be doing this to get something out of him (whatever that may be) but that didn't negate the fact that they were giving him something – something very precious. He thought he could understand why the vampires kept their secrets, and so too could he understand just how much Malfoy wanted whatever he intended to get in terms of repayment. It was taking a lot from the blond to give this, and not just blood.
“In that case,” Malfoy said suddenly, getting to his feet with abnormal speed, despite his depleted supplies. “Potter, would you accompany me outside?” Harry glanced between him and Snape for a moment, stunned by his bluntness. But Snape didn't seem to even notice they were still in the room, so engrossed was he in his potion once more. And when Harry looked back to Malfoy again, he couldn't find it in him to refuse him. He too, got to his feet.

“Of course,” he murmured, waiting for Malfoy to go first through the door before following him out. The door closed by itself and locked again behind them. Harry allowed Malfoy to lead the way slowly up out from the dungeons, not saying a word until they came to a sudden stop just inside the doorway to the Transfiguration Courtyard. “What…? What is it that you wanted to say?” Harry asked, not entirely sure that was the correct way to enquire, but still, he could bear the silence no longer. He was so uncertain of what Malfoy might ask in return for what he had done that he couldn't even stand still. He shifted nervously from foot to foot.

“Stop fidgeting,” Malfoy said, turning to face him suddenly. The world outside was still roaring with rain, wind and fury, an unruly background to Malfoy's intense appearance. Harry swallowed despite himself, forcing himself to still and instead chewed the inside of his lip discreetly.

“Just tell me what it is you want. You want something from me in repayment, I can see it in your eyes. And I can't honestly deny you it. Just tell me what it is.”

Malfoy watched him for a moment, the thunder rumbling mockingly above the only sound they could hear. “I don't want anything from you,” Malfoy said silkily, “I just want you.”

Harry flushed in a mixture of anger, frustration and embarrassment, looking away. “I'm not your prize, I can't… You can't just be doing this just because Hermione is important to me. You're doing me a favour, so what do you want? More blood? A…A…” His jaw twitched as he forced out the words, “A blow-job? What do you want?”

Malfoy chuckled. “A tempting offer indeed, I'd wager you might even enjoy it a little.”

“Fuck you,” Harry growled warningly, his hands curling into fists. “It just stands to reason you should ask for something as equally important to you as Hermione is to me. Just tell me so I can bloody well get it over with.” Harry couldn't stand the way the vampire swayed closer, a mocking smile still playing along those lips.

“Alright,” Malfoy agreed at last, “I want you to come flying with me.”


Malfoy was staring into his eyes again, his gaze now a dark grey, so cavernous it threatened to swallow him whole. “I haven't flown since before sixth year. And I cannot trust anyone to see me
now, I might... I'm not sure how the broom's magic might react to my change. I might have increased speed or power that I cannot explain to anyone else. I want to fly."

Harry could understand that, he supposed. He hadn't flown in a while either and he missed the wind on his face. He missed the feeling of his body pressed flat against a broom as he flew forwards, so fast that the breath rushed from his lungs in exhilaration. "There's a storm going on, in case you hadn't noticed," he argued.

Malfoy's grin broadened. "Not scared, are you, Potter?" he challenged.

"You wish," Harry replied, unintentionally echoing their words of their second year as his chin raised defiantly. "You're on, Malfoy." It occurred to him much later, that Draco's request was probably intended to distract him from Hermione, from his concerns over his magic, from all of his worries. And it didn't occur to him until then, just how selfless Malfoy's request had been.

*                      *                      *

The castle certainly looked like an ominous figure under the darkened sky of the autumn storm. Rain thundered down upon the deserted grounds hauntingly. An invisible shape passed through the trees that were swaying violently with the storm, choosing to bend rather than break under the force of the wind. The Quidditch stadium stood high, towering over the man's comparably insignificant (yet powerful) self and he sighed as he stared up at the angry sky, his keen, supernatural sight barely revealing two tiny figures, swooping and diving.

The man's pale lips upturned in a small, calculating smirk as a loud 'whoop' of delight greeted his ears, despite the wails of the wind. He watched silently, watching the nearly (equally) invisible boys. Standing as their hidden observer, he watched them both, still so young despite their triumphs and trials. With still so very much to learn...

They relished in the privacy the fog and the furiously falling rain offered. High above in the midst of a thick, stormy mist, they were alone, blissfully separated from even their thoughts. Harry felt his face all-but freeze in a jaw-aching grin as he swooped down, glancing over his shoulder into the fog briefly, seeing Malfoy come bolting out after him. Offering the blond an impish smirk, Harry threw himself forward on his broom, diving hard. This would lose him for sure!

Suddenly, before he could even react to what was happening, Malfoy had dropped out of the sky, colliding into Harry's straightening dive, and throwing his arms out to ensnare him midair. The breath was knocked from Harry's lungs and he yelped in surprise, before releasing a laugh to the raging tempest, the sound all-but lost to the screeching wind.
Yet the warming sound was sure to reach Malfoy’s ears, a free, uninhibited, unforced noise that made Harry’s skin flush with embarrassment as he heard it leave his lips. There would always be this competitiveness, this friction between them, it seemed. But apparently that didn’t stop them enjoying themselves. Very much.

“Your turn to play seeker,” Malfoy challenged him then, “I’ll be your snitch.” Releasing Harry awkwardly, Malfoy pushed him back with a playful shove, before flying off into the stadium. “You’ll never catch me, Potter!” he called back arrogantly. Harry flashed him a grin before shooting after him.

Draco lay flat against his broom, flying through the tallest goal-post and diving down towards the stand. His laughter called back to Harry, who careered through one of the lower hoops, descending after him. Mere feet from the ground, Draco rolled midair, dipping down beneath the stands. The world was spinning but his mind was racing, his sluggish heartbeat thumping in a hard beat. He may be dead but he had never felt more alive. He could see Harry weaving between the structures without slowing, gaining swiftly on him. Smirking broadly, Draco yanked back hard on his broom, soaring upwards and back into the downpour.

He was climbing the skies, hearing and feeling Harry's heart-rate accelerate into a crescendo of excitement as he drew closer. The Firebolt ridiculed his own broom even with his vampire speed (which, as it turned out did not overly affect the broom’s magic). It was gaining insanely quick, and as Draco’s excitement peaked, Harry slammed into him, nearly knocking him from his broom. Draco went rigid with surprise, but Harry cried out with laughter, his fingers knotted tightly in his, Draco’s robes, as they both struggled to regain their senses. But unlike Draco, when he had caught him earlier, Harry did not let go.

Harry blinked, staring at him through damp lashes for a considerate moment, until the chosen one used his grip on him as purchase, and pulled himself towards him.

Suddenly, a white crash leapt across the sky and thunder roared lividly above. Harry jumped, evidently startled from his excitement induced haze by the worsening cries of the storm. Draco pulled back, offering him an indecipherably impassive look. “We should head in,” Draco murmured carefully.

Harry sighed heavily, staring at his companion through his (magically water-repellent) glasses. His breath came out in curls of fog in the freezing air. His hands were frozen to the broom but he didn’t care. And at the sight of Draco’s brief smirk – a sign of that ice-cold mask failing beneath
his gaze, Harry offered a swift grin. “Beat you to the ground,” he yelled, before throwing himself forward on his broom and yelling out with unbridled freedom. He felt invincible, immune to his concerns when he was flying.

He flushed hotly, feeling the wind tear brutally at his skin. Rain crashed into his soaked clothes. Malfoy was gaining on him. Harry smirked devilishly, aiming his broom hard for the ground. It was but feet away now; Malfoy had pulled up, calling something desperately to him. But he did not relent. He was still hurtling towards the ground, set to hit it until he jerked his arms sharply, the Firebolt lurching under his precise control. His muscles tensed and his back arched as the broom flew upwards, skimming the grass as he did so, barely missing a head-on collision with the ground. Gliding within touching distance of the sodden grass, he touched down, skidding to a graceful halt.

Spinning on his heel, Harry’s eyes scanned the muddy pitch, only to see Malfoy straightening up as he landed carefully, his back stiff. Harry darted over to him. “What’s wrong?” he asked breathlessly, his cheeks red and hot with the flush of excitement. “Malfoy?”

But the vampire remained silent, his jaw set in determination not to scream his outrage to the deserted pitch, it seemed. Harry stared up at him through a curtain of dark, damp hair. “You weren’t worried, were you?” he asked carefully.

Draco sneered. “Do not be ridiculous, Potter,” he snarled. He stared at him hard for a moment, before shaking his head in disbelief and turning to head back across the grounds quickly.

The wind screeched, whipping against him spitefully, yet even the thundering skies overhead, even the rage causing his eyes to burn into the path ahead of him could not erase the fluttering freedom from his chest. He had felt so free of the world’s pull up in the sky, they both had. In their own private world amidst the storm, he had felt as if he had found a lost part of himself, the missing piece to fill the void in his now unmoving, cold chest. And Merlin help him, he’d been worried – terrified when he’d seen Harry hurtling toward the ground, promising to take Draco’s newfound freedom with him.

But what had terrified him even more, was that it hadn’t been until after he had seen Harry pull up from the dive, seen himself that he had remembered, Harry’s death would, in the end mean his own. He’d been more concerned with Harry's safety than his own life.

“Malfoy!”
That voice broke him free of his musings as it called to him, barely audible above the screaming skies – to human hearing. But Draco did not pause to wait for Harry to catch up. His hand clasped around his broom determinedly, he had to rid his face of this look before Harry caught up to him. Fear, it was not optional to a Malfoy, much less a vampire…

“Malfoy wait!” Harry called again, a tinge of regret in his voice as his feet sprinted along the damp path. He was quickly catching him up. Damn him, he was fast for such a scrawny brat, and Draco dared not use any amount of vampire speed to aid him, not in such an open setting that could be so easily overlooked.

“Draco!”

That stopped him. Draco stopped stock-still, and those gasping attempts to draw breath were suddenly beside him.

“I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to scare you-”

“I wasn’t scared, Potter,” he scoffed, but did not turn away this time. This time he remained still, unable to tear himself away from a soaked Harry Potter, peering up at him for forgiveness. It was…pleasing, oddly. But he had been scared, and he knew there was no way to deny it, at least not to himself. And not to Harry, his mind supplied. His eyes widened then. I thought ‘Harry’ – and he said ‘Draco’! As naturally as if it were breathing!

Harry chewed his lip obstinately, determined not to forsake his pride further by admitting the truth, yet even more unwilling to let Malfoy retain his pride by stalking off alone, possibly into Alaric’s waiting grasp. Even if he was more than a little confused about the freedom the vampire had just imbued him with, yet again, he didn’t want to ruin whatever had just happened by being too proud.

“I’m sorry,” Harry repeated, flinching a little at Draco’s sneer. It was stupid really, any progress made by their ‘flying match’ had been spoiled by his childish act. Childish, yes, that was the perfect way to describe how he had been acting all day. “I was…trying to impress you, I suppose.” It wasn’t very like him, but then, neither was snogging the face off of a vampire he had hated for roughly seven years. A lot had changed since the end of the war.

Draco’s eyes widened at Harry’s honesty, and the blond cleared his throat a little, awkward at the admittance. Harry could practically see the astonishment in Malfoy’s face, he was only just realising how faultlessly honest he, Harry was, right down to the bone.
“Impress me by *killing* yourself, Potter?” Malfoy snapped then, with no real force to his words. Harry sighed in relief at the sound of the vampire’s voice, and stepped a little closer to the damp blond.

“You’ve seen me fly before. I’m not good at much but I’m an alright flier, I was never in any danger,” he smirked a little to punctuate his words. “Not from hitting the ground anyway.”

Malfoy stared at him, his expression vacant for a moment. Until, at last, the anxiety, embarrassment and the foul temper that came with them faded in preference to his pride. “Don’t worry yourself over it, Potter, here,” Draco said, reaching for Harry’s Firebolt. His fingers enclosed around it, but he did not pull it towards him. Patiently, he waited for Harry’s permission.

Harry stiffened on instinct, unsure of what his companion was up to. The Firebolt was his first and most precious gift from Sirius. Draco raised a questioning brow, and Harry (shamefully reluctant) obliged. Harry watched as the vampire reached into his robes for his wand, and winced a little. The vampire obviously noticed, because he offered a reassuring smirk before passing both brooms into Harry’s grasp.

“Hold them for me,” Draco said, directing his wand at both of them. “*Dumensio!*” With a flourish of his wand, the items shrank up swiftly until Harry had to clench both fists tight to keep the minimised possessions in his palms. His eyes were wide as he opened his hands and stared at them. Draco laughed. “Did you think I was going to blow them up?”

Harry looked away briefly, ashamed of his lack of trust in someone who…well; he wasn’t really sure just what Draco was any longer.

“It just makes it easier to sneak back in without drawing attention to us,” Draco elaborated, taking his own shrunken possession and stowing it away in his pocket. Harry blinked, doing the same just as Draco grasped his wrist. Electricity leapt up his arm from their contact. Cold flesh against cold flesh. Diverting his gaze to the ground in an effort to hide his reaction from such an simple touch, Harry found himself tugged into movement.

“Let’s get inside before you freeze to death,” Malfoy suggested, reluctantly releasing Harry’s wrist and after a few short steps he broke into a run. Harry smirked, bolting after him across the muddy grounds. Was this the kind of careless freedom he was robbed of as a child? He wondered too, as the wind whisked past him, as adrenaline and excitement surged through his veins, if Draco was permitted this freedom as a child? But judging by the way the forever eighteen-year-old relished in it, the way he sped off across the grounds at accelerated (but still human) speed, illuminated by a flash of lightning, Harry assumed not.
It was as if the force of the wind had blown some of the heavy weight from his shoulders whilst he’d been up there on his broom. As if some of the bitter cobwebs clogging up his soul had been swept away. He hadn’t felt like this in years. Hadn’t been able to forget his concerns like this in so long. Harry beamed, an incoherent yell passing his lips and calling after Malfoy, who whirled to face him once he’d reached the door. The light from the lanterns caused his wet hair to shine like a blond halo, and Harry’s eyes grew bright at the sight of that breathless smile gracing Draco’s lips. He looked so young, so different to the arrogant brute he’d fought with for years.

*The youngest, the most human I’ve ever seen him,* Harry thought, *except he’s dead.* He kept telling himself that, kept reminding himself they had been agreeable acquaintances for a few scarce weeks and yet he was steadily growing closer to the vampire. It was hard to remember why he hadn’t wanted to give into him at that moment. His head was swimming with the not so unpleasant images that had plagued him all night and this morning. Trustworthy or not, honest or not, Harry was finding his disagreeable qualities more and more endurable and his appealing qualities more and more…attractive.

*Oh Merlin,* he swore mentally as he sped towards the vampire, *I think Draco Malfoy is attractive. I’ve snogged him of my own free will.*

The last few seconds of his sprint seemed to move in slow-motion. That smile penetrated the guarded, suspicious barriers and all remaining reservations about Malfoy. It didn’t dissipate them, but they certainly took a blow. This man that watched him now, the owner of the lips that had pressed so eagerly against him, he was not the same person he had once known. He knew he had changed but he had never been sure of how much. Behind the feigned Malfoy arrogance, the failing mask, was someone completely different. Someone Harry was so swiftly and stupidly beginning to trust.

*And care about,* an unnervingly ‘Malfoy-sounding’ voice whispered at the back of his mind.

Malfoy was watching him with dark eyes from the front doors, and Harry’s heart sped up as they glistened with something unfamiliar, unnerving, yet thrilling. Whatever it was mixed irresistibly with a challenge that accelerated Harry’s steps so that he stumbled the last two, fumbled them in his haste to show Malfoy exactly what he thought he was winning so easily.

*Just because I find him attractive doesn’t mean this is an automatic win for him,* he thought even as he saw the ground coming. *I wont be convinced he’s what I want that easily.* He struggled to catch himself only to have two hands grasp him under his arms, yank him up and push him a little too roughly into the wall.
The breath was knocked from his lungs with Malfoy’s rescue, but the mirth had not died from either of their faces. Harry smirked, noting that the fingers knotted in his robes did not fall away, and that Malfoy’s cool, pale face was mere inches from his. Musky breath tumbled from that mouth over Harry’s face; he could taste it on his slightly parted lips. Harry found that all-too familiar blush rushing to his cheeks as blood rushed to his nether-regions. He knew his resistance was falling, hard and fast – no one got a reaction out of him like Malfoy did – good or bad. He couldn’t chase after or be captured by any one else…

*Equals,* he thought, remembering Malfoy’s words. *Just like he said.*

“It seems I caught you even though you were the one chasing,” Malfoy breathed and Harry swallowed hard, nodding dumbly. He was sure his eyes were as wide and wondering as a doe’s in headlights, just as sure as he was that the dark stars that lit up inside those eyes were lidded with something more intense than he had ever known. Harry cursed Malfoy. He cursed his own *virginal* reactions even as his tongue darted out unconsciously to wet his suddenly dry lips. Malfoy’s eyes followed the tiny movement, the fingers of one cold hand reaching out to ghost over Harry’s mouth awkwardly.

Inexpertly, uncertainly Malfoy forced his words out. “You want me to kiss you again.” It was a statement, not a question and Harry shivered in anticipation, unconsciously standing up on his toes to accept the potential kiss better. But Malfoy did not move, and Harry felt a frown crease his brow.

“I want you to kiss me…*again,*” he clarified with a barely-there whisper, nearly losing his voice on that last word. Surveying him for a painfully prolonged moment, the blond spanned the space between them.

Harry watched him through his soaked curtain of obsidian hair, water running from the tendrils and down the bridge of his nose. Malfoy’s nose nudged his up ever-so lightly, catching the rivulet of water between their mouths as he sealed them. Harry’s eyes slammed shut. His arms remained rigid at his sides, hands clenched into tight, unsure fists, although Malfoy did not. The blond’s long fingers knotted in his clothes determinedly, while the digits of the other hand braved a whispering touch of his frozen cheek, before sliding back into his damp hair.

Harry’s lashes fluttered briefly, his eyes cracking open to risk a curious glimpse of Malfoy’s closed eyes and damp, eternally youthful face, before shutting his eyes once more with a sigh into that mouth. Gaining bravery from the sight of his…companion, Harry leant up, parting his mouth to flick his tongue persuasively over those lips, which parted in answer (albeit with a smirk).

Harry leant into the embrace, his arms still awkwardly rigid at his sides as his tongue swept into that mouth coercing Draco’s latent muscle to follow his back, beyond his own lips. A moan tore
from him, muffled by the kiss as that tongue circled his own, shy one and traced the roof of his mouth before Malfoy stepped back reluctantly.

The rain stampeded down towards the earth around them. And the wind began to howl once more. Evidently oblivious to the fury of the world, Malfoy looked down to one of Harry’s tensed hands, and tugged it up slowly to his chest, where his own fingers forced the limb to relax until it was flat against his wet robes. Harry blinked at the slow, barely-there heartbeat he felt under his fingers. A moment passed between both their breathless, lustful bodies, until Malfoy’s free-hand darted forward, tugging Harry tightly to his chest,

Malfoy’s skin was like ice but he felt the rain burn as it ran down those cheeks, rushing onto his own skin as their lips melded together like liquid. His hands shot up, seizing Malfoy’s face so hard he swore his fingers were shaking with their grip. He scratched at the vampire’s cheeks lightly, the rain hot and fiery under his fingers, in his hair. He could hear his own frantic breath, his own heart as it thudded maniacally with all the force of the thunder above. Malfoy must have heard it too, it seemed, for that hand slid up between them then. It clawed at Harry's shirt, fighting to get in until it lay flat on Harry's skin, just above his heart.

Harry groaned at the little burst of electric heat he felt there and tore his head back a fraction, rain clinging to his lashes as his face turned up to the roaring heavens.

“So warm,” Malfoy panted incoherently, “I’ve never felt this warm.” He leant in then, sealing their lips with another impassioned kiss. Harry went to him willingly, all of the panic and fear and worry for Hermione, for Remus, for Malfoy himself even, completely consumed by the fiery raindrops pounding down on their interlocked bodies.

Harry was soaked through, as was Malfoy and yet he felt so burning hot as he tilted his head to get deeper into Malfoy’s mouth. Now his tongue swiped out to meet the vampire’s with equal passion and vigour and desperation. Neither of them had ever felt this alive, not even when they had rutted together in the hall with blood shared between them. This was just a kiss, so simple sounding and yet it was so much more.

Letting out a small, unsteady gasp, Harry found his skin trembling with delicious shivers even as his body stood firm and determined in the wild storm. The heat of Malfoy's coolness touched him deeper than any curse or spell.

Suddenly, a low growl shot through Malfoy's lips, brushing against Harry's mouth before he jerked his head away. Harry frowned, motioning to step back, only Malfoy's hand locked around his wrist sharply. The blond jerked his head to the side, sniffing the air.
“What's the matter?” Harry asked, his breath but a whisper on the wind, lost to the screaming of the skies. But he knew Draco – Malfoy had heard him, somehow. “What is it?”

Malfoy scowled at the horizon, inhaling again. “Something is out there. And it's been there for a while, whatever it is. I didn't sense it in the air before, but now…” The vampire stalked forwards slowly, not releasing his grip on Harry's wrist and so tugging him along with him.

Draco's innards clenched with anticipation, tensed as if ready to pounce. He eyed the tree-line warily. Something was there, he couldn't pinpoint just what but it was potent and eerily familiar. “It must have been watching us the whole time, waiting for its moment,” he murmured to Harry, who had at least remained quiet. The other man gave a small nod, reaching for his wand with the hand not locked in Draco's death-grip.

“Homenum Revelio,” Harry muttered and a light burst from his wand. It glowed in the dimness of the stormy world, lighting up the grass beneath Harry's feet before vanishing completely.

Draco snorted. “That means only that whatever is watching, isn't human,” he said, taking another step towards the forest. He couldn't help but notice the way Harry's body was tenser now, hotter, as if under a great deal of strain. And just from that one small spell, Draco thought, keeping his gaze focused on the edge of the forest. And the invisible creature lurking there. “I'll kill it.”

“Don't leap before you look,” Harry warned, yanking sharply on the arm that Draco held captive, so that he felt his need for freedom. Reluctantly, Draco released him. “It could be an innocent vampire or werewolf or something, you don't know. You can't just go charging down there and–” Harry's voice died in his throat as a shrill, piercing howl tore through the air.

It lasted unnaturally long, pitching off into a low whine before dying completely. A hunter's cry, Draco thought, knowing it instinctively. Somehow. “Well, we can't just let it wander off to hurt someone if it isn't innocent, now can we?” Draco snapped.

Harry scowled. “As if you care! You only care about showing off your bloody vampire powers, not innocent people – creatures, whatever. He stepped in front of Draco then, brandishing his wand once more. “Creatur Revelio!” This time, the light that came forth lit up the ground beneath Draco's feet before flying through the trees like a bolt from a bow. It burst through the dark line of trees and vanished, disappearing just beyond the border.

Something was there alright, right there.
Harry would, no doubt at one point have thought twice about entering the forest with no one but Draco Malfoy at his back. Now, however, Draco watched him step forward without a pause and move towards the trees without so much as a glance back. Despite the way his body shook from using his magic. *He knows that I will follow, Draco thought, that our paths are twined together, wherever they lead. That together, we can be unstoppable.* He didn’t know how he knew that, he just knew.

The connection they had merely tasted when they shared memories, blood and bodies had the ability to grow, to deepen and unleash unto them such insurmountable power. It was a possibility they both had yet to explore. *But it’s more than that, you know it,* his mind corrected him. Draco’s head bowed in a slow, personal nod, then he flew forwards, putting himself at Harry's side.

Falling into stride with Harry, Draco felt his fangs itching to break free, eager to show his strength in the way his instincts were suggesting in a whisper at the back of his mind. “No heroics, Potter, I can already see the sweat on your skin from those two minor spells. You shouldn't use magic until you're in control—”

“I am in control as long as I keep my emotions harnessed,” Harry cut across him obstinately. “I don't intend to be a hero, I just want to make sure whatever is there won't hurt anyone.”

“Just let me be your weapon until it’s safe, will you?” Draco suggested. “That's the idea, I'm sure you've realised. You offer me blood and I offer you a bodyguard and a lover.”

Harry flushed darkly, the pinkish hue dusting across the skin his cheeks and all the way down his throat. Draco relished in the sight of it, his tongue swelling with the tantalising, teasing pulse of blood there. He wasn't at his peak, he needed more but now was not the time. He was slowly but surely learning to wait.

“I need neither, thank you,” Harry replied stiffly.

“Because you're such a good judge, aren't you?” Draco growled. “Oblige me this once, will you?” Harry said nothing in reply but allowed Draco to lead the way through the barrier of the trees regardless, his wand still in hand. Draco didn't think Potter would ever let someone fight for him, or in his stead, not so long as he had breath in his lungs.

*I shall have to show him that he needs to allow someone to take over for him once in a while,* Draco thought, staring around at the dark forest.

The trees swayed above under the force of the storm and he kept close to Harry’s side, listening as far as he could for movement. The snap of a twig, a sharp, inhuman breath, anything that would betray their stalker. Suddenly Draco stopped, and beside him Harry went still as well, almost
simultaneously. *Even he can't deny how perfect we are together, not forever anyway,* Draco thought as he studied the immediate space around them. He had heard something, it had been close by. So very close…

Suddenly, another piercing howl tore through the air, overpowering even the cries of the storm above. It was closer now. Draco tensed, ready to leap the second he saw…whatever it was. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Harry's wand steady in his hand. “That didn't sound like a wolf,” Draco whispered. “Not a normal one at any rate.”

“Werewolf?” Harry suggested. But Draco did not reply, there was a low, muffled murmuring ahead now. He slunk lower, taking swift, soundless steps towards the noise. Harry followed quietly, catching up to him where he had finally stopped, beneath the cover of an overgrown bush. Draco glanced to him reassuringly, before creeping into the small opening in the bushes, invisible to anyone who wasn't looking. Carefully but sharply, he tugged Harry in after him.

It was a tight fit, their bodies were so close that they were touching. But they had bigger problems to concern themselves over now. Their hiding place had given them an unhindered view of the 'wolves' they had heard alright. Except they weren't really wolves at all.

~To Be Continued...
“I saw him, my Lord,” said a hunched figure, a man dressed in the richest of crimson cloaks. They all wore them, were all shrouded in blood-coloured shrouds that hid their identities. Draco could not help but realise that if they chose such garish, bright colours for their disguises, they weren't worried about attracting attention. Whoever, whatever they were, they could handle anything that discovered them.

That includes us, Draco thought, looking to Harry, who looked as if he was having the same thought. The dark-haired saviour's heart was thudding hard, his breath coming out in raspy pants. Draco reached through the darkness of their hiding place and pressed his hand to Harry's chest, pressing gently to let him know to control the frantic pounding of both. Those green eyes locked with his, glistening in the darkness, and slowly, he heard both that pulse and that breath lull into a gentle, quiet rhythm. He withdrew his hand silently.

They were both on the same page here, they knew that they could not so much as utter a word. If these were supernatural beings they would hear even a loud breath. But whatever they were, they didn't look like wolves, or anything that could howl, for that matter.

Then, a flash of crimson eyes caught his attention, just beyond the circle of cloaked creatures. A handful of otherworldly beasts sat at their feet, shaped like canines but broadly muscled and furred with smouldering red eyes. A mouthful of ice-white fangs were visible from the way they sat panting, slavering at their masters' feet. They were the source of the howling, whatever they were. Terrifying beasts in their own right. So what kind of magic and power must their cloaked masters wield if they could so easily subdue them?

“I saw the youngling and the Chosen One wrapped around each other like a constrictor's embrace with its prey. Our suspicions are most assuredly true,” the first figure continued, bowing slightly to the tallest, slim creature. This one gave a light nod of comprehension and his words that followed were in a thick, guttural, animalistic growl of a voice.

It was obvious that he was no ordinary man.
“As I suspected. The boy must be his First, otherwise such a young one would not be able to endure the proximity of so many ripe young bodies. He is…almost human. He would not have been able to resist when we called to him unless his allegiance was already indebted to the boy. Yes, he most definitely has a First.”

“Do you believe the First is likely to take advantage of his devotion?” a third creature asked of the leader, he too, slightly bowed as he addressed him. “Perhaps use him as a weapon against us? And a formidable one at that.”

Draco looked to Harry out of the corner of his eye at that. He wondered not only what Harry thought of that accusation, but also what kind of ‘people’ would be wary of such a thing. Why would they be concerned of what Harry Potter, the Dark Lord’s bane might use his vampire for? His vampire. Rather than off-put by that thought, he felt a rush of arousal and possessiveness curl up in his stomach. He rather liked the idea of being Harry's, it meant that, in turn, Harry was his.

“That Caius Alaric, he informed us that the Potter boy was a foolishly good-hearted little fop whose only real danger was to his own self, his own naivety,” the leader reminded them. Draco felt Harry tense at his side. He reached out, laying his hand on Harry's in an attempt to ease the surge of anger that had risen in his pulse. But Harry snatched his hand away sharply.

“I doubt that Potter will cause us any trouble, but still…we did not survive this long by making assumptions based on transparent information divulged by a traitor,” the leader said, reaching down to card his tapered, long fingernails through the fur atop his pet's head. The beast bowed slightly but allowed the contact, its eyes glowing ferociously.

It looked oddly like Greyback when he was transformed, Draco thought. Merlin knew, he had seen that enough times when the wolf was his tormentor back in the dungeon. Only more…compact he supposed was the word. Lean with more powerful upper muscles, fur of the blackest night and more wolf than man-wolf.

Draco narrowed his gaze it was almost like a creature bred specifically to serve them. Except he had never heard of anything like that in any of the literature or history surrounding vampires. He’d have to consult Severus as soon as they got back to the castle.

“I will not put ourselves at risk by merely accepting the word of the pet of Lucan Vesper. He is volatile and works only for his own goals, let him think we have aligned ourselves with him but we will not trust him as far as a youngling could throw him,” the leader concluded, reassuring his followers before looking to the second vampire that seemed the most cowed.
“What does he mean?” Harry whispered directly into Draco’s ear, so that his words were but a flicker on the breeze. “Who is Lucan Vesper? Why are they saying Alaric is his pet?”

Draco himself was confused. That name, Lucan Vesper, it was like a familiar glint. A glimpse of his past familiar to the flashes of déjà vu one might have when encountering a childhood friend or… Or a flicker of something from my human life, something important and yet insignificant, all at once…

Suddenly, the creature closest to the leader slunk forwards like a hunting hound onto a scent. Its gleaming crimson eyes, as rich as the cloak of its master were staring directly at Harry and Draco. Draco’s eyes went wide, his hand snatching up Harry’s and refusing to release him even as he struggled to tear free. Then, a low growl ripped from that muzzle, which now tightened menacingly. White, sharp fangs came closer, closer and Harry went suddenly still beside him, his other hand holding out his wand before him. That hand, no, that entire arm was shaking. Draco was sure he would be shaking were he capable of such any longer. But he was definitely afraid, just as afraid as Harry. He might even tell him so, if they hadn’t had bigger problems stalking towards them, faster now.

“Climb onto my back,” Draco commanded under his breath. Harry didn’t look at him, but he did not scramble to agree either.

“I’m not a child. I can fight–”

“Now is not the time for heroics,” Draco cut across him, his words as quiet and sharp as a viper’s hiss. “What that thing said was essentially true. I am your weapon, you give me blood and I give you myself. Use me you fool!”

Harry visibly recoiled from the notion, trying to shy away but Draco pulled him tight to his chest. They had mere seconds before that brutish pack of demon hounds tore through the bushes to get to them. “I can’t – I’m not like that. I won’t do that!” Harry retorted. “I don’t want you to give yourself to me.”

“If you use the kind of magic you will need to escape this alive, you will die you pillock,” Draco cursed him, yanking Harry hard to him with unyielding, vampire strength. “Let me get you out of this. Do you want to bloody well die here?!”

Like a body tightening for an oncoming blow, Harry's entire form clenched in response to Draco’s
Draco watched his jaw quivering with the force in which he was grinding his teeth. Then he heard Potter utter hurriedly, “I don’t want to die. Get me out of here.”

When no further argument came from Potter, he shot forwards. With vampire speed, he seized those arms, tightening them around his neck. He hoisted the chosen one onto his back and leapt from the bushes in one a sharp, lightning fast movement. The leaves flew wildly away as he darted through the trees, scarcely touching the ground. A grunt in his ear told him Potter was less than happy with the position, but the man was not stupid enough to fight it. Not with heavy, inhuman footsteps pounding on the soft earth close behind them.

It was entirely the wrong situation to notice how hot Harry's body was against his back, how tightly his strong thighs gripped his waist. How indignant every panting breath he made against Draco’s ear sounded – he hated relying on him, it was clear. Harry Potter loathed to allow anyone control over him. Draco would relish in showing him just how blissful losing control could be.

But not now.

Now fingers bit into his shoulders, Harry's tight grip alerting him to the rapid rate of which the hellish hounds were gaining on them. Five slobbering beasts snapping at their heels. Draco hadn’t even realised until then, but he’d been running, dodging the army of trees’ branches lashing out at them – and without even thinking! His vampire abilities were definitely growing. Breaking into a grin, he pushed forward, forcing his body to its limit. The wind whistled as he flew through the maze of the forest, conscious of Harry lowering himself as flat to Draco’s back as he could go. He was afraid Draco might hit something, no doubt. Draco’s grin broadened. He would never do something as clumsy and...human, not ever again. For the first time, he felt unburdened by his change, he felt...exhilarated. Invincible!

He was strong. He was fast. Faster than whatever those animals were. He wasn’t human anymore, no. He was better!

Rain beat down hard upon his body as he broke free of the trees. Their branches lashed forwards with the force of the wind, as if trying to ensnare them and draw them back. Harry's legs squeezed him harder as a branch whipped across their sides, narrowly missing them. Draco dodged it easily. He was too fast. And this wasn’t even about impressing Potter with his abilities either. Well, not entirely, a very small voice in the back of his mind whispered. He was free of the heavy self-loathing at last, free of the burden of what he might never be. Because now, he would be better than whatever he might have achieved before.

A chorus of howls filled the air from a fair distance now. Thunder pounded in almost unison with lightning, a terrifyingly fantastic percussion to the haunting melody of baying. Draco was aware of everything. He could sense everything, and even the rain, the wind, Harry's uncomfortable tight
grip on him, even the fear thudding in his slow-beating heart thrilled him. He was powerful, his curse had become a gift in the face of terror.

Suddenly a snarl, far too near for comfort sliced through his ears and before he could turn, he felt the hard, supernatural strength of one of the beasts barrel into his legs. He dropped and felt more than saw Harry slam into the ground a few feet from him. Rolling back onto the balls of his feet, Draco’s head snapped up just in time to see the creature that had attacked him arch its back threateningly as it approached Harry.

To his credit, his First didn’t stay down long. Draco watched as Harry scrambled gracelessly to right himself. Those green eyes were wide with fear but also determination, determination to survive. He had seen it before, but never with eyes that saw everything this clearly. He could see the courage burning like fire in every brownish fleck of those emerald orbs.

Harry’s hand dove into his robes, returning brandishing his wand before him, as if to ward off the beast. It kept coming. Its head bowed menacingly at the sight of the wand, its fangs were bared, gnashing together with a thick trail of spittle diving to the ground as it stalked closer. To Draco’s surprise, Harry merely smirked.

“I killed a bloody basilisk,” he snarled, “I’m not afraid of you.”

For the first time, Draco understood what Harry meant when he said things like that. He could taste Harry's fear, hear it thundering through his heart, but it did not affect him, did not rule him as it ruled others.

Not even when the howling ceased, replaced by growling, raspy canine pants all around them. The other four ‘wolves’ had caught up. Harry wielded his wand before him like a sword and shield all at once, like it was all he had left to defend himself with. Draco rolled onto his toes, ready to pounce. He’s already forgotten that he has me.

The world whirled into slow motion then, the hounds were in a circle around them, but it was the one directly in front of Harry that lunged. Draco’s eyes widened, he already saw that Harry’s arm was at the wrong angle, his lips moving too slowly to finish the spell in time. Those fangs perilously close to that delicate flesh. Hellhound, werewolf or other supernatural beast, there was no way in hell those teeth would pierce that flesh.

An unnatural roar ripped through his lips. He leapt forwards, seizing those gaping jaws with his bare hands, just as they would have snapped shut around Harry's arm. Harry scrambled back, his eyes wide as he stared frantically at the place where Draco’s hands were holding open that
powerful maw, despite the jagged teeth tearing into his skin. Draco felt it alright, it hurt like fuck but pain didn’t rule him as it once had. Just like fear did not rule Harry.

Biting through the stinging agony, Draco sank his nails into the beast’s chops, bearing down until he heard a satisfying yelp of pain. The sound of movement behind him, of grass bending under powerful paws reminded him of the others and he spun on his heel, tossing the one in his grasp into the horde, scattering them like ants. Dropping down on all fours then, he bared his fangs, putting himself between them and Harry.

They were circling again, like a pack of hyenas, growling forebodingly. He had felt the power of that one hound with his own hands, literally. He could handle one, maybe two without getting a scratch on him, but he couldn’t protect himself and Harry from all five of them. And until we know what they are, I have to keep them from scratching or biting Harry at all costs, he thought, his bloodied hands healing as they gripped the ground for purchase. They would have to go through him to get to Harry.

Unfortunately, that’s exactly what they seemed intent on doing. Their haunches tightened, the ground bowing under their feet as they readied to pounce. Draco leant further forwards, feeling the way his eyes burned a bright, caveat silver and the most otherworldly snarl vibrated through his own lips. He felt Harry tense behind him, but the most interesting thing, was that the wolves paused at the sound of it.

Something moved out of the corner of his eye, and Draco whipped his head to the side. A few, crimson shapes had emerged from the trees and the wolves, startlingly, bowed their bodies obediently, like cowed lapdogs and flew back to their masters.

Not yet easing from his battle stance, Draco watched them gather by the forest’s edge. Why did they not approach? Why had they called off their hounds? He strained his heightened senses but could not detect their words over the loudness of the storm, instead he focused his keen sight on the figures. Yet still, it was impossible to decipher why they had given up in the chase. Draco knew he was fast but he knew that the cloaked beings must have been too. Perhaps faster – stronger. They certainly didn’t smell human, whatever they were. He would have to work on interpreting the smells of individual species, and fast.

“Why are they stopping?” Harry asked, staggering to his feet. Without even tearing his eyes off of the figures by the trees, Draco knew Harry was edging back away from him. Standing up himself, Draco held an arm out, silently bidding Harry to pause. Those things, they hadn’t given in the chase so easily for no reason, so then, why?

“Stop fidgeting, Harry,” Draco snapped then, bristled by the fact that Harry seemed desperate to put some distance between them suddenly. Because of the way he’d acted? Because of his
animalistic outburst in an attempt to protect him? He clenched his healed hands into tight fists. That wouldn’t do. They’d crossed a line tonight, they’d come closer than ever before. He wouldn’t have that undone. Would not allow Harry to retreat now.

“You needn’t be afraid of me,” Draco began, only to end up confused at the sight of Harry's expression.

“I’m not,” the man said bluntly, “I just don’t want them to get any ideas about–”

“Potter! Malfoy!” A familiarly commanding voice called to them. Harry whirled on his spot and looked back up at the handful of teachers sprinting across the ground towards them. Hagrid, Flitwick, Sprout, Snape and Professor McGonagall, whose voice had called to them were all racing towards them, wands drawn. So that was what had Harry so skittish. And perhaps what caused those things to retreat. Yes, they probably didn’t much like being faced with even numbers, for behind the professors was a hoard of intrigued students. They had heard the noise, Draco realised, the howling was a piercing sound that could not have been overlooked or mistaken – regardless of the storm.

“What on earth is going on? What was that…that horrendous sound?” McGonagall demanded as she and the professors reached them. The students hung back a fair way, close enough to see but far enough not to be in range of any danger. Like a band of vultures eager to witness a kill.

Severus gave both Harry and Draco an assessing glance, evidently relieved that they were unscathed. “There's something in the forest,” Harry blurted out as Draco remained silent. “Not the normal kind of ‘something’ either, they were…” Draco saw him glance at him out of the corner of his eye, as if silently seeking permission to speak. Draco remained impassive. Harry continued hastily, “They were wearing red cloaks and these …wolves. I don't know what they were but they were fast!”

McGonagall surveyed them both critically for a fleeting moment, before looking to the edge of the forest. The danger had vanished into the cover of trees. “They didn't harm either of you, did they?” Both Harry and Draco shook their heads.

“I thought that the wards of Hogwarts fought to keep intruders out?” Draco snapped then. If Potter was too polite to state the obvious, that everyone in this school was in danger, then he would. “This is a school. It is meant to be safe but those things chased us half way up the grounds! How was it that they slipped past the wards?”

McGonagall pursed her lips, evidently disliking his insulting tone. “You may be a legal adult but as it is, you are also still a student. Therefore, I would be careful to talk to your headmistress and teacher with respect,” she warned him.
Respect is earned, however, not given, Draco thought. And incompetence was something no Malfoy could tolerate well. “A headmistress that can't even keep her students safe. And I thought Dumbledore was a pitiful school head…”

“You speak of the dead with respect, young man!” Sprout scolded. Draco opened his mouth to retort hotly but at the last moment, he caught Severus’s expression and swallowed his words, turning his head away.

“Nevertheless,” McGonagall said when Draco had fallen silent. “I will ensure that the wards are strengthened. Every precaution has been taken against a human of course but magical beings and creatures often find loopholes in the wards. We shall have to cement them against non-humans as best we can.” She looked hard at Draco, as if daring him to make further comment. But Draco didn't even return her stare.

No, he was quite distracted by the words he had heard back in that forest now that the more imminent danger had diminished. His mind had begun to swim with recognition at the mention of Alaric being some Lucan Vesper's pet. Lucan Vesper. He remembered that name! He was certain of it! He'd definitely heard it before now…

“We'll search the grounds,” Hagrid suggested, “secure the castle fer now an' get all the students inside until we can be certain it's safe like.” Harry looked up to his large friend then, offering a smile. Draco didn't like that. How Harry could find a smile so easily for such a brainless oaf and yet…

He steeled himself against the jealousy and hunger for Harry Potter. Certainly, his very nature and connection to him ensured he would feel these things for the Chosen One, but that did not mean he had to allow the emotions to rule him. No, he had evolved. He was strong now, he had to compose himself as such. It would be disadvantageous to allow Harry to see just how intense his emotions were, in any case. He may be dead but he had some pride. A lot, if truth be told.

“I will want you to tell me in more detail later, what you saw,” McGonagall continued, scanning the sodden grounds warily. “For now, however, I need you and the other students to return to the castle. It is not safe out here in the open.”

Harry, Draco noted, nodded respectfully and hurried to obey, but he did not get far.

“I require a moment with both yourself and Mr Malfoy, however, Mr Potter,” Severus cut in, “I will see you both outside the Hospital Wing in ten minutes.”

Draco watched Harry's brow furrow for a moment, before his face dawned with badly concealed comprehension. He, Draco, had not been the only one to forget the potion for Granger until then, it seemed. He followed Harry in, ignoring the whispers and stares from their fellow students as they did so. On reaching the door, he gave a final glance back to the forest, but he couldn't see even a
trace of the wolves or their cloaked masters. They were gone, for now at least. Draco couldn't help but realise they would return, and he only hoped that he could decipher what he and Harry had overheard before then. They needed to be ready for them in every way possible.

Struggling to calm his breaths and his racing, tumult of thoughts, Harry mingled with the flow of the crowd until he reached the corridor leading to the Hospital Wing and then he slipped sideways, stopping just in the alcove formed by the brickwork near the Hospital Wing door. It was only when a shadow fell over him that he realised Malfoy had kept so close to him.

Harry closed his eyes, catching his breath. His pace on the way here had been faster than perhaps was normal. But then, nothing about the last few days was normal. Hermione was in some kind of trouble. So was Malfoy and now these cloaked demons with hellish dogs as pets…

A low sigh left Harry's lips and he tipped his head back, finally realising he could not put it off any longer. He met Malfoy's gaze. Those grey eyes were lidded with that same intensity that Harry was familiar with by now. The familiarity did not stop his stomach from clenching at the sight of it, however. “What were those things?” Harry asked when he'd found his voice. Though it was not as strong as he'd like. “Not the wolves the cloaked men,” he added. “And what did they mean about Alaric? What is he? Who is this Lucius Vester?”

“Lucan Vesper,” Draco corrected carefully, “and I do not know the answers. I had thought that once Granger had her potion, we could discover that together.” He was accustomed to watching Harry closely now, his eyes dropping every now and then to rove Harry's throat, mouth and chest. The dark-haired man felt his innards twist, not at all unpleasantly. A light flush touched his face and he straightened up further as if gaining a few inches would dissipate the affect Malfoy had on him.

“We? Together? Us?” Harry repeated. “Listen, I think you should know. I don't want the kind of arrangement you mentioned down in the forest. I don't want to have some sort of servant in return for my blood. I'm not a master or a lord or… I just want to be myself without anyone trying to change me.”

A smile played along the pale line of Malfoy's lips. “I'm not trying to change you, on the contrary, I'm probably the only suitor you can trust wants you for who you are, flaws and all. I believe we've discussed this before.”

Harry sighed again, glancing away. He did know that of course, and he suspected it was at least a little true. Malfoy had seen the ugliest sides of him over the years, and most recently been privy to some of his most loathed bad qualities. He could be under no illusions as to who or what Harry was, and yet he still insisted on pressing closer and closer. “I know,” Potter agreed at last. “And so you have to understand how little having a vampire guard dog appeals to me.”
A low snarl rumbled in Malfoy's chest then, his eyes darkening. “I am no dog,” Malfoy retorted.

“Well you're not my bloody 'suitor' either,” Harry snapped back. “I'm not a fair maiden for you to woo, or something. I have no interest in being courted like a fickle princess.”

Malfoy pressed closer, caging Harry in by setting his hands either side of his head on the wall. His long fingers dug into the stone in release of his anger, the same anger that swirled in thick clouds in those stormy grey eyes. “You're twisting everything I say. Grasping at straws yet again. Do not make me into an enemy just so you can find reason to fault this.” He punctuated the final word by inhaling the dark locks at Harry's ear, one hand dancing over Harry's heart which was pounding frantically with fury. And no little arousal.

“You should have guessed from that kiss we shared earlier, but I am not looking to be your pet or guard. I'm looking to be your lover. Lovers protect and help each other. It has nothing to do with being a vampire or you being my first and everything to do with how bloody brilliant we both feel when we're together.”

“Just because it feels good, just because you want me for me, that doesn't mean that this is right. It doesn't mean that I want this,” Harry argued heatedly. He didn't like Malfoy's assumptions that he was closer to Harry than he really was, than he possibly could be given the short amount of time they'd known each other amicably.

“I made you feel so good that you came in your trousers,” Malfoy reminded him huskily. “You're always looking at me. You care whether or not I die, whether or not I'm in pain. You practically blush every time I come near you. I'd say that means you want me quite a lot.” Malfoy's eyes were shining as he reasoned with him. It was the same situation, the same argument.

*He's persistent, Harry thought, I'll give him that.*

“Arrogant arse,” Harry sniped. “You could at least pretend to be a bit less self-assured. A bit less certain that I want you.”

Malfoy chuckled. “Oh, but you prefer honesty, I know you well-enough to know that, among other things. This is me, Harry, I'm not pretending to be anything other than what I am.” His nose brushed against a lock of Harry's hair, just slightly, but it was a subtle, seductive enough touch to send an instinctual shiver through Harry's body. It was then that Malfoy's hand slid down to grasp his hip.

Harry glared up at him. No one in all his life had ever gone to so much trouble, paid so much attention to him without wanting something substantial or immoral in return. No one. “You don't
know me as well as you’d like to think. And this may be you, but you’re certainly after something dishonest. You can't be going to all this trouble to get closer to me, to help me just because you want me. You're too sneaky for that to simply be it.”

“I'm flattered,” Malfoy mused, his voice deep and heavy with lust. “But I have more to gain by being honest, since it's a ridiculously moral little gryffindor I'm seducing.”

With a growl, Harry shoved at Malfoy's chest, trying to get him to back off, to get those lips away from his face and that hand away from his waist. Both were alarmingly close to parts of his body that were vulnerable to pleasure. The hot, insatiable kind that would riddle his mind with uncertainty. “Stop saying things like that. I'm not your lover! Lover implies love!”

“Not at first,” Malfoy argued, his voice frustratingly smooth. “That can come later. Right now I think you like me enough to give me a try though.” Harry opened his mouth to retort that he absolutely did not when Malfoy cut him off with, “don't lie, Harry. I can smell how your pulse speeds up when you do.”

A grunt of defeat left Harry's lips and he twisted his face out of Malfoy's grasp when the vampire tried to grasp his chin. He supposed if Malfoy was being honest with him because he wanted it, Harry would be a hypocrite to not give him the same courtesy. “So I might like you, a very small amount,” he admitted. “You understand things my friends never will, and you tell me what I need to hear rather than what I might want to hear. You want Harry not the chosen one, I can't help but like that but that's a far cry from being your bloody boyfriend, you git.”

Malfoy laughed again, though the sound was oddly imbued with affection as opposed to derisiveness. “I think it's a good place to start, to at least try. You're cutting your nose off to spite your face by not even trying, and all for the sake of your pride.”

“Huh, says you?! The king of toffee-nosed, stuck-up arrogance?!" Harry scoffed. “Bloody hypocrite.”

“I believe I have sacrificed a great deal of my 'pride' over the last few weeks. Given everything I have said and done to you. For you.”

Harry slumped a little. Malfoy was right in that aspect, he had surrendered much of his front recently. Whereas he, Harry was frantically clawing at any ridiculous reason to keep it. Even if rationally, it might be more practical to let it go. A long sigh left him then, his whole body deflating as his ire was banished by reason. “I like you. I don't know that I care about you like a boyfriend.”

Draco gave him a smile that made Harry realise just how immature and naive that had sounded, but the blond did not verbally taunt him on the matter. Quite the opposite, he seemed oddly pleased with the statement. For some reason. “I think you know better than not to try though, hm?”
Harry met his eyes with something outside of a challenge then. Something ordinary, human. Draco – Malfoy his mind corrected insistently, had pushed through his barriers, his defences and made him feel that. He wasn't sure he liked the determination the blond had to get him. He seemed so set on him, like a gift he just had to have and still, Harry couldn't fathom why, even after all Malfoy's explanations from before. They didn’t seem valid enough reasons for this desperate yearning for him. But rationally, he supposed as long as Malfoy liked him enough, it shouldn’t really concern him, should it? He couldn't spend the rest of his life second-guessing and suspecting everything to be a disaster or an evil plot waiting to come about…

“I can't make this kind of decision now. Not with Hermione so…” Harry trailed off, blinking hard. “I appreciate all you've done. But can we talk about this later?”

Draco's expression was then touched by a look that was a cross between desire and amusement. “Of course, given that until Granger is healed you will not offer me and the conversation your full attention. Which is simply unacceptable.”

Harry winced at that. Irritated. “I don't like that kind of possessiveness. Even if I were your…your boyfriend, it wouldn't mean you owned me or that you could control me. Just so that you know now, if you try to control me I'll shove you away and you won't get a second chance. If I… I'm trusting you not to completely bollocks it up and turn back into an arsehole.”

With a laugh, Dra– Malfoy leant in to touch their noses together, his hands knotting in Harry's tie, tugging him close. “It’s in my best interest for you to trust me. Why would I work so hard to earn it only to piss it away?”

Grunting out a non-committal noise, Harry tried to turn his head a fraction to avoid touching Malfoy. All the action did was to invite Malfoy's lips to his own, that mouth ghosting over his in an almost-kiss. He inhaled sharply. “We're out in the open,” he muttered hurriedly, his entire sentence one abrupt breath. “Someone will see…”

“When I'm this close,” Malfoy replied heatedly, “I don't care. It’s not as taboo in the wizarding world as in the muggle world, you realise. No one will blink an eye at two men kissing–”

“But they will at you and me kissing!” Harry insisted. “I don't lap up attention like you do. You'd probably love to be in the Prophet snogging the ‘Chosen One’, but I'm more private than that. That's another thing you need to know and respect if you want me to give you as much as a chance!”

“You fly off the handle very easy, you know. You've got an awful tempter,” Malfoy smirked then, a brief flicker of affection. It was the only warning that Harry had before Malfoy pressed in for a swift kiss. Their lips touched but for a moment before Malfoy stepped back from Harry, making a more respectful gap between them.
Harry opened his mouth to say something but was cut off by the echoing sounds of footsteps from further on up the corridor. There was Snape, rounding the corner and walking towards them, his robes billowing about him with the brusqueness of his pace. When he reached them, he gave both Malfoy and then Harry's flushed expression an odd look, before gesturing for them to follow him inside. That was it, the potions master did not say a word until the door of the hospital wing had closed behind all three of them quietly.

“I would have thought that given everything you both have endured at so young an age, you would have valued your lives more,” Snape bit out, whirling around to face them, his voice low and venomous. “After over seven years, are you still unable to comprehend that the forest is off limits for good reason? Neither of you are above the rules. Neither of you are invincible. When will you ever understand that?!”

Harry flinched at that tone, accustomed to the anger but not the source of it – concern. Malfoy, however, merely scoffed at the scolding. “What do you fear will happen to me?” He returned bitterly. “Are you afraid I will die? The worst thing that could possibly happen to me already has. And I'm turning it to my own advantages. I'm faster, stronger than–”

“So you are suicidal now?” Snape demanded heatedly, drawing in close to them both like a vulture. “I never thought you capable of such stupidity, Draco. Always arrogant but never as foolish as to believe yourself indestructible. There are many a beast out there that can still kill you.”

Harry watched as Malfoy shifted uncomfortably under Snape's wrath. The potions master was like a parent to him, he supposed, it was only natural that a scolding made him feel a sense of shame.

Harry could relate to that and he could even understand what Snape was saying. He, Harry himself had complained that he was never allowed a break, that he was always expected to throw himself into harm's way. Always the sacrifice. And yet he had jumped in himself down there, into the forest. He hadn't had to, but he'd charged forwards regardless, without considering the possibilities. His face must have reflected his epiphany because the potions master was looking at him now thoughtfully.

*I really must think I'm the only man for the job, Harry thought. I subconsciously throw myself into danger when it might not be the best idea. What good did I do down there? What did I offer except a distraction? He couldn't for the life of him realise just when he'd come to think of himself as this almighty saviour, but he didn't like the thought of it. He was tired of being the hero. He wanted to be Harry now, but how could he be that? How could he blame people for throwing him out as a sacrifice when he subconsciously did it himself anyway?*

*I'm destroying any chance of a real life, one beyond destroying Voldemort, Harry thought. I'll live a very short, very miserable life if I don't start living for myself, instead of the next villain.*
Looking up to Snape, Harry forced himself to meet those black, tumultuous eyes. “I never meant to get myself involved in even more evil,” he heard himself say quietly, feeling quite detached from the words leaving his lips. “I just want the chance to live my life in peace. I don't want anymore adventures or dark lords…”

“Perhaps next time you will remember that before throwing yourself into the throng, Potter,” Snape replied sharply. Harry took that on the head. It was no more than he deserved. He'd been whining about how unfair his life was, but recently, he'd been doing it to himself.

“I didn't think, I just… When I thought someone could be hurt—”

“The counter-argument is exactly that,” Snape cut across him. “You didn't think. Neither of you, Draco out of a desire to show off and you out of a misplaced sense of duty. Perhaps next time it may occur to you that you might be doing more harm than good by charging in so recklessly. You are barely a man, not even out of school, not a trained professional. If you were harmed or captured by some dark force just because you charged in blindly, then any rescue party would be put in danger, potentially hurt or even killed trying to aid you. And it would all be for naught. The war is over, Mr Potter. You'd do well to remember that hence forth, any danger is not your sole responsibility to solve.”

“I know…” Harry replied weakly, glancing across the Hospital Wing now to where Hermione lay, still and unconscious. It was just as great a danger as his out-of-control magic. He could seriously endanger people if he didn't change. “…I'll try to be more responsible of my own life and less of everyone else's, Professor. Thank you.”

Those last two words had almost stuck in his throat but he'd forced them out. Snape was right and what was more, he'd been concerned (for whatever reason), he deserved that Harry forget his pride a little. Just as Draco did after all he had done recently. One thing at a time, he told himself, looking to Hermione again. But before he could open his mouth. Malfoy was speaking again.

“While it’s monumental that Harry Potter just might realise it isn't his job to save the world anymore, I think you've forgotten just what I am, Severus. I am not a mere student—”

“Neither is Harry Potter,” Snape replied simply, his eyes hooded with frustration. “You are a vampire. But you're a new one, and you are nowhere near invincible. Strong, fast, yes, but foolish if you believe you are unconquerable. You are not stupid, Draco, use these abilities and use them to your advantage but do not stupidly assume it gives you leave to challenge the world just to impress your boyfriend.”

A low hiss tugged free of Malfoy's lips. “I did no such thing!”

With a smirk, Snape asked, “and what other reason might you have had?”
Harry might have laughed, had the situation been any different, on seeing Draco Malfoy with such an embarrassed, subdued expression. As it was, there were more important things to deal with right now. “The potion,” Harry said abruptly, holding his hand out to Snape. “Can I give it to Hermione? I'd rather get her healed as quickly as possible.”

Snape nodded and he delved deep into his inside pocket, drawing out a curved, crystal vial with pinkish fluid inside. Harry took it gratefully and moved to his friend's bedside.

“Five drops, no more, unless you wish a reaction such as yours upon her.” Harry flushed furiously at the thought and removed the stopper from the vial, before carefully dripping five drops into Hermione's mouth.

“There's something else,” Malfoy said to Severus, while Harry sat back on the chair beside Hermione's bed, stroking her hand carefully. She hadn't moved yet, but he swore her breathing seemed to be coming easier to her now…

“In the forest, whatever those creatures were, they knew my name, that I was a vampire, they knew that Harry was my first,” Draco whispered out hurriedly, “I don't know how, but they knew a lot more than they should. And they mentioned Alaric, that failure of a defence teacher and that he was a 'pet' to someone, or something called Lucan Vesper. Does this mean anything to you?”

Harry listened to the silence that had fallen absently. He wanted to know the answer to that too, of course he wanted to know, but Hermione was still not moving. Her face was as pale as ever and Harry was struggling to remember how fast Draco's saliva and blood healed him. Shouldn't it have worked by now? Why hadn't she so much as opened her eyes?

Suddenly, the sound of the Hospital Wing door swinging open made Harry's head snap up. He didn't move but he didn't feel encouraged either that Ron was standing there now, glaring daggers at Snape and Malfoy before turning his gaze on Harry. “I might understand you, but what the bloody hell are they doing here?” the red-head demanded.

“I happen to be this school's potions master, Mr Weasley and you would do well to remember that Madame Pomfrey isn't the only one who is trying to help your Miss Granger.”

Ron snorted, and then glared at Malfoy in particular. “Right, so what about him, then? When I know for a fact that he wouldn't piss on Hermione if she were on fire!”

“He's with me,” Harry said quickly, before an all-out row could break loose. This wasn't the place or the time, and with Malfoy still needing some more blood, he wasn't sure the vampire could hold his tongue. And he doesn’t deserve Ron's rubbish, his mind supplied.
Ron's freckled face contorted with loathing, his skin as red as his hair. “He isn't welcome. You might be that desperate for a shag that you'd be Malfoy's lapdog, but I'm not blinded to what he is.”

Harry sat up straighter, his hands tightening around Hermione's unconscious one. It still lay limp and lifeless in his grasp. He wished she were here to advise him, to help him. He was confused enough about himself, but now Malfoy was...maybe his boyfriend and before Harry could even decide how he felt about that, Ron was interjecting his biased opinions. His head hurt. He winced as tension, stress rippled through his mind like a wave of spiteful, biting electricity.

“Look, you don't have to like him, but I get to decide who I want around me. Not you. If you try to tell me who I should and shouldn't be friends with, then you're no better than he was in first year. He's different now, we all are, and he's had to work bloody hard to earn my trust. I didn't – I still don't make it easy for him. I'm not an idiot. If you hate him, fine, he probably doesn't like you much either, but you both like me. So with that interest in common maybe you can at least be civil, for me.”

Ron snorted. “Malfoy doesn't 'like' anyone, mate, he only likes opportunities. That's all you are to him. An opportunity to redeem some of his foul reputation.”

Malfoy gave a jerk of a badly smothered laugh. Harry just sighed, again. “If that's a risk I'm willing to take, it really isn't any of your business. Look, I had to get used to you and Hermione getting closer and pushing me out a bit, you'll have to deal with being pushed out a little by M...Draco. It doesn't mean we still can't be best mates. If Voldemort didn't change how we feel, why should this?”

When Ron remained silent and that uneasy, awful quiet made to choke Harry and shatter his falsely calm exterior, Harry saw Malfoy glance to him. Those grey eyes were filled with thoughtful concern and he could not help but be oddly touched by it.

“Listen, Weasley,” Malfoy said, stepping towards the seething red head. Harry was grateful that Malfoy ignored the way Ron reached half way for his wand in an unspoken threat. “We can get on for Harry's sake, enough that we don't make his life miserable at any rate. But if you make him choose, you'll lose him.”

Ron snarled. “You think he'd pick you over me? I've been his best friend for seven years! You've been his fuck for a few weeks! He wouldn't pick you over–”

“I think that Harry is fair and if you force him to, he'll pick the person that isn't making him choose like a spoilt child, a brat who cares more about his own importance than his friend's happiness.”

That at least rendered Ron speechless. The red head sucked in his lips in irritation at having Malfoy point it out to him, no doubt. And it was a tad harsher than Harry would've thought necessary, Ron was just concerned, was just feeling put out because he cared. Still, by the look on his face, Harry thought that the message had sunk in. He lifted his chin to give Malfoy an
appreciative glance, but before he could, Hermione's hand twitched in his grasp. Both he and Ron lunged towards the bed while the slytherins responsible for this miracle watched on impassively.

Hermione's brow wrinkled, her body tensing as it might were she conscious, and readying herself to get up. For now, however, her lashes fluttered. Harry saw the moment when her eyes slowly drew into focus. Her head rolled slightly and a look of profound relief touched her tired features as she saw both him and Ron. She squeezed Harry's hand back.

Sharp, relieved tears stabbed at the back of Harry's eyes but did not fall. “Welcome back,” he said lamely, with an unsteady smile. “You frightened us to death!”

Giving a little breathless smile, Hermione tried to find her voice. “I…s-sorry. D-Didn’t mean to… to worry you.”

Ron leant closer then, taking up her other hand and stroking it carefully, as if she were a crystal that might shatter. He seemed too relieved, too moved to form words. Harry saw the way they looked at each other and felt as if her were being a little…intrusive then, as if he were witnessing something very private that perhaps he shouldn't be.

Subtly, he released Hermione’s hand. “What did this to you, Hermione?” he asked, he should leave them to each other, he knew that. And he would, as soon as he had a direction to head in. “Who cursed you? Was it a–”

“I wasn't cursed, Harry,” Hermione replied shakily, looking from him to Ron in an oddly thoughtful manner. “I was just exhausted, out of control of my magic. I admit it now, I don't know how I can have been so… I was just going to hand in one of our essays early and I came over sort of…peculiar, so the professor offered me a drink of water. I felt better for a little while after that. But then later, Ron and I were practicing dual casting and I just–”

“Which professor?” Harry demanded hastily.

Raising a brow questioningly, Hermione replied, “Professor Alaric, Harry. He was very kind. He let me sit down for a bit and then offered me a drink of this sparkling water. It smelt just like elderflower,” she paused then, frowning. “I must’ve missed out on so much work…”

Harry’s gaze darted to Malfoy. He saw the vampire’s shoulders stiffen but otherwise, he was impassive as stone. For some reason, Alaric had poisoned Hermione. But why?

“You reckon Alaric poisoned her, don't you?” Ron murmured to Harry, he too glancing at Malfoy, as if trying to guess what secret he and Harry shared, and what it had to do with this.
“What a ridiculous claim!” Hermione gasped. “He's our teacher, he'd never try to–”

“You very nearly died because he poisoned you,” Malfoy interjected. “And do not be wilfully obtuse; it is not as if a teacher has never tried to kill any of us, after all.”

Hermione looked a little confused at Malfoy's presence then, as if she had only just noticed him and Snape standing nearby.

“It is incredibly dangerous indeed to make such accusations without proof, however,” Snape said, looking at them all in turn. “You are no longer children, if you offend the wrong people in the adult world your actions may have grave consequences.”

Harry stood up then, marching over towards the door. “We'll find proof then,” he announced as he moved.

“Are you going back on your decision to not take responsibility for every wrong already?” Snape asked warningly.

Harry whirled to face them all, his two best friends looking incredibly confused by it all. He couldn’t help that now, however, he would find some way to explain without exposing Malfoy’s secret – later. “No. I'll stick by that decision, where possible. Here this is a direct attack at us, however. This is my responsibility, I think I can tell the difference now.”

An exaggerated sigh sounded from across the room then, and Malfoy moved towards him. “Don't worry, Severus, I'll keep the chosen one out of trouble.”

Ron snorted. “Oh what a hardship for you,” he spat sarcastically with no effort to disguise his disgust. “You’ll probably be watching his arse the entire time.”

“I don't understand what's going on,” Hermione interjected then, evidently confused and concerned. “Why are Professor Snape and Malfoy here? Why are Malfoy and Harry–?”

“They made the potion that saved you,” Harry interrupted quickly. He couldn't deal with another row about him and Malfoy. Not now. “You should be fully healed but you still need to take it easy because of your magic, at least until we know for sure if it’s settled. If whatever Alaric has poisoned you with is still–”

“Don't forget that you too must take it easy,” Snape reminded curtly. “I have no desire for anymore of my evenings to be monopolised by brewing cures for you three. See to it that you remember your recent epiphany.” And with that, the potions master was gone, the Hospital Wing door left ajar, tempting Harry with escape. He couldn’t afford to linger and give his friends opportunity to ask questions he wasn’t ready to answer yet. And besides which, he and Malfoy had work to do.
No sooner had he thought that, however, than he felt Malfoy slide up next to him, so close that the vampire’s chest was touching his side. He sucked in a sharp breath at the sudden contact, just as Malfoy leant in to whisper in his ear. “If we intend to get your evidence on Alaric, we need to go now.”

Harry frowned. Yes, it was urgent, they all wanted him proven guilty and then locked up where he belonged as soon as possible. But why was Malfoy so adamant that it be right this moment? As if plucking that thought right out of his head, Malfoy added all-but silently, “I must be locked away in Severus’s rooms by sunrise.”

Green eyes widened in horror as he recalled just what had kindled the fear in Malfoy’s eyes back in the dormitory earlier. The monumental problem he had so conveniently forgot in light of the problem he considered more important. The problem Malfoy had easily pushed aside in order to help him, Harry to save Hermione. And just because I wanted him to, Harry thought, feeling disgusted with himself. He hadn’t realised just how self-involved, how selfish he could be.

_Malfoy’s protection against sunlight is going to run out tomorrow and then he’ll have to hide away until Snape can track down the ingredients to make more potion. And that would take weeks, months if Alaric was as efficient in causing trouble as he was at teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts._

Giving Malfoy a small, fraction of a nod that only he could see, Harry set his jaw determinedly. They would find evidence to condemn Alaric to his crimes, of course, but he would not let Malfoy hide away in darkness for any amount of time either. _I won’t let him suffer_, he thought resolutely, avoiding Malfoy’s eyes as they left the Hospital Wing together. _If he thinks he has to do this alone, he’s already forgotten that he has me._

* * *

The absence of breath in the body pressed tightly against his made Harry hyperaware of his own, unsteady breaths. Slowly, he forced them to even as they halted outside of the locked door that was their target. The door to Professor Alaric’s office. The invisibility cloak kept them hidden, but of course, everyone was up in their dormitories, so it was hardly needed. A necessary precaution though, Harry thought, for he couldn't imagine this was exactly what the eighth years were meant to use their extended curfew for.

“Is Alaric in there?” Harry asked quietly, knowing Malfoy’s keen senses would pick up on the
man's scent if he were in there or nearby. He had checked the Marauder’s Map before they’d come here, but Alaric could’ve returned to his office in that time. He watched Malfoy incline his head a fraction, before the blond shook his head. “No recent scent, and it’s silent, the natural kind, not the magical kind. Wherever he is, he's not there.”

“Good,” Harry replied, drawing his wand and turning it on the door. “Alohomora!” To his incredible surprise, it opened with a ‘click’. Green eyes turned to Malfoy suspiciously. “That was too easy. We'll have to watch out.”

With a nod, Malfoy followed him in cautiously through the door. The office was not that much different to what you might expect from the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Books and peculiar artefacts filled the shelves that lined the walls, while the desk was swamped with glistening, silver instruments. Harry frowned when he saw them, wondering why Alaric would leave them there, in plain sight if the door hadn't even been properly warded.

The cloak was still over them and they kept silent but as soon as they stepped towards the middle of the room, the door behind them gave an alarming groan. Whirling on their heels, they faced the door just in time to see it merging into the wall, until all that was left behind them was solid stone.

“We're trapped,” Harry said, glancing around the room. That was evidently why it didn't matter to Alaric if anyone got into his office. Because whoever got in, wasn't getting out.

“Let's just look for what we came for,” Malfoy said, pulling the cloak off of their heads. “We'll worry about the escape after we're done here.”

“Right.”

The problem was of course, that Alaric had so much crammed into the shelves that it would take them hours to search it. May as well get started then, Harry thought, unwilling to admit defeat so quickly. He started by pulling the books gently out of place and checking behind them while Malfoy searched the desk. Or at least appeared to.

“You look very… striking when you're concentrating,” Malfoy murmured, his voice the tone of rich, warm caramel. It made spittle gather in Harry's mouth. Inclining his head from where he stood rummaging through the shelves, he tried to sound scolding and unaffected when he said, “stop being distracted. We have an evidence to find.” He could not help the subtle flutter in his chest that caused his words to quake a little.

Harry skimmed the spines of the countless books with his fingers, reading the titles. Unfortunately, neither they nor even the (no doubt sterilised) silver instruments were evidence for anything. Except perhaps that he was dedicated to knowing everything about his work and was prepared against vampires. And that was too close to 'Draco's' truth to use as evidence. No, they needed that bottle of whatever Alaric had slipped Hermione to convince anyone of dodgy dealings.
Though, now he thought about it, Alaric had poisoned Hermione after she’d already been losing control of her powers. He frowned. *He must’ve been poisoning her all along, since we got here,* he thought. Or perhaps something else had started this all, had made Hermione’s magic unstable, and Alaric’s poison had simply exacerbated things. Perhaps the trouble had not come from just one source, as Madam Pomfrey had suspected.

Suddenly, the thin layer of dust that had lined each book vanished and Harry paused as his fingers touched nothing but the clean yet worn leather of the *Mythical Beasts Encyclopaedia.*

*He’s used this recently,* Harry thought, tugging the heavy tome towards him. It was not the book that was of use, however. In the space behind where the book had sat, was a collection of sparkling glass vials. He moved to turn to beckon Malfoy to him, but the blond was already right behind him, so close that his cool, needless breath skimmed the back of Harry’s neck. Harry shivered at the alarmingly pleasant sensation. It made his ears grow hot.

“Look,” he said unevenly, trying to forget his unwelcome desires and focus on the matter at hand. “Some look like they have liquid silver in,” he said, reaching for the clear, fizzy looking fluid closest to the back of the collection.

“Looking to spray me with it or make me ingest it, no doubt,” Malfoy snarled, pointing to another of the vials still on the shelf. “That one is holy water, says so on the bottle. And look,” Malfoy snatched up a roll of parchment from beside the vials. “An order for half a million gallons of holy water? What the hell is he planning to do with that?! Drown half the vampires in England?!”

Only half listening, Harry popped the cork on the vial he held and sniffed warily at the contents. He couldn't tell what the smell was, but it was by no means foul. Malfoy leant in then, putting their faces dangerously close as he smelled the bottle.

“Definitely elderflower.” Malfoy said, looking directly into Harry’s eyes, his outrage at Alaric’s crooked transactions fading with every second they stared at each other. “This is it, you have your potion.”

Flipping it round so that he could see the label, Harry frowned. “Essenz der Fee?” he read, and then winced as he saw the translation in tiny letters beneath that, “Essence of Fairy?” He knew he must’ve sounded revolted (as well as pronounced the name wrong) because Malfoy was smiling.

“It’s not made from fairies, it’s made by fairies. In Germany, hence the German name. You need a little work in the language, evidently.”

Harry snorted. “Oh, and you don't, I s'pose?”
A devious grin crossed Malfoy lips as he breathed purposefully over his ear, “Ich bin von dir fasziniert. Ich denke immer an dich. Hast du mich gerne?” Harry's entire body tensed and quivered like a plucked harp string. It didn’t matter the language or that he had no idea what the blond had said, he’d felt his intent right down to his core. He heard a wicked, hot laugh directly over his ear then, felt it whisper against his lobe. “I want to fuck you on his desk,” the vampire growled, with equal passion and ferociousness.

“No,” Harry all-but gasped, shaking his head. “I…I–”

“You don't sound too convinced, Potter,” Malfoy teased, tilting his head so that his lips could capture Harry's inflamed earlobe. Harry groaned, arching his hips uncontrollably. He'd had no idea his ears were so sensitive. So sensitive that he was already nearly fully hard and straining against his trousers. Malfoy pressed his own burgeoning arousal against his, grinding slow and hard into him.

Harry's lower body fought back with equal vigour, even as his upper body tried to push Malfoy away. This was hardly the time and besides, there were more important things happening right now, he couldn’t afford to waste time…

But then, suddenly, Malfoy’s mouth was on his, smooth and supple yet demanding. And he was very conscious of the feel of hard fangs present in the kiss. A moment of hesitation, that was all he had time for before those lips assured him of Malfoy’s carefulness. Even amongst the fire, the passion and yearning, there was a chary tenderness in the sensuous passes of that tongue over his own.

A grunt of barely concealed pleasure sounded deep in his chest and the tenseness in his jaw dissipated as long, slender fingers caressed the hard line of his chin. It was as if they were willing him to relax, to unleash his worldly cares and simply melt. He wanted to, so badly, but he wasn't sure that the cautiousness instilled in him for so many years would be so easily shattered.

What happened to taking your life back? A voice whispered from the last coherent stretch of his mind. Since when have you ever given up at the first hurdle?

At that moment, Malfoy’s fingers left his chin and dived up into his dark locks, tugging hard. They dragged him back to reality and deeper into the kiss. Harry groaned in earnest then, cupping the back of Malfoy’s neck to hold him to the kiss. He knew he wasn’t particularly good, but he thought if Malfoy stayed just there, he could be better. Bloody brilliant, his mind supplied.

Tilting his head a little more, Harry’s own tongue slipped out to manipulate Malfoy’s experimentally. Barrelling in without a thought, he stroked the length of that lean, wet muscle, before touching the tip teasingly. A hiss of bliss vibrated through his own mouth from Malfoy’s
and he grinned against the kiss.

*Doing alright, aren’t you, Potter?* Malfoy’s voice whispered in the corner of his mind. He wondered whether they were actually Malfoy’s thoughts, another extension of their blood connection or if it was just his own mind adopting Malfoy’s persona. The first sounded frighteningly more plausible.

That was all that was left of his coherency, however, when Malfoy pressed in tight to him again, those fangs scraping gently over his kiss-bruised lips. They tickled, made his sensitive flesh tingle in a way that made his cock throb. He felt the slickness of a mix of his and Malfoy’s saliva on his lips, in his mouth and dived in to flick his tongue over the points of those fangs, before he could dwell on the possibility that it might be predominantly Malfoy’s saliva making him feel like this.

He wanted this, Malfoy wanted this and for Merlin’s sake he bloody well deserved this!

Harry kissed back harder now, gasping into that lukewarm mouth. He’d made that warmer, he’d made Malfoy gasp and groan when he didn’t even need to breathe to live. Malfoy was a vampire, he was physically stronger and faster, but Harry had just as much power here, if not more. Malfoy was willing to give him that power, Malfoy wanted him to trust him. And…Harry thought that maybe, just maybe, *Draco* was worthy of that trust.

“No,” Draco said, his hands sliding down to Harry's hips where they rested, still, for a moment at least. “I… I didn’t want this to be about…” he growled in frustration, stepping back from Harry a good few paces until his legs were against the edge of the desk. “Bloody hell, I want your blood so fucking much!” Those last words were a low hiss now and Harry was trying to make sense of it as he stepped towards where Draco was now leaning, his long fingers tearing gouges in the side of the desk until the wood splintered.
“I can hear it, pounding in my head!” Draco snarled, his blond hair hanging into his suddenly piercingly, inhumanly silver eyes. “I can… I can taste it every time I… I have to show you, prove that it’s not about blood.”

Harry’s brow furrowed with his confusion now. He thought Draco was coming to terms with it now that his powers were growing, but it appeared he was still fairly sensitive in some aspects. He wasn’t as untouchable as he would’ve had them all believe earlier.

Finally he was standing before Malfoy, his entire body still strumming with pleasure, his mind fogged up with lust. But somehow, he managed to find some coherent words. Just. “I’m…I’m alright, with that. It didn’t hurt, it’s – fuck’s sake, Draco. Bite me, I don’t care! I don’t care about a little pain. Why am I coming to terms with these easier than you? You’re a vampire, you need my blood. I came in my trousers the second time you bit me! And I probably would’ve the first time if we hadn’t been in—”

“Don’t,” Draco growled warningly. “Don’t talk about… about that night. In the dungeon with Greyback and that… the vampire that… It makes me sick, to think that anyone saw me like that, that you saw me like that.”

Harry tried to pull back from the haze of ecstasy but didn’t quite manage, he stepped closer, until he was standing between Draco’s open legs. “It’s not shameful, what that vampire made you feel. You… you made me—”

“Not that, you idiot,” Draco snapped. His head jerking up so that Harry could see those silver eyes shining wildly now. “You saw… They tortured me, they made me scream, cry, beg like a girl. It’s the most… the most shameful part of my life and you saw it. I never, ever want to think of that again. I don’t want your bloody pity, understand me?!” He seized the front of Harry’s robes then, dragging him close, his arms shaking with the intensity of his pent up hunger. Harry could see those eyes trained on the blood still oozing from his lips. He swallowed.

“And I don’t want every time I touch you to be about blood. I’m a vampire, not a monster,” Draco added, “I won’t become a monster.”

Harry pressed in closer, the heat of his own groin having never dwindled once during their conversation. And now it was driving him towards Draco unalteringly. “I won’t let you become a monster,” Harry breathed, his hands reaching out and swiping the objects resting on the desk away, sending them flying to the floor with a horrendous crash. That roused a grin from Draco, who no doubt was hoping that some of those silver heirlooms (weapons) had been broken. Shoving Draco back hard, Harry dived down and stole his lips with another kiss. Even as their mouths moved
together, he felt the sting in his lip heal.

Harry scrambled inelegantly to get onto the desk a little more, grinding his aching crotch into Malfoy’s until the blond gave a snarl of pleasure and reached up to tug hard on his dark locks once more. Draco seemed to like doing that…

“You’re the only one who has a problem with what you are,” Harry panted, his words dusting over Draco’s lips as he lay there, panting on top of him. “And what you are is bloody stupid if the bloke you want is begging you to fuck him and all you can think of is something that happened months ago.” Harry dove down to lash that wicked tongue with his own again. This time, he traced the outline of those fangs again, so gently that he felt Draco shiver. They were sensitive? That was interesting…

“Hmm, fast learner, Potter,” Draco teased, the hand not gripping Harry’s hair sliding down to squeeze his First’s arse and rock those hips faster into his own. “I thought you were supposed to be a prudish little virgin?”

Harry growled then, grinding harder into Draco in mock punishment. “Everyone’s a virgin at some point, Casanova.”

Fighting back with equal intensity, Draco’s grip on his hair, tightened, yanking him hard down into a fierce kiss. Still, Harry could not help but notice that those fangs never did more than tease him. Harry was quickly being driven into a frenzy now. His mind was buzzing with need. He felt desperate now. His cock was throbbing, hungry for touch.

“N-Need…want to come! Shite, please! Fu-Fuck me!” Harry panted, not even sure what he was saying. The words were coming from a place of need and passion now, with no coherency left in him. He scrambled for the zip in his trousers only to yelp loudly as Draco flipped him over, pinning him to the desk. Harry arched up under him, growling in frustration.

A quiet chuckle answered his desperate snarl, along with the return of that delicious friction against his hungry prick. “Fuck me! Bite me! Do something!” he snapped, white-hot hunger spreading through his entire core when he saw Draco reaching to undo his belt. Fuck. Who cared where they were, or how, or why? He needed to come so badly. He needed…something, something he didn’t quite understand…

Nothing else mattered, and dimly at the back of his mind, he realised that that was probably suspicious. But he couldn’t find it in him to pause for even a moment to contemplate it. Especially not when he felt Draco’s deliciously cool hand yank his trousers open and steal inside, caressing
the soft fabric of his briefs.

“My my, white, Potter?” Draco all-but purred, “You shouldn’t have.”

“Shut it,” Harry gasped, his words cut off by Draco’s fingers pressing ardently against his burgeoning arousal through his underwear. Pleasure rolled through his body in thick waves and his eyes slammed shut with the intensity of it. His fingers clenched in Draco’s shirt, his mouth open in throaty groans that were half stifled by possessive kisses that randomly assaulted his lips, then his jaw, then his neck. Draco’s other hand flew up – Harry thought to knot in his hair again, but instead, it merely rested there, the smooth pad of that thumb brushing over the scar at Harry’s forehead.

In the clutches of lust and desire that still felt so new and overwhelming to him, he couldn’t think of anything but how good Draco felt over him, against him, touching him. It made his hips roll frantically up into that cool hand, his own body feverish and red hot with want. He had never felt anything so amazing in his entire life. He swore he was going to explode with it. Turning his head to the side, he exposed the marked side of his throat to Draco’s descending kisses. That made the vampire pause over him.

“You’re mad with lust,” Draco breathed heatedly; “you don’t realise how dangerous it is for you to tempt me.”

Harry cried out in a mixture of frustration and yearning. “Don’t stop!” Oh Merlin, the way Draco’s body writhed against his own, in perfect sync with the frenzied beat of Harry’s heart. He was so close. He didn’t care about anything else. Those fangs were against his skin still, but only as an inactive participant. They glided over his flesh with every hungry, ravenous kiss Draco laid on his tender throat, they tickled his sensitive skin until shivers rushed down his arching back, but they did not break through. Draco did not bite, simply continued the faultless worship of his throat until his eyes welled up with the overpowering bliss.

Clawing at Draco’s shoulders through his shirt, he pulled him tight against his body, so that every hard stroke the man made over his erection caused his arm to taunt the tight muscles of his stomach. One hand shot up to seize Draco’s hair, tugging him awkwardly away from his throat. His eyes flickered open, just quick enough to catch a glimpse of the lustful confusion on Draco’s face, before Harry pulled him down, guiding that mouth to where he truly wanted it, his lips. They were but a hairsbreadth apart now…

Suddenly, an echoing sound of footsteps announced the sound of someone advancing outside. Harry froze, the haze of lust still there, still fogging his mind, but now the danger had pierced it firmly. He angled his head and saw, over Draco’s shoulder that the office door was slowly merging back into view from where it had retreated into the stone.
Shit!

~To Be Continued...
Panic struck him like a flame to fuel. There was still an inferno in his belly but now it was mixed with chaos. He jumped up from the desk, checking the *Essenz der Fee* was tucked safely in his pocket along with the cloak and his wand before looking to Malfoy. The *Alohomora* earlier had been enough to make him dizzy, he couldn’t use anymore magic to get out of here.

“We have to get out!” he whispered hastily, infuriated and panicking even more at the sight of Draco’s calm complacency. The blond casually moved to the window. Holy shit! Harry felt his heart pounding furiously in his chest for a very different reason now. The door was moving back into place in slow-motion but it still seemed too fast.

How could he have forgotten where he was? Why he was here? He had been so lost to the mind-blowing pleasure that he could’ve been murdered on the spot and cared less. That frightened him, that lack of awareness, that overpowering bliss. Surely no earthly feeling could make him forget the danger like that? It must have been some side-effect from so much exposure to Draco’s saliva. Surely?

Just then, two, strong arms seized his shoulders, shaking him back to the present. He tuned back in to catch Draco mid-sentence.

“…but we have to hurry! Just like in the forest, wrap your arms around my neck and I’ll get us out of here!”

Harry could only nod, he gave one final glance to the door, seeing that it was actually nearly fully visible now before he felt himself yanked towards the window. He threw it open before Draco had the chance, his head still swimming, chest still breathless with his frantic heartbeat. Draco flew past him and was out on the wall, clinging effortlessly it seemed to the stone. The vampire’s eyes were still vivid silver, telling him that Draco too was fighting to keep his cool despite his instincts and desires. A pale white hand extended to him and Harry, hearing an echo of his vow to not take
on the world alone again, accepted it. As if he were lighter than a feather, he was pulled effortlessly from the room and into Draco’s chest.

“Don’t look down,” Draco mused distantly, looking around, for a more stable perch, no doubt. Harry glanced back to the window and kicked it shut. That would buy them some more time, hopefully. Alaric would not immediately assume they would be stupid enough to jump out of the window. A fall may not kill Draco but Harry was certainly susceptible to high drops.

“Seeker, remember?” Harry answered distractedly, panic still thundering through his veins, “I’m hardly frightened of heights.” A firm pressure at his stomach where Draco’s arm secured him was the only warning he had before Draco hauled them both up onto the slanted roof above. The wind howled around them at such heights, the storm not yet having died in the air. But at least the rain seemed to have stopped.

Harry grunted as Draco threw them both flat to the roof before reaching for his own wand. Harry could not help but resent that, the fact someone was saving him, the fact that he needed to be saved. It wasn’t something he would easily get used to, he thought. But he knew that he had to, a very short, very lonely life was the only alternative.

“Accio Firebolt!” Draco cried and Harry’s eyes widened in surprise. Draco’s had summoned his broom as opposed to his own. Whilst the firebolt was faster, of course, he had a feeling that that hadn’t been Draco’s reasoning. Within moments, his familiar broom was zipping through the air and hovering beside them. “Fly us to safety then, Potter,” Draco said, glancing down at the window they had just escaped from. “Before Alaric decides the window had to have been our only exit.”

Harry kept his head down and his eyes diverted all the way back through the castle. His fingers clenched firmly around the vial of Essenz der Fee in his pocket as he walked. He could feel the swish of Draco’s robe against his, he was so close. Harry swallowed uncomfortably, his face burning. He could not come to terms with what he had said, what he had done with Draco back in Alaric’s office. The feelings that had gripped him had been so strong, they had eradicated all sensible thought. He didn't think he could ever face Draco, or even his own reflection ever again.

With his stomach tightening from over thinking every groan, every filthy word he'd panted into Draco's ear, Harry stopped. A realisation had hit him.

“What’s the matter?” Draco asked, having stopped beside him. With green eyes still riveted on the blond's feet, Harry fought to find his words amidst the mortification. His cheeks were still red with it. He only hoped the could trust his voice not to shake. “When any vampire bites a human,” he began uneasily. “When…when you bite me, you always lick my neck first.” It was a statement, not
a question, but Draco nodded all the same.

“Yes. It has aphrodisiac and analgesic properties. It allows for the bite not to hurt you, for you to find it pleasurable instead of painful,” the vampire explained. Harry grunted under his breath. So that was it, was it? He had expected as much when the realisation came to him just then. When Draco had been kissing him, it had felt like he was about to explode with every minute that they were locked together. It was just as he’d suspected all this time. Those feelings were inspired by Draco's saliva, by his vampire gifts, not by their own feelings.

Harry winced as his own words replayed in his ears, over and over again like a broken gramophone. The way I threw myself at him, Harry thought, humiliated by his own memories. “I knew it,” he murmured, wishing he didn't feel or sound so disappointed. He wished he had been wrong. “I was just getting high off of your spit, wasn't I? I felt it, while we – the longer I kissed you the hazier things got.”

Draco frowned at that. “You do come up with some frighteningly idiotic ideas when you're left to your own devices, Potter,” he taunted, completely confused as to where that had come from. He'd sensed Harry's mortification, his awkwardness but he had thought that was simply because he had been so...so uncontrollably ravenous back in Alaric's office. Harry was a prudish, virginal Gryffindor by nature, Draco hadn't seen anything odd about his quietness or embarrassment. But this?

“What are you on about?” Draco demanded.

He watched Harry flush a dark, tantalising red as he determinedly avoided his eyes.

“The things I said. The way I moved, the noises that I...” Harry's words halted then and the scent of embarrassment hung heavy in the air. Mixed with a self-destructive whiff of bewilderment.

“Can you not for once just experience something positive and not question it? Not try to find reasons to deny yourself, just because the intensity of it, of me frightens you?” Draco retorted. He curled his fingers into tight fists, fighting back the urge to shake Harry until he saw sense. Ever the martyr, he thought bitterly. What other eighteen year old male would fight his desire for sex so resolutely?

“If embarrassment is the only reason you're saying such ridiculous things, then you should know, embarrassment is part of it. Especially for someone like you.” Watching Harry's body tense at that last sentence did make him want to smirk, but he held it back. He didn't want to provoke Harry's temper at the moment, not when he was hoping he could get the chosen one to finish what they'd started earlier...
Severus's quarters were private and dark, Harry might feel more comfortable if he thought Draco couldn't see him properly. *He doesn't have to know just how good my night vision is,* Draco thought deviously. His body hummed with hunger yet to be sated, with both the vampire and human desire to feel Harry against him again, as unrestrained as earlier.

“This would be just as confusing and embarrassing if I were a human lover,” Draco added then, wondering if that was closer to the real reason Harry was being so shirty.

Harry scoffed at that then, eyeing him dubiously. “You just said it yourself, your saliva made me feel all those things.”

Draco glared, "Don't put words in my mouth. I said no such thing. The properties of my blood and saliva remove inhibitions and pain, sometimes even enhance pleasurable sensation but it does not create feelings where there are none.” Harry didn't look or smell too convinced as they continued on towards Severus's quarters, however. *Of all the men in the world, the one I can't stay away from has to be the most moral, destructively selfless fool of them all,* Draco thought with irritation.

“Have I ever given you a reason to doubt me?” Draco asked him then, infuriated by the unspoken accusation. “You think I’d resort to drugging you to make you compliant? That I…” He grit his teeth. He shot forward, seizing Harry's arm with vampire speed and whirling him around to face him. “Is it so unbelievable that you felt and did those things because I felt good to you? Am I such an unlikely lover?”

“Stop using that word,” Harry snapped. “You’re not…” The man flinched where Draco held him, still avoiding his gaze. “Look, I wasn’t saying you were…were trying to rape me or anything. It’s hardly your fault if your saliva and pheromones blow my good sense and ability to think to–”

“It doesn’t have the power to do that!” Draco snarled, his nails digging into Harry's arms even through the fabric of his robes. “Bloody hell, you’re so pig-headed! Would it kill you to relax, to enjoy your life for the first time ever?”

“It just might,” Harry growled warningly, “I’ve made some stupid mistakes in my life, and people always got hurt because of them, people I cared about. Now you’re all saying that I am infinitely more powerful than anyone alive, I can’t afford to make mistakes, to have anyone take away my sense of right and wrong. Even if you don’t mean it, even if you think that’s what I need to do to start living my life.”

Draco released the man then, taking a step back to fully study him. Harry Potter was truly jaded, world weary. He was bursting at the seams with both power and frustration but more than that, he reeked of fear, fear of hurting and being hurt. It was maddening. *This* was an intensity that *Draco* could not comprehend.
So much for finishing what we started, the vampire whispered at the back of his mind. He shook his head as if to silence the thought, his golden locks falling into his eyes. For some reason, that movement caught Harry's attention, and he raised his chin to face him. When Draco looked, he saw deep, unfathomable green eyes locked on his hair. That isn't the look you give someone who you believe you only fucked because of influential substances, Draco thought.

“How long must we play these same circles, Harry?” Draco breathed, his voice turning the frustration, the anger he felt inside into red hot lust. He was still ripe from earlier, and so was Harry, he could smell it on him. “Each time you try to draw back you find that you couldn’t flee quite as far as you did before. How many times will we have to go over this before you realise that you can’t run away from what is inside of you?”

Harry bared his teeth. “I’m not running from anything. Why do you think it’s so mental that I’m putting everyone’s safety before my sexual desires? Why do you think it’s so bloody stupid that I’m dubious about my feelings experienced under the influence of your vampire powers?”

“Because deep down you know very well that all these excuses you keep finding are just that, excuses!” Draco bellowed, throwing himself towards Harry again until he’d pinned that body to the stone wall. Harry grunted, Draco hissed in satisfaction. Now Harry could not run, could not help but look at him. And cannot hide his body's reactions, for I can smell and feel every one. It was like an ever changing tide, life with Harry Potter. He’d experienced more mood swings in the last few weeks than he had in a lifetime.

“Why did you break up with the Weasley bint?” he whispered smoothly. Harry's eyes went wide and Draco forced his expression to remain vacant. It wouldn’t do to show just how pleased he was with shocking that scowl off of Harry's face.

“What's that got to do with anything?” Harry snapped through clenched teeth.

“Did she turn you off of women?” Draco leered, goading him, “is that it?” He knew very well it wasn't, but when Harry's temper finally snapped, he knew he'd get a true answer from him then.

“Don't talk about her like that,” Harry warned, “she didn't do anything wrong. It was all me. Don't you dare mouth off about her, she's a good person and I love her and her family.”

Something in Draco's cold chest clenched with white-hot jealousy. He sneered. “If you love the little twit so much then why did you leave her? Why have you not even looked at her since you've returned to Hogwarts, while she can't take those pathetic 'bambi' eyes off of you?”
Harry rolled his eyes. “Common sense is one thing they don't teach you at pureblood finishing school, then?” Harry snorted derisively. “I finished it, because I realised I didn't love her that way. That didn't mean that her feelings had changed any. She probably still loves me, I wish she could find someone who will return that love but it’s not me. Satisfied? Now get out of my face!”

Harry shoved hard at Draco's shoulders. Draco made himself immovable, however, and did not even blink. Harry may not return those feelings, but he certainly felt awkward speaking about them. But he understood his noble little gryffindor much better now than he had a few weeks ago.

_He feels bad for not being able to return those feelings, for hurting her, for losing his perfect way of being an official member of that red headed family. That explained why the little wench couldn't tear her eyes off of him. His gut clenched possessively at that. He didn't like the way she stared at the back of Harry's head at meal times, in the hall._

“You're not a commitment-phobe, then,” Draco drawled.

Harry glared. “That'd make it easier for you wouldn't it? I'm not. I used to want commitment, a family, someone who cares about me more than anything. I still do want them, but there are more important things.”

Draco's hands eased their grip on Harry's arms then, his fingers gliding up over those shoulders. His thumbs caressed the sharp line of Harry's jaw for a moment and it clenched obstinately under his touch. Draco smiled sexily, one hand sliding back to cup the back of that neck possessively, whilst the other slid down slowly, caressing the warmth of Harry's torso. He relished in the shudder that his touch drew from that hot body as his hand stilled, gripping Harry's belt.

“And that's it, is it?” he all-but purred. “When you're with me, when we're this close, it feels so good that it feels as if nothing else could be important. I set you free and you're terrified of that, of letting anyone in close, of letting anyone save you.”

Harry tried to growl but Draco dove forwards, swallowing the sound as their mouths collided. He pressed himself in tighter to Harry's body, grinding into that delicious heat. The other man tensed under him, a part groan, part growl vibrating through their joined mouths. He drank it all in, his fingers scratching gently at the back of Harry's neck, his other hand reaching around to squeeze the chosen one's arse, hard as he devoured his mouth.

Harry was hesitating beneath him now, paused on the precipice of surrender and escape. Whatever he claimed was the reason for his reluctance, his innermost self was certainly putting up a fight to ensure it got its pleasure. _He wants me_, Draco thought, _even if he doesn't admit it_.

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“One day your powers will be stable,” Draco murmured against those lips, drawing back a fraction, just enough to keep their mouths touching and yet ensure Harry heard him clearly. “One day it will be safe for you to lose your control, and what will be your excuse then? There will always be one, won't there?” When he looked at Harry then, that face was more flushed than ever and his eyes were shining with lust that he knew the man wished he didn't feel. But he does, and he does want me, and his body reacts to mine, Draco reminded himself. He'll realise soon enough that that's more than most relationships have to start on, at first.

Reaching down then, he drew his hand across the rather noticeable shape in Harry's trousers. Harry shuddered, let out a low hiss. His hand shot down to grip Draco's wrist fiercely. Draco stared hungrily into those eyes for a moment, their locked gazes speaking volumes. Even as the pressure tightened around his wrist he leant forwards, smoothing his lips over Harry's again, more gently this time.

Suddenly, the door closest to them flew open. Draco's body bunched as if to pounce when he tore his mouth from Harry's, his fangs bared on instinct. It wasn't even a conscious effort to defend his First; his body had moved and prepared itself to attack before he'd even thought about it. But just in time, with Harry's borrowed blood pumping through his system, he realised who was standing there and halted his instincts in their tracks.

I suppose there is something to be said for having a donor whose blood is so ripe with unrivalled magic, Draco thought as he slowly removed himself from Harry's personal space, watching the man straighten himself up hastily. They both avoided Severus's dark, questioning eyes. His magic, it gives me not only growth spurts in my power, but more control, more connectedness to my instincts as well. The more he fed, the more advanced a vampire he was becoming.

“You would do well not to flash those fangs in public, should you wish to keep your secret, Draco,” Severus drawled then, his voice cutting through the awkward silence. “Or anything else.” Draco raised his chin defiantly at that, whilst Harry just looked away even more determinedly.

Even though he was a little embarrassed at Severus seeing him so out of control and fornicating in the corridors like a fifth year, he was too proud to show it.

“Did you find your evidence?” Severus asked indifferently. Draco left it to Potter to answer.

“Err...yeah,” the chosen one replied as eloquently as ever. “We found it but I want to find out what it actually is before we use it to convict him. We have research to do.” Severus merely looked at Potter, his face vacant and his eyes swimming with thoughts.

Draco sneered. “I suppose I am condemned to hide from the sun until we can locate more ingredients anyway, so time matters little to me,” he murmured. He hadn't seen or smelt a trace of any of the ingredients in Alaric's office. He must have disposed of them immediately. Bastard. “Will you be able to make up an excuse for my teachers?” Draco asked. Severus nodded.
“I can arrange for you to vanish for a family emergency for a few days. That will be an ample excuse. I only hope I can acquire the ingredients quickly, a few weeks away from your lessons could be detrimental to your NEWT scores. You take them slightly earlier than the other students, given that you are eighth years. You only have until April.”

Draco grit his teeth. No, he'd forgotten that their year here would end at the start of May...

“Thank you for the reminder,” he bit out sarcastically, “I can hardly help it, can I? It’s not as if I'm skiving off by choice.”

With a piteous glimmer in his eyes, Severus agreed, “No. And I will hound all of my regular suppliers and then every one on the planet until I get them, Draco. Some are…difficult to acquire, but I will not let you down.”

Suddenly, a soothing warmth flickered near his side and he glanced back to see Potter standing beside him now. Staring right at him. “I won't let you down either,” the man said with conviction. So startled by the sincerity, the concern in that face, Draco stared at him dumbly for a moment. He was touched briefly by his genuineness, before he hastily recovered his indifference mask.

“And just what won't you let me down on?” Draco all-but purred, regardless of Severus's presence. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the potions master roll his eyes before turning and heading back into his chambers. He left the door open though, a silent reminder that Draco should hide himself away before first light.

Potter, meanwhile did flush a little, but otherwise did not cringe away in embarrassment. “Perverted arse,” Harry retorted. “I won't let you rot away in here. I know how important this year is to you, you're as bad as Hermione. I won't let some prat with a grudge to steal that from you.”

Draco's insides twanged like the plucked string of a harp. With a cursory glance at the door to ensure they were alone, he spanned the gap between Harry and him. Their chests pressed flush together. He could feel that warm heart thudding faster and faster with anticipation when his hands came to rest either side of Harry's throat. The beats vibrated through him, heating his cool flesh wherever they touched.

Smirking devilishly for a moment, he leant in to rest his forehead against Harry's. The man swallowed, hard and he felt the movement where his hands lay, as is shielding the sight of that delectable yet vulnerable throat from the rest of the world. “Careful, Potter,” he breathed, his words tumbling out, steaming up Harry's face. He watched those lips move soundlessly in response. His grin broadened. “I might think you fancy me.”

“Piss off,” Harry retorted, but his voice was breathy and held none of the malice he may have
liked it to have. A moment of silence passed, the only sound that reached his ears the soft tremble of Harry's warm breath on his skin, the beat of his heart, just him. It was as if they were the only two left in the universe. Then, without warning, Harry's eyes fluttered shut and he tilted his head to lay a barely there kiss on his lips. Draco gasped, even if he didn't need to breathe and stared at the chosen one, awestruck when the man stepped back out of his reach.

“Goodnight,” Harry whispered, so quietly that only someone with Draco's senses could hear him. And with that, he turned and bolted into the dimness of the hallway, vanishing around the corner. Draco frowned, wondering just why Potter had surrendered his insistences that he didn't want him to offer something as simple as a goodnight kiss.

Draco touched his lips. Heat lingered there from Harry's touch. If he could have blushed, he would have. Shaking his head, he tried to clear it of the silly sentimental feelings and thoughts that were clouding it. *Damn Harry bloody Potter*, he thought, heading through the door and closing it behind him. How was it that one single man had such power over him?

Harry kept his head down in every lesson the next day. That was made easier by the fact that both Hermione and Draco were absent, and Ron was still sulking over Draco's presence at Harry's side the previous night. The red head sat beside him, but kept quiet. His hand was also frantically working his quill across the parchment. They were both taking notes for absent friends it seemed. Neither of them wanted to let them down, education was after all, insanely important to both of them.

Harry glanced out through the window of the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, the afternoon sun was beaming down through the windows, bathing the room with warmth. He cringed when he thought of Malfoy, alone in the dark, probably close to the fire without any natural source of light. *He hates the dark*, Harry thought, remembering how the vampire loved to steal the warmth of his body. At first it had been unnerving but now…now he supposed he understood.

Even though he was a vampire and the darkness and cold was no longer a problem physically, the soul inside could not forget those torturous days in the dungeon, at the mercy of Fenrir Greyback. Harry winced then, frantically continuing with his notes. This was the last lesson of the day, he had things to do as soon as he escaped here…

“I'd appreciate it if your attention remained on my subject until the end of the lesson, Mr Potter,” the voice of Alaric called out. Harry glanced up to find the man looming over him, right beside his desk. “I can tell that your mind is drifting, that is unacceptable for an eighth year student. You're not here to daydream, Mr Potter.”

Harry raised a brow. If Alaric thought he was any stranger to a teacher purposefully provoking him, he was wrong. *And no one is worse than Snape used to be*, Harry thought, ignoring the professor and continuing with his notes. The man did not leave his side.
“Did you hear me, Potter?”

“Perfectly, Sir,” Harry murmured without looking up. “I’m trying not to let my mind drift from my studies…” The sound of quills scratching across parchment died then. Everyone had stopped writing to listen, even Ron.

“You boast the attitude of an obstinate ten year old, Mr Potter. You are not in a position to cheek me,” Alaric warned.

Harry did look up then, staring into Alaric’s cold icy eyes with all the venom he could muster. “I am not a child, and you do not have anything on me to threaten me with, Professor. I’ve faced Voldemort, I'm not afraid of you,” he said simply. This man, for one reason or another had hurt two people he cared about now. He would not let him get away with it.

“See me after the lesson,” Alaric snapped, before sweeping away from Harry's desk. Harry said nothing, simply went back to his notes without so much as a second glance up at the professor.

“You're asking for trouble, mate,” Ron whispered in his ear. Harry merely glanced at him from behind his fringe.

“He'll get it back tenfold for what he's done,” he breathed back.

Ron showed signs of wanting to stand at his side when the end of lesson came. Whatever his friend felt about Harry’s 'carelessness' and Malfoy, he wouldn't abandon him; Harry understood that now but shook his head. He needed to face Alaric alone. As soon as the door closed behind the last student, Harry stowed his notes in his bag and lugged it over his shoulder before approaching the teacher’s desk. He kept his chin up and his eyes on Alaric's face, he wasn't afraid and he wasn't in a position to be blackmailed. And I won't let him get away with messing up my friends’ lives.

Alaric was in his chair, fingers folded together and his expression thoughtful as he watched Harry approach. Only when Harry stopped just before his desk did he say a word. “I know that you used insurmountable magic on me the other night, Harry Potter,” he said quietly.

Harry’s expression remained untouched. “And I know what you're doing to Draco, to Hermione, which do you think is the greater offense, Sir?” Harry replied casually. At that, the man got to his feet. He towered over Harry now, but so had Voldemort and Harry merely stared back challengingly. Did this coward really think he was more terrifying than anything Harry had faced before?

“You know not what you are dealing with,” Alaric warned, “There is more at work than it seems. And I can hurt you in ways far more personal than a curse. Imagine what the wizarding world would say if they knew how out of control, how dangerous your magic is? If the Ministry knew
just how powerful you were, do you really fancy they'd let you go free?"

Harry smirked; a trait of Draco's he knew was rubbing off on him. “You think you can threaten me? You just said yourself how powerful I am, do you really think it’s wise to piss me off?”

Alaric chuckled darkly. “You can kill me, obliviate me even, but I am not working alone and your secrets, your precious vampire's secrets will still get out. This is bigger than just me, you little fool.”

Harry slammed his hands down on the desk then. The uncontrollable magic coursing through his fingers made the wood groan with the force. He bit back the power that wished to escape, but let it flutter near the surface. He couldn't use it, not yet, but Alaric didn't know about the vow he had made against using magic until he'd learned to control it.

“I will prove what you did to Hermione, that will be enough to convict you, and if you value your life, you will take Draco's secret and mine with you to the grave.”

Again that twisted, unsettling laugh rolled over Alaric's pale lips. “But that's just it, Mr Potter, I do not value my life, that is the whole point.”

Harry frowned. “Don't try to tell me you don't give a shit about anything. If that were true, you wouldn't have let loose this vengeance streak on Draco. What did he do to–?”

“He, Mr Potter is the reason my life holds little value,” Alaric cut across him. “What makes you think I won't reveal what your 'Draco's' condition is the moment you leave?”

Harry leant in then, his face composed, vacant as he knew would make Draco Malfoy proud and he whispered, “Because you and I both know this isn’t over yet. You’re after something more than just torturing Draco every now and then, I know you are, and until you are, you won’t give up your trump card.” With that, he stepped back from the desk holding the man’s eyes for as long as he could until he turned.

“You are lucky that your fate has already been decided, Harry Potter,” Alaric murmured, “or else you would regret turning your back on me.”

Harry kept walking, even though the words made his skin bristle with unease. What did that mean? Those cloaked creatures? Something else? Someone is after me, he thought, struggling to keep his cool Malfoy-like mask in place, to not betray his curiosity or concern. It was hardly a surprise if someone was after him anyway, hadn’t someone always been after him? One way or another? He wouldn’t let this cryptic fool rattle him.
“I’m on to you, Professor Alaric,” Harry replied as he reached the door. “And it’s you who should watch your back.”

“Despite all you have done, Mr Potter, you are still a boy playing the games of men, and your little display here did not scare me. Prepare yourself, for your little vampire’s desire to see sunlight will soon be the least of your problems.”

Wrenching open the door then, Harry stormed out of it and slamming the door behind him. He grit his teeth, curled his fingers into his palms in an attempt to stifle the magic swelling inside him. But in his hurry to distance himself from the source of his unsettling anger, he collided straight into Ron, nearly sending his best friend flying across the hall.

“Blimey, Harry,” Ron murmured, seizing Harry's arms to stop him from falling back. “What did that arse say to you to make you rush out of there so…?” He paused, studying Harry's face, his brow knotting with confusion. “Mate, what did he do to you?”

Harry avoided his gaze. “Nothing, he just…he just pissed me off. He knows I’m onto him, I need to research what that potion was that Malfoy and me found.” He moved to pass Ron, but the redhead wouldn’t budge. His best friend’s eyes were riveted to his face with concern.

“But not now, mate. Your powers are connected to your emotions, yeah? They go nuts when your emotions do, you need to relax, not go charging off and…well, you know, blowing up the castle with angst.”

Given another situation, Harry might have laughed at that statement. But even with the relief of knowing his best friend was behind him regardless of his choices, he could not shake the uneasiness rattling through him. But he had to, there were things he had to do. And the priority was calming his temper so that his magic would settle. That ‘lesson’ with Snape couldn't have been scheduled for a better time.

“I’ve got a lesson with Snape, one to learn to control my magic,” he said quietly, beginning to walk brusquely through the hall. He wanted to put as much distance between Alaric's office and this conversation as possible. Alaric was the last person Harry wanted to overhear them. “After dinner. He's going to help me, stop me from exploding every time I get a bit pissed off.”

Beside him, Ron winced as they walked. “Why has it always got to be that arse? It's not like he's the only competent teacher in the world.”

Harry smiled slightly. “He's the most powerful man left that we can fully trust.”
“Suppose so,” Ron grumbled, glancing to Harry out of the corner of his eye. “So why are we heading towards the front of the castle and not the dungeons?”

Harry wondered just when his friend had become so observant, but the man had gone through a war with the rest of them, he supposed. And despite the fact that Ron was still obviously displeased about Harry's secretiveness, about Malfoy, about him breaking up with Ginny, the red-head hadn't abandoned him as he had done before. An odd feeling fluttered in his stomach then and he sighed as the realisation struck him. He'd missed Ron and Hermione through his own seclusion. As soon as Malfoy can walk in sunlight again, I'll have more time to spend with them as I wish, he told himself. I only wish that this was my secret to share with them. I can't stand keeping things from them. Harry thought for a moment, and looked to his best friend more fully. “I need to make something, before I meet with Snape. I can make the potion and everything I just need you to cast the end spell that ties it all together. I'm trying not to use magic, you see.”

Ron nodded slowly, even though his face twisted with confusion. “Yeah, of course,” he began sceptically. “If the spell is that complicated though, I don't want to ruin whatever you're trying to make.”

“It's something that a first year could do, don't worry.” He gave his friend a reassuring smile then. “It'll only take a bit, then we can go down to dinner together before I have to go see Snape.” He'd had a feeling his best friend had really needed him, especially with Hermione unwell. But he hadn't realised just how much until he saw the man smile back as he clapped him on the arm.

“Of course, mate. Come on, let's make it quick yeah? I'm starving.”

* * *

Harry had eaten his shepherd's pie as slowly as possible whilst at dinner with Ron. He kept his head down, sitting with the red-head in companionable silence as he pushed the mashed potato around his plate to smother the peas with them. Lucky for him, Ron understood the reason for his silence. Harry knew why he had to go to Snape, knew why it couldn't be put off, but at the same time, dread still filled him. Personal lessons, or lessons at all with Snape had never gone well and he couldn't see how that would change just because they were a tad more amicable since the fall of Voldemort. He still doesn't like me very much, Harry thought, swallowing the last of his dinner, making sure to eat every scrap. He'd likely need his strength tonight. “Say hello to Hermione for me,” Harry murmured to Ron in his way of goodbye before pushing away from the table, snapping up his bag as he did so. It didn't matter if Snape liked him or not. He'd grown up, and as an adult, he'd learnt that his dislike of something or someone was not important in grand scheme of things. Things still had to be done, he couldn't afford to be childish. Swallowing his pride and apprehension, he approached the door of Snape's office. The sun had descended now and he wondered if Draco –
Harry had intended to see him after, to give him his catch up work, but it had only just occurred to him that Malfoy would most likely want to escape the light-tight safety of Snape's private rooms.

Harry winced. He couldn't bear the thought of him hiding away like that, over thinking all of the things he could lose if he didn't get that potion soon. *I hate the idea of him hurting at all, Harry realised with no little amount of surprise. I...I worry about him. I care if he's hurt, and not just in the physical sense...*

Suddenly, the door flew open, rudely interrupting his musings. Harry looked up hesitantly into the dark, secretive eyes of his professor and swallowed hard. Despite the hatred gone between them, Snape still made him very nervous. *Especially since last time I was with him and Draco in his personal chambers he watched me come in my trousers like a twit.* He cringed at the memory, sliding passed his teacher and into the room.

Snape's office was well lit, much brighter than usual and Harry supposed it was to banish the dingy, dark memories of their occlumency lessons. *Merlin, I hope these aren't going to be like those lessons!*

“You seem especially distracted today, Mr Potter,” Snape said, circling round him to stand with the desk between them. Harry stared at him dumbly for a moment, before shrugging uselessly. There was no sense in lying to him, perhaps a partial truth would do.

“I'm worried about Malfoy, Sir,” he murmured. It was true enough, he was, but that was not what was making him uneasy. Sitting back slowly in his chair, Snape surveyed him over his steepled fingers critically much as Dumbledore had done countless times before.

“You need not worry, Potter, though private lessons between us have been known to be...volatile at best, I think we are beyond such petty hatred now.”

Harry nodded again. He was hoping for that, but again, that wasn't all he was worried about.

“Part of the lesson is keeping your inner calm even when you are on the brink of emotional explosion. You cannot possibly be helped if you hide from me the source of your unease. Fear is one of the strongest catalysts for explosion, Potter.”

Harry contemplated his words for that moment, it sounded plausible. He couldn't hope to be taught tranquillity and control if he was all up in the air to start with. Averting his eyes with no little shame, Harry muttered, “I'm afraid that it won't work. That I'll be as rubbish at it as I was with occlumency. That I'll fail, that I'll... I'll get someone else killed.” Yes, someone 'else' for many had died for him now, hadn't they? Catalyst, yes, he was a catalyst for disaster.
Snape leant forwards suddenly, sending Harry silently into the spare seat opposite with his sheer will. Harry was at eye-level with him now and he was forced to meet that unfathomable gaze. It still made him uncomfortable. “You did not kill your parents, or Black, or Dumbledore. They died because of choices they made and situations out of their control—”

“Out of control because of me!” Harry snapped. “Everyone that touches me dies. Even Hedwig, even Dobby—”

"Those situations were beyond everyone's control, you didn't ask to be put in them. The Dark Lord put you in them, the Dark Lord brought about the circumstances in which they all were forced to make the decisions which killed them.” Snape's eyes were hard now, his lips a thin line and his words negotiable.

Something about the fact that, for the first time ever, Snape was trying to console him stilled Harry in his downward spiral of guilt. The guilt that lingered at the back of his mind, always. The guilt that kept him closed off to everyone. Maybe Snape was making sense. If he listened carefully, he felt the darkness in his soul ease a little.

"Even if I say that's true," Harry began, “Sirius died because I was too lazy, too stupid, too concerned about my own petty hate of you to learn occlumency. He died because I was too proud to crawl back here on my hands and knees apologise and ask for more lessons – as I should have! Sirius died because of me, not anything Voldemort did.”

Surely Snape could not deny that? He had seen Harry's failure in occlumency first hand. Surely he could see that that at the very least was his own fault.

“Is that why you are so on edge?” Snape said quietly. “I am aware you have a lot on your plate regardless, but it is the association you have with this room, our lessons and Black's death that has you bubbling with discontent, isn't it?” Harry looked determinedly at the door to the left. He knew it lead into Snape's quarters. Draco was probably in there, listening to every word.

“Potter!” Snape snapped, and Harry met his eyes again, reluctantly. “If you even hope to succeed, you must leave the ghosts of your past behind you. Sirius Black died because Voldemort manipulated you. Even if you had learnt occlumency, I seriously doubt that a novice, a fifteen year old boy could have kept out a wizard as powerful as him. Not if he really wanted in. You are as blameless with Black's death as the others, and until you realise that, until you realise that you are not responsible for every wrong to befall those you love, you are wasting my time.”

Snape stood then, circling the desk and crossing the room to pluck an unlabeled vial off of the nearest shelf. He kept his back to Harry, who knew he was waiting for him to understand, to comprehend his words as truth. Only Harry wasn't sure if they were the truth or not. Suddenly, two large hands were on his shoulders, squeezing them awkwardly. Harry stiffened at the odd contact, but did not struggle, and Snape did not move away.

“I have done and said many things to you and your cohorts over the years, Potter,” the man said
slowly. “Some to distance myself from you in an attempt to avoid the pain of my past, some to preserve the illusion of loyalty with the dark side. But have I ever lied to you?”

Harry froze, his lips moving soundlessly. Why, why did it feel as if his insides were being squeezed until they bunched up in his throat? Why did his eyes burn? Because you know he's telling the truth, that Malfoy-sounding voice whispered. He choked on his own saliva then, shaking his head in answer to Snape since his words had spectacularly failed him. Those long, pallid fingers squeezed more firmly now.

“Then why would I lie now? You listened to my words about your needless heroism, so listen now and stop wasting your young life with guilt and pain that should have long been forgotten.” Silence for a moment, and then, “let go of it, Potter, lest you become a twisted, solitary man as embittered by his past as I.”

Swallowing hard, Harry tried to stifle the overwhelming relief and sadness building in his throat. Sadness for the lost, for Snape's lost youth, relief for the weight lifted from his shoulders as his mind registered those words. “You don't think that I...that I should suffer, sir? You don't think that...that being happy would be like forgetting them? Forgetting what they died for?”

The grip on his shoulders lifted then along with a great deal of the guilt as Snape replied simply, “I think that being as happy and successful as you can is the only true way to repay them and remember what they died for.”

Harry hung his head slightly so that his fringe hid his eyes from view. Snape was standing before him now, waiting for something, some sign. “Yes, Sir,” Harry whispered at last, his voice hoarse and when he looked up, Snape was holding the vial he had seen earlier, offering it to him. Questioningly, Harry took it.

“That is a calming draught, you haven't been taking the dose I recommended, no doubt,” Snape said, his voice as unaffected as if they hadn't just had a very personal, very emotional conversation. “It is necessary, however, to these lessons. Five drops before breakfast each day should be adequate.”

Harry blinked hard and then raised his head properly. He knew why Snape had said what he'd said, knew that it was true, all he had to do now was believe it, feel that truth all through his perpetually burdened body. It will take time, he thought as he stowed the vial in his robe pocket. But it’s for the benefit of those I love, dead and alive as well as myself.

“I'm ready, Sir. I'll do what it takes to be... To take my life back.” He was sounding like Malfoy now. Hadn't he said those exact words not long ago? Maybe he's having a good influence on me, despite our frequent arguments, he thought. “Just tell me what to do.”

Snape observed him carefully for a moment, as if gauging his genuineness and then he stepped
back towards his desk, taking his seat once more. “What you will learn from me is a mixture of spell work and meditation. One is useless without the other. We will focus on the focusing your state of mind firstly, as I have a feeling that will take more practice than the actual spell.”

Harry frowned at that. “And what exactly will that do, Sir?” he asked.

“It will, in time, ensure that your magic will not fluctuate with your every emotion. The focus will become a natural thing you do without thought eventually, and that will, in effect, put a barrier between your emotions and your magic.”

Harry nodded slowly. “So…what will the spell do?”

“Simply call you back from the edge should the magic become too much for you at any point, strengthen the wall within.” Snape replied simply. “This technique, of course is something that will become as natural as breathing to you. Eventually your magic will likely settle down on its own, as no doubt your hormones will.”

Harry flushed, glancing at a very interesting patch of stone floor between his feet. “With all due respect, Sir, I don't think it’s possible for me to keep calm all the time, especially with everything that is going on.”

There was a pause, in which he still did not look at Snape. And then…

“That is not what this technique requires. It requires sheer will and concentration in order to keep your magic calm even when your emotions are in a tumult. The spell will help to do this once we have practiced the meditation side of it.”

Again, Harry nodded, feeling a bit stupid. At least Snape was answering his questions honestly and efficiently, without any sniping comments. It was a tribute to how far they had both come, having this civilised conversation like two stable adults. “Today we will begin on the meditation. Next week I will teach you the spell, if you can grasp the state of mind well enough.”

Harry swallowed uneasily, just hoping he would grasp this quicker than occlumency. He wanted the ability to use magic again without being afraid he'd blow up Hogwarts in the process. “Right,” he said lamely, sitting up a little straighter in his chair and finally meeting Snape's eyes again. “Where do I start?”

Snape was studying him over his fingers with that manner eerily similar to Dumbledore again, and Harry fidgeted uneasily in the brief silence. “Simply relax your body to begin with. Close your eyes,” Snape said eventually. Harry did so, feeling quite stupid again, and very vulnerable. He tried to make his body go limp in the chair, but it didn't quite work.
“Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose – deep breaths,” Snape instructed slowly. Harry, again, tried to do as he was told. His breathing was loud in the silence of the room. But he was struggling to relax. Every time he tried, some wilful thought or worry smuggled into the space he had cleared of anxiety, starting him up again. It was only now that he focussed on it that he realised, his stomach felt permanently tied in knots with the tension, the constant battle to keep his magic caged. He didn't think he could do this.

“You aren't relaxing, Potter,” Snape said then, his blank, short tone making Harry open his eyes.

“It’s not like I’m not trying,” he countered with a glare. “I haven’t ever relaxed fully as far as I can ever remember, it’s not something that comes naturally. Particularly in front of a teacher that hates me.”

With a sigh and a roll of his eyes, the potions master stared at him impatiently. “I haven’t hated you for some time, you silly boy. Now, if you would please clear your mind of such dismal thoughts, it will make relaxing much easier.”

Harry chewed his lip, trying to curb the impulse to snap that relaxing was impossible. Snape was trying to help him, after all. “I was never very good at clearing my mind, if you remember, Sir,” he said cautiously instead.

“This is not occlumency. Since you cannot obtain a peaceful state of mind easily, whilst meditating, you should perhaps try to clear your mind of any distressing thoughts, replace them with pleasant tranquil ones to help settle your mood. Now, Potter.” The last part was an abrupt order that snapped Harry back into the moment. The chosen one sighed heavily, closing his eyes to try again.

After a few more attempts with various happy memories, Harry let out a growl of frustration. It had been at least forty-five minutes and still nothing. Cracking open his eyes again, he looked at Snape expectantly, waiting for the next step, the next slice of advice to help his incompetence.

“Dare I ask, if you have ever reached a tranquil, carefree state of mind, Potter?” Snape asked softly.

Harry shrugged. “I’ve felt happy, my life hasn’t been filled with only bad things,” he said. He didn’t really know what Snape meant by ‘tranquil’ and ‘carefree’. “When I fly, I feel like my…my worries sort of, you know, fade into the background.”
“That is close, but it holds an essence of exhilaration. What I speak of is complete calm, peace,” Snape explained, raising a brow at him. “You have never experienced that?”

Remaining still and silent at that, Harry resisted the urge to say something sarcastic. Snape knew what kind of life he had lived, did he really imagine there was room in that for peace? He had had his share of happiness, of course, and he wouldn’t surrender them for the world, but his life had never been a place of tranquillity.

“Not even with a lover, or—”

“I’ve never had a ‘lover’,” Harry grumbled, glancing to the side awkwardly, unable to help the glare he gave the door to Snape’s private rooms, behind which he knew Draco was lurking, somewhere. Why was everyone tossing that word around so easily lately? And just how did Snape get the notion into his head that he’d ever had time for more than the odd quick snog with Cho in fifth year and Ginny in sixth year?

“Potter,” Snape said then, his voice suddenly tinged with regret as Harry had never heard it before, except in the memories he had seen, the ones revolving around his mother. But it had vanished as soon as it had come. The potions master seemed to recover himself before he finished. “Draco is not a bad choice of first lover, he may be a tad impulsive, possessive and overzealous, but he is a good man.”

Harry bristled. “Draco is not my lover,” he corrected sharply, “And none of this has anything to do with… anything, anyway. How can I get into a peaceful state of mind when I don’t know what it bloody well feels like?”

Snape tilted his head slightly, glancing to the door that Harry knew lead to the room where Draco was residing. “Achieve it the first few times with magical aid,” he suggested lightly.

Harry frowned. “Like spells, you mean?”

The professor inclined his head slightly, giving nothing away. He’d spent far too much time around Dumbledore, Harry thought. “No offense, Sir,” he began carefully. “But I don’t much like the idea of messing up my mind with spells.”

“The end justifies the means, surely?” Snape replied, “And of course, when performing the conscious act of calming your mind, you should be calling on some of your magic to do that.”
Harry winced. “I just… I don't like it, that's all.” He couldn't help but be opposed to spells and magic meddling with his feelings or his thoughts, given the way he had been used. He thought that Snape should be able to understand that.

“Perhaps this would be easier if you had the aid of someone experienced in learning to control a sudden growth in power?” Snape suggested, again, in a tone that told Harry he wouldn't much like the idea. This time, however, Harry knew exactly what he was referring to.

“You mean Malfoy, I assume?” he asked bluntly.

“He has mastered this art, it was necessary for him to be able to function normally in front of people without revealing his condition,” Snape explained slowly. “It would be disastrous, if for example, he suddenly crushed something he was holding, or broke into supernatural speed without intending to. His powers are growing erratically all the time, it may help you to have someone of your own situation with you.”

Harry watched his teacher suspiciously. He had a feeling that for some reason, Snape wanted him and Malfoy to spend more time together, wanted to push them together at every opportunity. That's stupid, Harry tried to tell himself, why would Snape want to do that? But it was all too obvious, he supposed. He hid his eyes from Snape so that the man could not guess at his thoughts. Snape wants Malfoy to be happy, he thinks I'll make him happy, only stands to reason he'd try to push me towards him. It was sort of similar to how Hermione and Ron had tried to push him and Ginny together over the summer. The more they had seen Harry try to pull away, the more they had pushed. They just wanted to see them both happy. But it wasn't their decision to make ultimately. But Snape wants me to choose Malfoy.

“No offense, Sir,” Harry began, “but I doubt that being in close proximity to Malfoy will help me relax.”

Snape looked mildly amused at that. Probably at the way his voice has wavered slightly as he'd spoken. “You'd be surprised, Potter. I wouldn't make recommendations to aid your lessons if they wouldn't honestly benefit you. I wish for you to become stable as soon as possible, obviously.”

Harry remained silent.

“And Draco is your dual casting partner, as I understand it?”

“Why are you pushing this?” Harry asked shortly, “Did Draco suggest this idea?”

Snape looked mildly irritated at the suggestion. “I do not and will not discuss our lessons with anyone. What Draco knows about your instability is what you have told or shown him yourself, we most certainly do not spend every waking moment discussing you.”
He makes it sound like I'm being paranoid and big-headed. Harry thought bitterly. He swallowed the sharp retort brewing on the tip of his tongue. He had to be mature about this, he would get nowhere if he simply pissed Snape off. He needed to learn control. This was a fine place to start.

“Just… Look, let me try by myself for this lesson, and I'll consider letting Malfoy help if I can't even manage to relax this time.”

Snape said nothing, merely waved a hand flippantly, a signal for Harry to do as he pleased. With an impatient sigh, Harry closed his eyes, trying again. And again. And again. “Err, could you not look at me, maybe?” Harry asked, cracking open an eye. “It’s hard to relax with you watching me.”

Snape got to his feet, striding away across the room, somewhere behind Harry. His movements were mocking and full of irritation, but Harry tried to push that from his mind as he made another attempt. He had a feeling he would find this almost as impossible as occlumency, no matter how reasonable and patient Snape was being.

He was right.

Another hour and ten minutes and still he could not alleviate the tense feeling in his body. He'd even gone to the desperate measure of laying down flat on the floor, but all that had done was make him feel even more the fool in front of Snape, and gotten his robes dusty. Eventually, Snape came back to stand before him once he was sitting in the chair again, his face complacent even though his eyes were clearly saying 'I told you so.'

“Since you made so little progress, I'd advise you come back in a few days instead of waiting the full week. We need to at least teach you how to relax your body when you feel your emotions overcoming you if we want to guarantee everyone's safety. The meditation can often be of help even without the spell, you see.”

Harry nodded, both exhausted and on edge at the same time as he got to his feet. He would've thought that being tired would help him to relax, but it had only made his insides knot tighter. And the fact that he had made absolutely no progress at all didn't help.

“Is there anything I can do, you know, until then?” Harry asked.

“Simply practice relaxing,” Snape said simply, “and in light of your lack of progress, I would advise you to speak with Draco about sitting in on your next lesson.”

Harry tensed but said nothing otherwise, instead turning to pick up his bag, only just remembering why it was so heavy. He still had to give Draco the work he'd collected for him. His insides twisted even further. After all the prodding Snape had done, and after his spectacular failure, he didn't really fancy seeing Draco right now. And just when did I start calling him Draco? He thought, heading towards the door to Snape's private quarters.
“Potter.” The potions master's voice stopped him in his tracks. He turned when he felt him draw near and flushed darkly at what he saw the man offering him.

“Thanks, Professor,” he mumbled awkwardly, practically snatching the Temporentia Sensium. Snape knew he had promised to feed Draco, knew what he would likely do and say and feel whilst he was doing so. Harry felt more than on edge now, he felt quite sick.

“I intend to visit a few Apothecaries tonight in hopes of finding the missing ingredients for Draco's potion,” Snape said, plucking his travelling cloak off of the stand in the corner. “You need not worry about my presence until much later. Draco has been expecting you.”

Harry bristled at that, but brushed it aside almost immediately. He had promised Draco blood after helping Hermione, it made sense that he had been expecting him. Clutching the Temporentia Sensium in his hand, Harry nodded dumbly, turning away from his professor and pushing the door open. It was only when it was closed behind him that he looked up from the floor.

The room was lighter than usual. The fire and floating candles above seemed to have been charmed brighter, and for good reason, since Draco was sitting near the fire at a desk that hadn't been there before, the tabletop lost beneath a massive sprawl of countless books. The vampire looked up almost immediately and Harry stopped before the door. He felt nervous all of a sudden, awkward and unsure of what to say. The last few times he had been in Malfoy's company, they had gotten very close indeed, especially that last time. He flushed at the memory. He wasn't sure he was ready to be close to him again, especially not as close as the bite inevitably made them.

“Err, Snape said to tell you he'd be back later,” Harry said simply, “he's going hunting for ingredients.”

Malfoy sat back in his chair, turning to face Harry properly. He was wearing his usual grey school trousers, but his jumper and robe were absent, his upper body clad only in his flimsy white shirt. Harry swallowed, willing himself to look away, but unable to put that into action. The first few buttons were undone and his tie hung uselessly around his neck, taunting Harry with a glimpse of pale chest, dusted with a light smattering of blond hair.

Seeing Draco like this, casual, almost relaxed, it made all the saliva dry up in his mouth. The more he stared in silence, the harder it became to find the appropriate words. Draco's eyes were dark and shining as they watched him across the room, that blond hair hanging soft and limp into that face, with a just-washed look that told Harry that Draco had recently had a shower.

His adam's apple twitched as he swallowed again. The image of Draco in the shower didn't appease his awkwardness, especially since he knew for a fact that Draco would be able to smell his reaction to it. He needed to stop thinking about him, needed to stop imagining him in the shower,
making himself ready for Harry. Harry's cheeks were now enflamed.

“Err…”

“Cat got your tongue?” Draco breathed in a voice that suggested he knew exactly what Harry was so distracted by. Harry tucked the Temporentia Sensium into his pocket, before finally forcing his brain to work. He started walking towards the table. It seemed to take forever to reach it and by the time he did, his heart was thudding. Why am I feeling like this? He cursed himself. This was all because of the way Draco had made his head spin the last few times they were together. He was so sure no human could feel such intense pleasure in normal circumstances.

“I…I got some work for you today,” he managed to say at last, dropping his heavy book bag bag onto the table (mindful of the mess of books already there) and taking out the catch up work he'd collected for the vampire. “I know how important your marks are, so I asked the teachers. Of course, Alaric wouldn't give me sod all, but you can copy my notes, if you like.”

Draco still hadn't said much, he looked at the small pile Harry had collected thoughtfully, as if lost for words. Except his expression was far too calculating for that. “Thank you,” Draco said then, raising his gaze to Harry's once more. “It means a lot that you went to so much trouble. I can't afford to fall behind this year.”

Harry nodded, pushing his bag to the floor then and surveying the spread of texts Draco had been so engrossed in before he'd entered. “So…this is what you've been up to?” Harry asked, trying to break the tension. “Light reading?”

Draco raised a brow at the humour, but smirked all the same. “Not exactly. I had nothing better to do so I thought I had better get started trying to ascertain just what Essenz der Fee is.”

Harry's eyes widened. He could not help but realise that once again, Draco was doing something he otherwise wouldn't, just to please him. He sat uncomfortably in the chair opposite, not sure how to deal with the way Draco was treating him lately. He may only be helping Harry to get something out of it, namely him, but he'd never lied about that, and Harry could not help but appreciate his forthrightness as well as the sacrifices he was making.

“You didn't have to do that,” Harry said uneasily, already drained from his lesson with Snape and now unable to school his tone into indifference. He was showing his vulnerability, his emotions treacherously. As if it makes a difference, he thought, he can smell my emotions anyway.

“No,” Draco agreed. “I didn't have to.” That was all he said, before taking the books Harry had given him and setting them to the side safely. “I haven't found anything as of yet. Perhaps we can research together?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, of course, I mean I never expected you to help me look even but…” He paused, realising he was rambling. “Yeah. Thanks.” He pulled a book towards him then, despite
knowing that he was far too on edge with Draco watching him to be able to take in a word. He needed something to distract himself with. Especially if he hoped not to embarrass himself even further tonight and keep the necessary distance from Draco until his senseless hormones calmed down.

“So, were you alright today?” Harry asked conversationally.

Draco’s smirk broadened. “Worried for me, were you Harry?” He seemed to delight in the way that Harry flushed yet again. But before he could say a word, Draco was speaking in that husky voice again. “You seem distracted tonight.”

Harry wondered dimly if Draco had always had such a seductive personality, or if it was simply something that had emerged with his turning into a vampire. Or if it is something that's only happened since he realised he wanted you, a voice at the back of his mind whispered.

“Lesson with Snape didn't go as well as I'd hoped,” Harry said, only telling him half the truth. “I couldn't relax at all, though it’s not as if I have experience in that area.”

Draco’s eyes lingered on Harry a moment longer, before he looked back to the book he had been perusing. “I had forgotten that your lesson with Severus was due tonight. I wish it had gone better for you.” His voice seemed distant, weighed down by distraction. What was he thinking about?

“You…you couldn’t hear what was going on in there?” Harry asked.

“Severus respects people’s privacy,” Draco said, without looking up. “He put privacy spells around his office, not even I could hear what was happening.”

Reassured and a little less anxious now at the thought that what had been said had gone no further than that room, Harry looked back to the book before him, turning the page. He was acting strangely, and he could tell from Draco’s questioning gaze every time he edged away that he was confused by his behaviour. But now that he was in the room with Draco again, he could not help but be confronted by the real concerns whispering at the back of his mind.

Glancing up, he saw Malfoy fingering through a large tome rapidly, his bright silver eyes scanning the pages with vampire speed. It certainly helped with the speed of their search, the vampire got through almost three times as many books as Harry did. It would probably help even more if you gave him the blood you promised, a very Draco sounding voice breathed. Harry fidgeted. He would keep to his word by the end of the night, but he wasn’t eager to have his personal space invaded again before he figured out exactly what had happened the last few times he and Draco had been together.
Yes, the reaction he’d had to those kisses in Alaric’s office had unsettled Harry, to say the least. Though he hadn’t told Draco that. He was so very sure that Draco’s saliva had caused that overzealous, uncontrollable reaction, had made him overreact and spiral into a tornado of ecstasy all from a few kisses. He was sure no earthly thing should have done that to him, and until he was certain that Draco’s vampire gifts weren’t somehow enthralling him, he was hesitant to allow such contact again.

_I just can’t believe I could feel that way naturally and the sheer intensity of it, it’s not normal. I don’t love him or anything like that, it’s just…suspicious. I can’t allow myself so much as another moment of pleasure if it’s all only a result of Draco’s vampire influence or something!_

With a grunt at his unsuccessfulness, Harry slammed the book shut after a good while of trying to make something useful out of the rubbish contained within the pages. It had nothing. He moved onto the next one.

A sigh that was a cross between exhaustion and frustration crossed his lips. He thumbed through another book carefully. He’d consulted Gristlebeck’s *The Vampyr and their humanity* last night, hoping to find some mention of effects of the vampire’s saliva, but it was a thick book and he hadn’t had as much privacy or time to check through it.

Ron had kept popping his head round Harry’s bed-curtain, evidently seeking conversation to distract him from the fact that Hermione had yet to be released from the Hospital Wing. According to Ron, she’d tried only a few simple spells last night before after receiving the antidote, and despite feeling fine physically, even a simple spell either made her vomit or incredibly dizzy.

He knew how she felt, overwhelmed, lost, trapped, he understood, despite his magical instability being different to hers. He felt dizzy, felt his control weaken at any use of magic, but he also felt the power thundering against the cage of his body, fighting to get out with every spell, it terrified him, almost as much as the overwhelming senselessness Draco could reduce him to with only a deep kiss.

It was all so overpowering, exhausting, he just wanted to drop his head on the table and sleep. But Draco was watching him closely still, as always, no doubt drinking in the very way Harry carded a hand through his messy locks. Perhaps if they helped Hermione, they could then focus on the other problems riddling their world at that moment. There was just too much. Alaric, Draco, those demon dogs and their masters in the forest. He had barely had time to think about school since the moment they’d arrived on September First!

“You can’t even be reading that properly, you’re in a completely different place,” Draco said,
drawing Harry back to reality. Harry shifted uncomfortably, pulling his shirt collar uncomfortably up around his neck in a subconscious effort to hide the bite mark on his throat. It looked the same as ever, thanks to Draco’s healing him every time, but he was far too conscious of Draco staring at it, as if it were a collar or branding mark, marking him as Draco’s for all to see. Harry couldn’t say he liked that idea very much.

“I just thought it’d be easier to find, that’s all,” Harry partially lied, that wasn’t the whole truth, but his own problems were not his worry at that moment. At least they weren’t his most potent concern. “Essenz der Fee” can’t be that rare if you knew what it was right off the bat. And you’ve been looking all day.”

Draco gave a slow, almost smile. “I know what Essenz der Fee means because I was taught various different languages growing up, but I do not know the ingredients or what the potion does. It’s never come up in Potions,” he explained, shutting his current book and reaching for another. “Severus offered me this book to check from.” Harry looked up to see Draco retrieving a well-kept potions journal from the side, those long, pale fingers opening it slowly.

Stop concentrating on parts of his body, you freak, Harry scolded himself, trying to focus on the book instead of any part of Draco’s anatomy.

“It’s potions he’s never used but has come across over the years. I suppose he sees so many that only the ones he deals with more frequently, or those related to the dark arts are the most prominent in his mind,” Draco added. Though Harry could not help but think that Snape was incapable of forgetting anything to do with potions, it was the man’s life. He knew an old man’s plotting when he saw it; he had been subject to it often enough over the years. Snape wanted them to find it out by themselves, whatever it was. He doesn’t want to interfere, or get involved, or both, Harry thought and honestly, if he looked at it rationally, he couldn’t blame him.

“Essence of Wormwood,” Draco read aloud distantly, “Essence of strained Lacewing…” Harry listened to him read through it, staring at those long fingers tracing the page as he read.

“Did Snape know anything about Lucan Vesper?” he asked, wondering if Snape was holding back on that too. He doubted it though. If it was something for Draco’s safety, or wellbeing, he thought the potions master valued the blond’s life more than them learning things for themselves.

“Severus had never heard of anyone, or anything by that name, no. In fact apparently, Cauis Alaric’s past is a complete mystery to everyone. He went to Hogwarts as a boy and then when he left he just…vanished. Severus says he will do some digging for us but as far as we know, Alaric just dropped off the face of the earth until a few months ago.”
Harry nodded. “He returned about the same time I… The same time Voldemort died,” he said. It was awfully suspect indeed.

Draco paused in his reading then to stare directly at Harry. “You killed him, Harry, just admit it. Dancing around the fact is as pointless as me trying to pretend I'm not a vampire. And to be honest, it’s probably one of the many things that makes you unable to relax.”

“I don't...I don't relish in the fact that I ended another's life. I don't care who he was, what he did, I took someone's life—”

“To stop him from taking yours, to stop him from murdering everyone you loved,” Draco argued.

“It’s not my place to decide who lives and who dies,” Harry ground out, frustrated. He had never wanted his fame or glory or the responsibility. No one could understand his side of this, not even Draco. “Look, if I had to do it all again, I'd probably still do it all the same, but I will never be alright with killing someone, whatever they are.”

Draco gave a thoughtful, almost-smile again. “Lucky then, that you have a lover without such tedious morals. I killed that thing that turned me, it ruined my life, it tried to make me rape and kill you. I will never regret ending his existence, never. And if someone tries to hurt me, my parents, you,” his voice was so low and intense now that Harry could not help but look at his face. “I will kill them without hesitation.”

Harry winced. “I don't like that, that you could kill so easily…”

“Not easily, just as necessary,” Draco corrected, “even an animal fights back when it’s attacked.”

“You’re not a bloody animal!” Harry snapped. “You may be a vampire but you live in the same world we do and that means you can’t just go around killing people.”

“The Dark Lord was not a person,” Draco said simply. “And surely you must see that it is your way of thinking that is the wrong one? Most people would kill to save a family member, a friend or lover.”

“Look, if you could stop throwing that ‘lover’ word around that'd be brilliant too,” Harry interjected hastily, bluntly, trying to banish the embarrassment from his voice. “You’re not my lover. Don’t make assumptions.”

With a final, amused glance in his direction, Draco dropped his gaze back to the potions journal. Harry hated it when he ignored his anger, his frustration as if they didn’t exist.
“I meant it when I said we could work through all this together, you know,” Draco said softly. “You have issues, some related to Voldemort, some not but so do I, and we can deal with them together.”

Harry sat back and folded his arms across his chest, trying to distance himself from the situation as much as possible. “I don't like the…the sound of your voice when you say that. Like I'm more important to you than is feasibly possible in just a few weeks.”

Draco flipped through the journal leisurely. “You don't need to be so afraid of feeling for me, I think I've proved that you can trust me.”

*But it’s not you I’m worried about,* Harry thought, *I can't trust myself. I should be more cautious than this!* “Look, I don't think it even bears saying but this is…a little intense for me.”

“Hmm, yes, I'm your first lover,” Draco mused, sounding far too pleased about that and amused all at once. Harry grit his teeth.

“Stop using that word, you're not my bloody lover,” he snapped, his temper soaring. “You're nothing, you're barely a friend. You've sacrificed a lot for me over the last few weeks but that hasn't been one-sided, you know! I’m keeping you alive for goodness sake!”

Draco leapt to his feet then, and Harry almost flinched, almost. Draco was livid, his long fingers curling into such tight fists that Harry thought he might grind his own bones to dust. “And that's all it was to you, wasn't it?” Malfoy snarled, his fangs just visible behind his curled lip. “You didn't get any pleasure out of it at all, no you only begged for me to fuck you, to bite you, only came on me on a fair few occasions now. You dirty little liar.” His voice was venomous, heavy with fury but also tinged with hurt that made regret ebb in Harry's chest. He hadn't meant to be so harsh, so cruel.

“You might be afraid, confused, you're new at this but so am I. Everything is made ten times harder now that I'm… You're trying are you, you little coward? Well I am as well! Don't vent your foul temper on me, in case you haven't noticed, I'm doing everything in my power to help you!”

“Help me by fucking with my head?” Harry accused. “By using your weird spit to make me do whatever you want?”

Draco frowned.

“Yes. I felt it, when I kissed you,” Harry continued, “it…it’s not natural, to feel like that. To be so lost that I—”
“Well that’s where you and I differ again, isn’t it, Potter?” Draco growled, though the hurt had swarmed all of the anger now and was most prominent in his voice. “Because this may scare you, might not live up to the lifelong dreams of the Famous Harry Potter, but this is all that I am. I will never have normal, not anything normal ever again.”

“But that suits you just fine when you’re showing off your swanky new vampire powers, doesn’t it?” Harry retorted. “Don’t try to use that as a bloody excuse, Malfoy!”

A roar filled the air and Draco flew towards him. In a split second, his nails were digging into Harry’s shoulders, pinning him with vampire strength to the table. Half the books went flying. Harry grunted as the wind was knocked out of him, his head colliding with the wooden surface with dizzying force. He was still seeing stars as he lashed out. He clawed frantically, hissing, spitting, punching at any part of Draco he could reach.

This is his true face, Harry thought, those eyes glowing with rage now but an inch from his face. He has the power to hurt me, to force me and he will if he feels like it.

A blood-curdling snarl filled his ears, those fangs shining right above him. “Every waking minute I am cursed with breathing, tasting, smelling nothing but your blood. It’s all that I can ever think about and no matter how hard I try to ignore it, it’s always there at the back of my mind. You are always there. You’re haunting me.” Draco’s voice was a low, raspy tone now, grating like fingernails on a rock face. Harry swallowed despite himself, feeling how Draco watched the movement of his adam’s apple.

Like a predator watching his prey.

Those nails were near the point of breaking skin now. Harry winced, shoving hard at Malfoy’s chest. That did nothing. A cry of frustration, of desperation for freedom tore from his lips and he raised his fist, slamming it into Draco’s jaw with all his might. The blond did not even flinch.

Magic bubbled beneath the surface of his skin.

“If you’re only feeling these things because you have to then that just proves they aren’t real!” Harry howled, trying to angle his knee to strike Draco where it would definitely hurt. But the blond had him successfully pinned.

Draco pressed in closer, pinning him so tightly to the table now that Harry could barely breathe.
The vampire inhaled him deeply, hungrily then. “Do not keep deliberately misunderstanding me just so you have an excuse to run away, Potter,” Draco warned darkly. “My condition is what brought us together but it is not what controls my desires. I control the beast. And lucky for you that I do, or you’d be drained long ago.”

“All the more reason why I don’t want you. I’m not going to be your lover just because it suits your animalistic desires,” Harry sneered. “And I’m certainly not going to have who I fuck decided for me by meaningless fondling, by your vampire powers. I won’t be a bloody pawn in my own life anymore!”

“SHUT UP!” Draco growled, seizing him by his arms and throwing him away from him. Harry caught the edge of the table, struggling to hastily right himself and focus on where Draco was. He prepared himself to reach for his wand, but the vampire was just standing there, his hands palm down on the disturbed pile of books. He looked positively seething, shaking with the attempt to control his rage.

“It’s the same rubbish with you,” Draco murmured darkly. “You’re spinning yourself in circles trying to find an excuse to run away. It’s pathetic.”

With a flinch, Harry bit back, “And a vampire following me around like a lost puppy isn’t?”

Draco reached down then, tossing the book he had been reading from towards Harry so that it landed open on the page he'd had it on. “Essenz der Fee,” Draco spat, shoving away from the table. “And you can deny it all, everything you said and did, felt with me, but don't fuck around with me, Potter. I need your blood to live and I can make do with that, because I don't need to be pissed about by a self-important little golden boy.”

With that, he advanced on Harry again, this time halting just inches before him, his vibrant silver eyes shining ominously as they fixed on Harry's throat. “If you’re so hasty to distance yourself from me, Potter, then fulfil your promise. Replenish me and get out.”

Harry blinked dumbly, frozen for a moment. Torn between confusion, guilt and unease. Draco growled, actually growled and stepped closer, his cool body pressing flush against Harry's, pinning his hips to the table with his own. “Go on, Potter, you’re the one that wanted to keep the line between lover and charity case distinct. Do it.”

Breathing shakily, Harry reached into his robe for the Temporentia Sensium, downing his dose before tucking the vial back into his pocket. He raised his chin with the same defiance as always, even if that stubborn confidence didn’t quite reach his eyes when he dropped his school robe.
Before he had the chance to reach for his tie, however, Draco had already yanked it over his head. Harry gasped with the sharp force of it, opening his mouth to complain, but all that escaped him was an ‘oomph’ of surprise as Draco tugged his shirt collar roughly open and pressed his face into the scarred side of Harry's throat.

Harry's body trembled as he felt the vampire inhale him deeply, felt one hand grip his hair roughly while the other pressed into the small of his back, keeping his body tight to Draco’s. His heart was pounding frantically, sweat beading across his skin and Draco’s lips hadn’t even touched him yet. But, as if sensing that thought, Draco smoothed a wet, open-mouthed kiss across Harry's pulsing vein. A throaty groan tore from Harry's lips. He clenched his own hands tightly down on the edge of the table to refrain from touching Draco’s body, the way he yearned to.

“Yes,” Draco breathed against him, “you don’t feel any arousal whatsoever from my touch. It must be something supernatural, must be something unearthly, Harry perfect Potter couldn’t possibly be aroused by Draco Malfoy, how preposterous.” Despite the husky drawl, the tremor of arousal, Harry could recognise hurt when he heard it. Again, he opened his mouth to say something, anything, but before he could, Draco's fangs had released themselves, and were piercing his flesh.

A guttural groan tore from Harry's throat, his hips pressing against Draco's as much as they could with the way the vampire had pinned him against the table. His mind swam with pleasure and confusion. His vision was a multihued kaleidoscope of blurry lights. Heat bubbled inside of him and he didn't quite know whether the way he arched his throat to give Draco more access was his decision or not. This can't be right, he thought deliriously. This can't be real, can't be a normal sensation to any red-blooded human. It must be something to do with Draco. There's no earthly thing that could make me feel this good.

Little fool, he heard Draco's mind spit. Had he any control over his movements at all, he might’ve flinched at the notion of hearing Draco's thoughts, at knowing that Draco was hearing his. But the pleasure and the Temporentia Sensium were both overwhelming his simple motor abilities. A sound torn between pleasure and pain sounded then, from him as his aching hardness was caught between Draco’s hips and his own. Draco growled again, as if satisfied at the fact that Harry was aroused and yet could not reach completion.

I will take the bare minimum, your blood that you offered and nothing else, Draco snarled in Harry's head, guzzling greedily at his throat, which felt more tingly and numb than ever. I will not force pleasure on a man who claims he only feels it because of my supernatural powers. I won't have my attempts to help your ungrateful self thrown back in my face any longer.

Again, Harry opened his mouth to say something, anything, but all that escaped him were groans of ecstasy. Still he kept his hands rooted to the table, unwilling to reach up and grip Draco as he knew both the vampire and his own treacherous body desired. He would not. He would not succumb to feelings that were only affecting them because of what Draco was. It's not me, he thought through a haze of lust. It's not him wanting me, it's the vampire wanting its first.
It's both, you fool, Draco's thoughts whispered. Of course it's both. With that thought, Draco had leant forwards, pushing Harry flat to the table, pinioning him on top of the spread of books. Harry let out a choked sound at the pressure of Draco's hard, lukewarm body against his own, trapping him in the most sinfully delicious way. The vampire was guzzling so deeply that Harry could feel the movements of that throat against his skin.

He was losing rational thought now. Feels too good, he gasped mentally, clenching his eyes shut. Too good to be real! He wanted more, deeper, harder, faster. Out of control now, his hands flew up, surrendering to the pleasure and seizing Draco's shoulders. The second that he did so, however, Draco caught both wrists, slamming them both flat to the table.

Raising his head, Draco glared directly into his eyes, his own orbs a glistening, warm silver. You cannot have it both ways, Draco directed at him, I cannot be your lover one moment and your enemy the next. Make up your mind. With that, Draco leant down again, sweeping his tongue over the puncture wounds he had made. Harry shuddered at the sensations coursing through his body from the sinuous passes of that mouth over such oversensitive flesh. He cried out, he arched up, trying unconsciously to grind himself into Draco's body, but just when he made contact, Draco leapt backwards off of him.

Harry lay there shaking for a moment. The tingly throbbing in his throat had vanished, signalling that the bite had been healed, but his body was still humming with unfulfilled need. I mess him about, Harry thought, loathing the unsatisfied feeling that assaulted at his senses. He was confused about his feelings and Draco's in this entire situation, but then, if he was so bewildered what right did he have to clamour and rut into Draco's body?

Shame washed through him as he finally sat up on the table's edge. A quick glance in Draco's direction allowed him to see a trickle of blood escaping the corner of that mouth. He looked away again quickly, stooping to redress his upper body. All the while, he purposefully avoided that gaze.

Draco was standing a few feet away now, his entire body tense despite the now healthier colour to his skin and the glossy vibrancy to his eyes. Eyes that were riveted to Harry with a mixture of irritation, anger and desire. “Get out,” Draco sneered aloud this time, his fangs gone but his teeth still bared. “You’ve done your duty, aided your charity case. I wouldn’t stay around any longer if I were you, I might get the wrong impression…”

Harry stood, once again clothed but no less steady on his feet and no less torn. No less guilty. He opened his mouth to say something, anything to attempt to rescind the hurt he had caused, but Draco took another step away from him. “Get out, Potter,” Draco glared darkly, his tone blunt and dark. “Get. Out.”
Staring at Draco thoughtfully for as long as he dared, Harry picked up the potions journal containing the information on *Essenz der Fee* that Draco had pointed out to him. He also grabbed the bag he had dropped by the table earlier, swinging the satchel over his shoulder whilst moving towards the door. It was in the open doorway that he paused, just long enough to give opportunity for his own mind to conjure the right words, the clarity he so desperately desired right now. He didn’t want to leave things like this between them, Draco deserved better.

*Draco deserves his privacy and personal space when he asks for it, after all you have done,* Harry thought biting spitefully at the inside of his lip. The sharp pain brought with it a grounding sensation and also the memory of something he had prepared before he had come here. Something Ron had unwittingly helped him to make before dinner. Something he’d been hoping would cheer Draco up before he’d been the cause of even more suffering. It seemed a ridiculous idea now, but his hand was already in his satchel, reaching for it, as if completely ignoring instructions from his brain.

“Don’t make me throw you out on your arse, *Chosen One,*” Draco snapped, advancing towards him, as if that was exactly what he intended to do. But just as he reached him, Harry turned, his hand outstretched.

“I read about these a while ago,” Harry mumbled lamely, “it just came to me today while I was thinking of things I could do to help you and I thought you’d… Well I got someone to do the spell part for me, but I did everything else.” *You're making an even bigger fool of yourself,* Harry thought. Gritting his teeth, he thrust the object into Draco’s chest. “You may as well have it now regardless.” He rounded on the door again, his mouth still itching, burning to say something, anything that would make this situation better for them both.

The sorry he tried to find died before it even left his throat, however. In all honesty, it would have been a pathetic attempt at making things right, so with that he stepped through the door at a fast walk, not stopping until the dungeon corridor was far behind him.

Draco glanced down at the softly glowing sphere in his hands as the sound of the door slamming shut behind Harry ricocheted through the dungeons. His fingers traced the softly textured ball, the light within shining through his fingers, making his skin look as if it were gleaming. It was no bigger than a crystal ball, seemed to be made of some sort of clear blown glass and yet it was lighter than air. And more than that, Draco could *feel* the heat radiating from it.

It was a pleasant warmth, one that swept through his hands and up into the rest of his body, imbuing it with the kind of blissful heat only a perfect summer’s day could give. He could feel the skin on his face tingling with the gentle heat. He knew what this was now. A simple magical gift, a Solaris Sphere that was filled with magic that radiated warmth and happiness and comfort, like the
rays of the sun without the fatal effect that the real thing had on his skin.

Yes, it was a simple gift, commonly given in the magical world, but it was the most precious gift he had ever been given. It was his own personal sunlight, forged by Harry's own hands, just for him. It was a symbol of Harry's feelings for him, whether the idiotic little twit knew it or not. It was a symbol of hope, of light in the darkness.

Bidding the candles above to dim, Draco moved over to the luxurious settee he’d slept on last night and stretched out across it. The Solaris Sphere was glowing brilliantly in the darkness now and Draco could not help but smile as he set it down in front of him on the settee. He could have sworn that the warmth exuding from it, the heat dusting over his skin smelt exactly like Harry.

The anger, the frustration he felt was still there, bubbling violently in his gut, but now the situation didn’t seem as bleak as it had a few moments ago. There was some hope. Harry had proved that, whether he’d meant to or not. *He still has a lot of making up to do for making me wait for so long,* he thought shrewdly. *But it’s a start.*

~To Be Continued…
When he reached the grand staircase, Harry slumped against the lowest stair, resting his head on the balustrade as he stared down at the potions journal still clutched tightly in his hand. His insides were roiling and twisting as if being strangled by someone's fist. Flipping open the small, dark burgundy cover of the journal, he tried to focus on the words but could not make sense of them.

He had really hurt Draco's feelings, had let his mouth and his temper run away with him. He hadn't denied what he'd felt, hadn't meant to at least. He'd just been worried that this was the best he had ever felt in his life, and it may have all originated from Draco's vampire gifts, not because of how either of them felt. He'd been terrified of falling deeper, harder and then finding out none of it was real.

He wasn't certain what would become of him if he opened himself up only to be hurt again. Don't be such a girl, Potter, he scolded himself, his fingers tracing the section of the book that Draco had found for him. Something in his chest stung at that thought, he fought to push it away…

'Essenz der Fee,' Harry read, his brow furrowing with confusion as he scanned the paragraph, once, twice, three times before he sat back, even more confused. This potion shouldn't have affected Hermione at all, unless… Unless she was hiding a secret from him, from Ron, and somehow Professor Alaric had found out and decided to try and use it against her, to hurt Harry and in turn, Draco.

Quickly, Harry ascended the staircase, making for the Hospital Wing. He only had a vague idea what the 'Essenz der Fee' had done, but Harry knew he had to confront Hermione with it.

The Hospital Wing was thankfully abandoned, save for Hermione, who was sitting up in bed, a selection of books and pieces of parchment spread across her lap. She was scribbling frantically away on her Potions essay, Harry realised as he saw the book she kept referring to. He cleared his throat as he neared her, announcing his presence. She smiled as she saw him and sat back into the pillows, setting her essay aside.
“Harry, it’s a little late for a courtesy call, isn’t it? I’ve just sent Ron up to bed. What are you doing down here?”

Harry laughed. The sound was a little too forced, he thought, but Hermione didn't seem to notice anything off. “Don't sound too happy to see me,” he joked, taking the seat Ron usually took beside her. Hermione was quite similar to Harry, in the way that she didn't like being made a fuss off when she was incapacitated. Harry knew how trapped and useless she must feel. What he didn't know was why she was hiding such deep secrets from him.

_The same reason you're doing the very same to her and Ron_, his mind supplied. Neither of them had a clue what was happening between Malfoy and him. _I'm just as bad_, he thought, _but my secret is hardly mine to tell…_

“Draco found out the meaning of _Essenz der Fee_, that potion Alaric drugged you with,” he said, lifting up the potions journal where it sat in his hand. “It was in Snape's journal.”

Hermione smiled. “Really? I'm so proud of you, Harry, you always complained you were rubbish at research but I knew you could do it. I only wish I could’ve been more use.” Hermione threw the closed door to Madam Pomfrey's office a glare. “She comes in regularly to try and make me sleep. But I feel perfectly well now!” When she turned her gaze back to him, however, her eyes betrayed the location of her true thoughts.

Harry dropped his eyes to his hands, knowing what was coming and unsure if he could summon the right words to answer her.

“And Malfoy helped you, you say?” she asked, trying to sound innocently curious. “You've been spending a great deal of time with him, Harry. I overheard Zabini saying that he saw you two watching the quidditch tryouts together.” She wrinkled her nose then, as if in disgust at the memory of their classmate’s words. “Making vulgar alludes that you were 'shagging' under the bleachers.”

Harry flushed furiously. It seemed weeks ago that that innocent moment had occurred. He could still feel the cold heat of Draco's gaze on him, the soft flutter of that barely there kiss…

“Oh Lord,” Hermione gasped. “Harry, you didn't?”

“No!” Harry declared. “Of course not! You know bloody well I've never shagged anyone, not even Ginny!”

“Yes, of course but…well we haven't been talking about personal things as much recently,” she replied quietly, her voice full of regret.
“I know,” Harry murmured, “it isn’t just your fault I… I’m trying to deal with it all, I am. It’s just after…after Voldemort died and then everything else it’s all just…”

Suddenly, Hermione reached out, seizing both of his hands with her own and squeezing firmly. Her eyes shining.

“What you said before about this being hard, Harry everything is going to be hard for you right now. We… We might not always understand what you're going through but I don't want to lose my best friend over that, and neither does Ron. Both of us believe, no, we know that it’s worth any hard work just to be as close as we once were.” She squeezed his hands harder then, watching him as if fearful of what he might say. “Harry, we can be that close again, can't we?”

Relief, so potent, so overwhelming that it nearly choked him swept through his body. After worrying about being nothing more than a burden to them for so long, he couldn't have asked for a more perfect reassurance. He bit into his lower lip, fighting back the wetness threatening to gather in his eyes. “Of course,” he croaked. “Of course we can.”

Hermione pulled him into a tight hug then, evidently caring less that she'd pulled Harry so that he was sprawled across her blanket of books. “Oh Harry,” she cried, wetness leaking onto Harry's shirt. “I was worried we were losing you, and when you didn't even tell me how close you'd gotten to Malfoy I...I…”

Harry let her cry on him for a moment, he considered it the least he could do, what with the appalling friend he had been when she’d been carrying such an important secret alone. He only wished he’d known earlier. They might never have known what happened, and they would have lost her if not for Draco and Snape.

Slowly, Hermione drew back, wiping her eyes determinedly so she could see him better. “Harry, you have to tell me,” she said seriously. “Are you in love with Malfoy?”

Harry paused for a moment, not entirely sure how to answer that. “No, I don't think so,” that was true enough. He liked Draco, he felt the most amazing things when they touched, but he didn't think his feelings went any deeper. No, but he was afraid that they might, one day.

“Harry,” Hermione began, but Harry cut her off.

“Draco and me, that's complicated territory, Hermione,” he explained awkwardly. “I'll...I'll tell you what I can but there are things, secrets that aren't mine to tell. I'll tell you what I can, later. But I came down here to tell you what I've found, Hermione. Don't you want to know what the potion Alaric poisoned you with was?”
Hermione frowned. “Of course, sorry I just got a bit swept up with the emotions. Of course I want to know. So, Essenz der Fee? It sounds exotic?”

“German, according to Draco. It means Essence of Fairies, or something.” He stared at Hermione then, she seemed genuinely ignorant of the fact that the potion had something to do with her secret. “Hermione, Essenz der Fee is used in only the most extreme cases, where a child growing within its mother is weak or dying. It diverts the mother's magic and energy completely to the baby, but it's only used where there is no other choice, as it has a tendency to be too potent and inflict the mother with all sorts of side effects, coma, brain damage, even death.”

He stared at her fixedly now, watching the comprehension dawn on her face. She knew that he’d worked it out. “It only has an effect on pregnant women, Hermione. And on a pregnant woman in the wrong situation, it can be fatal.”

Hermione just looked at him in silence for a long time, before she managed to find her voice. “I couldn't tell you,” she whispered hoarsely, “I couldn't tell anyone. I need this year at school, I need to take my NEWTs, I can't afford to take time out now for a baby or everything will be for nothing.”

Harry leant forwards, rubbing her hand reassuringly. “When did it happen?”

Hermione shook her head, tears rolling down her cheeks, but whether that was purely because of her condition, or because of finally being able to tell someone, Harry wasn't sure. “The end of June, right after you killed Voldemort we… We'd never… We were stupid. Just so happy that everything and everyone was going to be alright and we…we must've cast the protection spells wrong. It was our first time and we were a little…. I found out when we came back to Hogwarts. My magic was so out of control and that combined with my missed periods was just…”

Harry nodded awkwardly, he didn't really want to hear about her womanly visits or about her sex life with Ron, but it was clear she did need to talk. He smiled reassuringly, pulling her into a hug.

“It was a mistake, and as far as mistakes go, a pretty good one. Did you think Ron wouldn't man up to it?”

Hermione sniffled. “He needs this year as much as I do, the good marks in his NEWTs. He wants to make Mr and Mrs Weasley proud. How could I take that from him? And my own parents they…they'd be so disappointed.”

Harry had a hard time imagining either of their parents would shun them, but then, Hermione wasn't really in a position to see things clearly. “Why didn't Pomfrey see it when she examined you?” he asked, confused.
“I cast a concealing spell. A complicated one. You kept talking about taking me to the Hospital Wing and I just wasn't ready yet.”

“So it was the baby that was making your magic unstable,” Harry concluded aloud, “Alaric must’ve figured it out somehow and then decided on the best way to get to me and Draco. And the *Essenz der Fee* nearly killed you because it was used when it shouldn't have been. The mother’s magic fluctuates so much in the first few months that apparently using the potion then is lethal; I read it in the description of the potion in the journal.” He studied his friend's face carefully, seeing, for the first time, just how lost and ashamed she was. “How long were you planning to hide this for?”

It was evidence enough of how distraught she was that she didn’t even ask why Alaric would want to get to him or Draco at all.

“I…I wasn't planning, Harry,” she replied, “that's just it. I didn't know what I was going to do, so I just tried to act like everything was normal. I will let so many people down if I…”

“All of those people only care about you,” Harry interjected. “And I can guess why you might not want the world to know, but I think at the very least you could tell Ron, maybe both of your parents. They may be disappointed, though I doubt it, but they'll still support you. And as for school, well there are ways, I’m certain of it. but you can't go on pretending that this isn't happening, there are hundreds of things you have to be careful of now, in charms, in potions…”

Hermione laid back, running her fingers across one of the books closest to her. “I know, I should tell Ron. I will tell Ron and then…well, I'll have to see, I suppose. I can't think right now…”

“Take as long as you need, but the sooner you come clean with all of this the sooner you can get back to class. You know the only reason you're still here is because we all thought that the poison must be still active in your bloodstream because your magic is still unstable.”

Hermione nodded. “Unsteady magic is common in the first few months, since that's when the baby's powers are formed. It settles down at the end of the first trimester.”

Harry just sat back; he couldn't offer anything more than his support. This wasn't exactly an area he was expert in. “Maybe just tell Ron and Pomfrey first, small steps, that's what Remus kept telling me when I felt like I couldn't even get out of bed after I…after Voldemort died.”

Hermione's face softened then at his words, a sad smile on her lips. “Look at me, making a fuss over school and acting like this *gift* is a burden,” she murmured, looking abashed. She still sounded shamefully as if she weren’t sure if the said gift wasn’t a burden. Harry wanted to reassure her somehow, but before he could even guess at what he should say, she was speaking once more. “When you're still deeply affected by everything that happened, aren't you?”
Harry shrugged, uncomfortable with the topic and with the pity that was heavy in her voice. “So are you, so is Ron, everyone is still healing. I sometimes think the school will never be the same without Dumbledore…”

“Well of course it won't,” Hermione said softly. “Of course everything is different, but Harry, this is a healing period for everyone. It will get better with time.” Harry doubted that things would get better for him, but if they did for everyone else, then he would be happy for them. “And Harry,” she continued, unwilling to let it go despite how clear it was that he didn't want to discuss this.

Harry could see how worn she had become, how gaunt yet determined to succeed. And Ron, possessive and irritatingly protective, over both of them. They were all dealing with the aftermath of the war in their own ways. They had all suffered, but that didn't mean that was something Harry wanted to talk about. And it didn't mean that they would ever understand what he’d been forced to do.

“You've had to do things, feel things that no one else should have,” Hermione murmured. “You had to grow up far too quickly, and I can't even imagine what that must've felt like, without even a parent or anyone to guide you. Just as I can't imagine what it must have been like to be forced to kill someone with your own hands.”

She paused when his entire body stiffed, bunching as if to flee and rage at the same time. He inclined his head slightly so that his dark locks hung into his eyes, but she angled hers so that he was forced to meet her gaze in spite of that. “Is that why you've grown closer to Malfoy? Because he was there with you? Because he was forced to grow up, to make hard decisions far too early, just like you? Is it that empathy, the shared experiences that have pulled you together? Because Harry I could understand–”

“I don't want to talk about me and Malfoy,” Harry cut across her sharply, his fingers curling into tight fists.

Hermione drew back, as if studying him from a different angle would make him easier to understand. “Did you two have an argument?” she asked carefully.

Harry grunted. He wished it were that simple. He could hardly tell her that he suspected Malfoy's spit and blood were fabricating his passionate feelings, now could he? And though she probably knew a fair bit about sex given her situation, he doubted she knew much about what men did in any case. He flushed at that thought. He'd been so busy shoving everything away frantically that he hadn't really given much thought that this was a man that wanted to be his lover, that he had begged to be fucked by a man.
But Draco was harder than Ginny and Cho had been. His body had been cool and firm and unyielding, his lips smooth but demanding and masculine, without an inch of submission in them. He wasn’t certain of many things in his life anymore, but it seemed definite that he preferred the feel of Draco against him to Ginny or Cho. That meant he liked blokes, he supposed? Or one, at least. He winced at that, at the possibility that perhaps Malfoy was special.

*Or maybe I wouldn’t be attracted to him without his weird saliva and blood?* He wanted to scream. He just didn’t know what was real and what was fabricated by Draco’s abilities. He peered up at Hermione from behind his fringe then, only to see her still watching him in his turmoil. A frustrated sigh left his lips.

“I'm just… Things with Malfoy are complicated even without the secret that I can't tell you. But… bloody hell this is awkward.” He chewed the inside of his lip nervously, before simply taking a breath and forcing the words out. “I just feel that the feelings he claims to have for me, they can't be real, not this quickly anyway. He says that…that he was thinking about me over the summer but that's not what… *Look*, when I'm *with* him, he just… Bollocks. We haven't had sex or anything but there's been kissing and, *you know*…”

“Heavy petting?” Hermione suggested, a pinkish hue touching her cheeks. Harry cleared his throat uncomfortably.

“Y-Yeah, that. And…just every time I…*lose* myself, Hermione. It makes me say things, do things I can't even…” With a growl of frustration, he ran his fingers anxiously through his messy locks. “It just makes me suspicious of where that intensity comes from, that's all. It’s just a bit—”

“Too good to be true?” Hermione supplied. This time, Harry said nothing, he would never admit it aloud but amongst all the other problems, yes, some small part of him was second guessing every pleasure because it was too good to be true. Because every time he’d had anything even half as good as this, it had been abruptly yanked away. That was not all of it, of course there were other things holding back, other voices whispering in his ear, but in essence it was true.

Hermione was talking again. “Harry, that…intensity you speak of, the kind that makes you forget yourself. That's perfectly normal, for men and women.”

“Bollocks,” he snapped, wondering why she wasn't more bothered by talking about him having sex with a man. It wasn't as taboo, he thought he remembered Draco saying once before. But he wasn't sure whether he was comfortable with the idea, even. Was he even gay?

“Harry,” Hermione said unwearyingly. “It’s normal to lose yourself in the passion, especially since you've never been kissed or touched like that before.”

“What, by a bloke?” he asked, trying to sound casual.
Hermione smiled patiently, as one might to a child that didn't understand something incredibly simple. “By someone connected to you, who understands you. By someone that wants you that badly.”

Harry felt his cheeks burn and turned his head to glance out of the large windows. How many times had he found himself in this very room? Staring at these very windows, lost confused. “You talk like you understand that.”

It was Hermione’s turn to blush then. “Ron is a very passionate man when we're alone. And our first…encounter was passionate enough that combined with the relief of the war's end, it made us both too inebriated to form an adequate protection spell. Obviously.”

“Too much information,” Harry winced; he really did not want to think of Hermione and Ron together. And he didn’t even know where to begin processing what had come from that ‘togetherness’. It all seemed a bit surreal, in all honesty, as if this weren’t really happening. He’d probably have a shock when he woke up in the morning and found this all to be real. Awkwardly, he cast a glance at Hermione’s stomach, still flat under her pyjamas. For some reason, thinking about there being a baby in there made him feel…peculiar. He couldn’t process the idea.

“Look, Harry, all conscious thought and sense of morality can fly out of the window when a person is with the one he wants most. Some people are naturally passionate, some are more reserved but with both your and Malfoy's temperaments, perhaps it only stands to reason that you’d both be a little overzealous with your lovers?”

“He isn't my lover,” Harry snapped. “Lover implies love. And besides which, why are you so…alright with the idea of me being fucked by a man?” he demanded hotly. Again, Hermione looked as if she were carefully calculating her words before she opened her mouth.

“Because I happen to believe that it’s the soul we're attracted to, not the gender. The Wizarding World is more accepting of it as a whole than the muggle world, I think you should’ve noticed? Wizards, they have prejudices, of course, but not in this. Love lives are generally more…private than in the muggle world; it wouldn't be the done thing to make a public announcement about your love life whoever you were with. Some older men and women keep themselves to themselves about it, straight or not. But by no means would the world spiral into outrage if they saw you kissing a man—”

“I think they'd be right on it if I was caught snogging someone,” Harry argued, thinking of the Prophet and all of the times they had meddled in his personal life before.

“Yes,” Hermione agreed, “but because you're Harry Potter and they just love to splash your life about like entertainment. Not because you like men. Harry, I'm surprised you haven't noticed, so many people you know quite well are gay and no one even blinks an eye, not even with all the rubbish the Prophet prints.”
Harry frowned. “Like who?”

“Hooch, Madam Pince, a third of the students at this school, Dumbledore.”

Staring at her incredulously, Harry repeated, “Dumbledore?” stupidly. “But he–”

“You read what I read. I can't believe it passed your notice that Dumbledore was quite obviously Grindlewald's lover!”

“What a load of–”

“Harry,” Hermione continued slowly, “don't you see? It’s so normal that no one here made spectacle enough for you to even realise something was up. It was implied everywhere, it’s there, all around you.” She paused then, her hands sliding tentatively down to her still flat stomach, as if this were the first time she had touched it. *It probably is the first time since she found out, Harry* thought.

“And Harry, in our generation you don't need to necessarily be in love before you become lovers. Cases like mine and Ron's are rare for our age. More often than not you start courting someone for some time before you feel love for them. Courting is the period when your lover is meant to woo you, to make you love them, after all.”

Harry grunted and then stood up, shuffling his feet uncomfortably. “I don't like those words, ‘woo’ and ‘court’ and ‘lover’, they… Who immediately decided I was gay? Or that I'm the 'girl' for that matter?!”

“There is no 'girl', Harry,” Hermione said patiently. “Only two men, or two women – a top and a bottom. But that can be a role you switch around, take turns between the two of you. It doesn't mean you're a woman if you like the receptive role more. And given your history, you seem to like both men and women.”

Harry thought about that. When he had been with Draco things had felt oddly…equal. He had been humiliating himself and begging, of course but they had been kissing and rutting against each other with identical fervour. There hadn't felt like a 'top' or a 'bottom'. And he was still stunned by the revelation of just how many people around them were gay. Especially Dumbledore, who he had been so close to. *Or thought I was close to*, his mind amended, as he remembered just how much he had found out through the paper and Rita Skeeter's awful book after the man had died.

It stung that he hadn't known, but more than that he wondered how he could not have noticed. He supposed it wasn’t really something he had time to notice, with everything that had been happening as he’d been growing up.
“Do we…I mean ‘they’ hold hands in secret or something?”

“No, Harry,” Hermione replied quickly. “No, it’s just…well it’s customary to respect the intimate rituals of courtship between two people. To be seen in public it’s not bad at all, it’s just… I’m saying this all wrong, but I want you to understand, just because you don't see lots of men snogging men doesn't mean they're not gay. It’s perfectly normal to see that kind of thing, just in school any kind of intimacy is generally discovered quickly, and most students here don't want to be the subject of gossip. It’d be perfectly fine for you to walk down the hall snogging Malfoy's face off or holding his hand if that was alright with you both.”

“It’s not alright with me!” Harry declared. “I don't want to hold his bloody hand, or snog him!” Much to his annoyance, Hermione seemed to be trying to stifle a laugh.

“Harry, why are you so determinedly trying to deny all of this?”

With a growl Harry dropped down into the bed closest to Hermione, purposefully kicking his heels against the frame. Childish, yes, but it made him feel better. “My whole life has been dictated by others’ decisions, others’ wants and needs. And until I'm sure these are just my feelings making me act like such a prat—”

“Harry, I think I've already answered that for you,” Hermione cut across him imploringly. With a defeated sigh, Harry dropped his head into his hands. He wished he could tell her the whole reason he didn't trust his feelings, that Draco was a vampire. But if she said it was normal to have your head spun like that when it was your first time, what did that mean? Could this still be all fabricated through Draco's abilities?

“Maybe you need to talk to Malfoy about this,” Hermione suggested abruptly then, breaking the silence.

Grunting under his breath, Harry just looked at her incredulously. “This isn't like you and Ron, this…it can't be solved by talking, Hermione it goes deeper than that,” he tried to explain.

“Perhaps it can't be solved entirely,” Hermione began, “but it’s obvious that there is a very pivotal part of this that you can't share with me, at least not yet. Malfoy is the only one with all of the information.” She had a point there, but Draco was biased, he would probably say anything to get what he wanted. That was the slytherin way, after all. “Give him the benefit of the doubt, Harry. If he helped to brew a potion to save me, he must care for you. I thought you trusted him?”

Damn her logic. Harry did trust him, oddly, he just didn't trust himself. He could feel himself easily coerced to do what Malfoy wished, giving into him, because that's what part of him wanted as well. The suicidal part, Harry thought. The other part didn't know if it wanted to risk it. “Thanks, Hermione,” he murmured. “I…maybe I will, thanks though, for listening.”
Hermione nodded. “Of course. You can always come to me Harry, about anything, even if it’s embarrassing or…or hard to talk about.”

Harry flushed a little, not able to even imagine telling Hermione about how he’d writhed in Draco’s grasp, begged him to bite him. “You too,” Harry said with a smile. His head whipped around as the Hospital Wing door opened. Ron was standing in the doorway. He didn’t linger, or stare, however, merely gave Harry an awkward glance, as if he didn't know how to act around him, before closing the door behind him and beginning to cross the room towards them. He was holding an arm full of biscuits with two cups of tea floating behind him. He intended to use the ‘late night snack’ excuse to buy him a bit longer with his girlfriend before bed, no doubt.

“What do you want me to stay?” Harry whispered. “You know…moral support?”

Hermione gave a slow shake of her head. “No, this…this is something I need to talk to Ron about in private. Go find Malfoy, Harry you need to settle that unease you're carrying around with you.”

Harry just got to his feet. It probably would be easier to quell the magic burning in his gut if he could relax, stop over-thinking and worrying for one moment. But that was impossible. For now, he thought, resolute that one day, this would change.

“Oh, you're leaving?” Ron asked, seeming a little upset about that.

“Yeah I…” Harry glanced to Hermione briefly. “I found out what Essenz der Fee was. It’s something Hermione wants to tell you in private, so…” he moved as if to walk away then, but Ron caught him by the arm.

“I've been an arse about Malfoy, mate,” Ron rushed out quickly. “I'm sorry I just…I just don't trust him. And you're like my family; I just don't want you hurt because you always try to see the best in people.”

With a thoughtful, sad smile, Harry replied, “you don't have to trust him, just trust me. And if you're my friend, then stand by to advise me, to pick up the pieces if it does all go wrong. You can't stop me from going through life just in case I might be hurt. That's stupid.”

Releasing his arm, Ron rubbed the back of his own neck awkwardly. “It’s barmy, I know and I will try not to rub him up the wrong way. But mate, I'll never like him or trust him. I don't think I'll ever stop hating the prick for all of the things he's said and done over the years.”

Harry hadn't expected even half as much as that, so it was fair, he supposed. Ron hadn't seen the person he had seen in the dungeon that day, hadn't seen or felt Draco’s memories. As far as Ron knew, Draco hadn't changed. Harry supposed that enduring patience was all he had right to expect.
“You two need to talk,” Harry said, giving his best friends both a reassuring look. He wouldn’t try
to shut himself away from them again, that was his silent vow. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He didn't go to find Draco after all, of course, he simply couldn’t. All he did was hide himself
away behind the closed curtains of his four poster, pouring over Gristlebeck's book. And that was
how the light of the next night’s early moon found him. It was a Saturday and he had been there all
day with the book under his nose. His room mates were all still out, enjoying their evening and
freedom to visit Hogsmeade as and when they pleased, no doubt. Ron hadn’t returned all night, his
bed had remained vacant and Harry wondered whether that was a good or bad sign. His body ached
from tiredness and no little hunger, but it was wide awake with the same anxiety that kept him
amply distracted from Ron’s empty bed.

Yes, he had valuable solitude, and he intended to use it wisely, to discover if Draco's saliva really
was the only reason he felt so overwhelmed by passion when he bit or kissed him. He needed to
know before he faced Draco again. He would willingly admit his wrongness if it turned out that
these were his true feelings, just like Hermione and Draco both insisted, but he wouldn’t roll over
and beg for forgiveness like a tame dog without reason. He wouldn’t say he was wrong or give
Draco a chance until he knew for sure that he was indeed wrong.

Gristlebeck's tome was a weighty one indeed, but it held the most interesting and relevant
information. He didn't find anything about effects of the vampire’s saliva, not right away but there
was a huge section on ‘the influence’ of the vampire. Harry felt a little sickened by it. Apparently
one of the first abilities that new vampires were taught was their thrall, their supernatural charm,
but more than that. It allowed them to call victims, influence them to do things against their will.

An echo of Draco's words: ‘I can make you’ whispered into the forefront of his mind. Had that
been what Draco had meant? Had he ever used his influence on him? Harry's blood boiled. If he
ever found out the bastard had used that on him, he would stake his cold heart – it was one thing to
unconsciously inebriate him with his saliva, or force him to drink his blood to save his life. It was
another to knowingly take his will away.

_I will be no ones puppet_, Harry thought venomously, trying frantically to recall if Draco had ever
seemed to have used it on him. Gristlebeck's book claimed that the vampire could make a victim
forget, however, so would he even know? Grinding his teeth, Harry tried not to jump to
conclusions. Draco was still new to his powers, he probably wasn't aware of his influence and if he
was, probably couldn't use it properly. _But there's a possibility_, Harry's mind reminded him. _Do
you really want to take that chance? He could take your mind, your memory and you would never
even know!_
Harry found himself unconsiously scanning his body for marks. If Draco had had him under his mercy, he would have surely bitten him. He was too new, he wouldn’t have been able to resist. But with each inch of flesh he scanned, his panic swelled as his mind whirled with the possibilities. He could have been vulnerable, weak and helpless and he wouldn’t even have known.

With his heart pounding now, in a moment of pure madness, he dropped the book and tore off his shirt and trousers. His breath was coming out in frantic pants as he felt around his chest, his throat, his groin. All of the major arteries. “Accio mirror!” He cried hurriedly, examining himself better in the mirror that flew through the closed drapes around his bed. His skin was no more scarred than usual, however. Thankfully, that was something at least. Even when Draco healed his bite marks or wounds, there were still pinkish marks like pale love bites for a few days. They never hurt but they were sometimes sensitive, and he couldn't find anything like that on his body.

Tilting his head slightly, Harry fingered the permanent mark left at his throat from the first bite. It was a pale, iridescent pink now. Gristlebeck said that the first bite of a vampire on his first remained a claiming mark, a territorial claim to warn others away. It would never completely heal or fade unless the vampire died. Harry sneered at the sight of it, a garish brand, claiming him like cattle.

_He thinks he owns me because of it_, Harry thought bitterly, recalling how often Draco's eyes dropped to that scar whenever he saw him. It disgusted him. It felt like he was Draco's pet or something! Harry's breath was still heavy, but not with anger and not with panic, now it was an aftershook of that frenzied spell he had used.

“Shit,” Harry gasped, dropping back flat on his bed. The mirror still floated in front of him and he stared at his reflection. He was pale, like he was about to be sick. Except he didn't feel sick at all. He felt hot, every inch of him tense as magic pounded its fists against his innards. “Calm down,” he whispered to himself, willing his breathing to even out, for the spasms in his core to cease. His fingers curled in the sheets, clenching so hard he felt they might break.

“Oh my God!” he gasped, his body arching upwards, white light radiating from his semi-naked flesh. Suddenly, the hangings around his bed were wrenched open. The mark on his neck throbbed knowingly just as Harry clenched his eyes shut so that he wouldn't have to see Malfoy's face. If he saw it now he'd surely explode with confusion, hatred and lust.

“Go away Draco!” Harry demanded, “I mean it. My magic is – just go! I need to calm it down.”

Somewhere above him, Harry heard Draco scoff. “Pity, and I thought those were the sounds of you wanking,” Draco mused. Harry cracked open his eyes to see the blond looking directly at the book lying open on the bed by Harry's feet. “See something that distressed you, did you?” the vampire asked.
Harry ignored his icy tone, closing his eyes again, fighting back his swelling magic with all he could.

“You've been using magic again? You idiot!” he heard Malfoy snap, a sudden pressure making the bed dip. When Harry’s eyes sprang open this time, Malfoy’s face was directly above his. His panic swelled again.

“Get off of me you prick!” Harry screamed, too afraid to physically struggle lest it push him over the edge. A bright glow was emanating from his skin now, skin that was burning up with the sheer force of the magic trying to break through. “It'll kill everyone! Stop pissing about!”

Draco's eyes were bright silver at that moment, fixed on him intently. “I can help, but you won't like it,” Draco said carefully, his voice heavy with caution.

Harry winced. It felt like he was being shaken until his teeth rattled. A low gasp of fear and pain ripped from his lips. Then, suddenly, a cold hand was resting flat on his chest, right over his frantic heart. “What are you doing?” Harry wheezed, his breath nearly stolen from him now.

“I've stopped you from exploding before,” Draco murmured huskily. “I think… Let me.”

“I can't,” Harry ground out through clenched teeth. “I can't let you use vampire magic on me. I won't let you!” He had to clench his eyes shut now because the light was so dazzlingly bright across his flesh now that he was afraid he'd go blind.

“I have every reason to want to help you. You swore you would let people help you – this isn't brave, or moral, you idiot. You're going to kill us all because you're too much of a coward to let anyone in!”

“Not everyone, just vampires who want to control me!” Harry roared. “I thought you made it quite clear that you wanted me to leave you alone last night, you said—” But his words were strangled from his body by a choking sound. His body slammed upwards of its own accord in a painful arc. He screamed. Draco's hands were on his wrists now, pinning him to the bed with bruising force.

“Never mind that now, you stubborn Gryffindor! What's changed so much in the last few days that you cannot trust me?!” Draco hissed urgently.

“I can't trust what's real with you and what isn't, that's what!” Harry bellowed. “I won't give you the chance to make me your puppet!”

“There isn't time for this now. Can you at least trust that I want you to live? That I want to live?”
Harry had but a moment to decide, before he swore he felt the magic leaking through the cracks in his every pore. He could feel how much damage the magic inside him could do, he could not let that loose, at any cost. He didn’t know exactly what Draco planned to do, but it was better than the alternative, whatever it was. “Do it!” Harry snarled, his words tapering off into an almighty howl. His head flew back and he felt his body crumble.

A hand shot round to support the back of his neck, holding his head up so that he was staring directly into Draco's eyes. They were so vivid now that he could see the flecks of blue within. “Look into my eyes,” Draco crooned, his voice a low, husky hypnotising sound. “You will not look away from my eyes.” Harry blinked slowly, but otherwise, found himself unwilling to tear his eyes away. Unable to even contemplate the idea.

“Let your breathing calm.”

Involuntarily, his rapid breaths screeched to a halt, flowing slowly in and out of his lungs to match the calm overcoming his panicked body. He was perfectly still beneath Draco's form, rooted to the spot by those eyes. Slowly, a cool hand slid back over his chest again, those long fingers fanned out over his heart as the other hand massaged the base of his neck.

“You feel calm, the magic inside of you will not break free. It's calming as well, falling back to sleep in its cage. You are not in any danger.”

“Yes, Draco,” Harry answered breathily.

“You are not afraid, everything is going to be alright.”

“Everything is going to be alright,” Harry replied dreamily, not even able to summon the conscious thought to begin to fight this. Even though, in the back of his mind, his true self was screaming. Draco was using his influence on him.

“You hate me, don't you?” Draco asked after an unbearable silence, his voice quiet.

“No,” Harry replied. He couldn't lie either under the influence either. It was like Veritaserum and the Imperius Curse all rolled into one, except this was worse. This was calming, soothing in a way that was almost...good. There was a kind touch behind the force, a gentle coercion that frightened him.

“You're afraid of me?” Draco asked then.

“No. Of what you could do to me, if you wanted to,” Harry answered, still lost to the hazy fog of
tranquillity. With all the fluttering subtlety of a butterfly's wings, the hand on his chest reached up to caress the sharp shape of his jaw, all the while, Draco's eyes staring into the vulnerable depths of his soul. Open to everything and anything he may ask.

“T'm going to let you out of it now,” Draco said, looking at him but a moment longer before sliding back slowly to sit beside Harry's legs. Harry remained where he was, breathing calmly, drifting on a cool, calming breeze. Suddenly, he felt Draco's influence ebb away from him like a tide going out. The fog faded and his awareness crept back to the forefront of his mind. As soon as he could think for himself, Harry bolted upright on the bed.

“You bastard,” he hissed venomously, teeth clenched and bared ferociously. “You used your fucking vampire influence on me! You forced me to feel what you wanted! How dare you?!” Draco looked away from him and glanced at the mirror still floating there, staring into the empty space beside Harry's reflection, the space where his reflection should be, no doubt. Harry didn't care right now.

“I only did it to save both our necks, to save everyone in this castle, you ungrateful prick,” Draco growled. “Would you prefer I let us all be obliterated? Would you have put up such a fight if your Weasel or Granger offered to help?”

“If their help involved controlling me like a mindless puppet, yes,” Harry snapped, shivering. He didn't like the feeling of the influence, it made him feel detached from his body, helpless like he was stuck floating out at sea. “You pissed away any trust I had in you by doing that. You know how I feel about being the pawn of others, especially those that claim to care about me. I'm not the wizarding world's little martyr anymore!”

Draco's gaze snapped back from the mirror at last then, dark and furious as he turned it on Harry. “This isn't about that,” he said, his voice dangerously calm. “You were in danger, I had no choice if I wanted to save you.”

“Oh, my hero,” Harry growled sarcastically. “I can't believe I was even sitting here trying to convince myself you wouldn't use the influence on me not even five minutes ago! You want to bend me to suit your needs, just like everyone else out there!” Except Ron and Hermione and probably Remus and Tonks, Harry amended in his head. There were very few he could trust to want to help him for him, he had thought he was beginning to include Draco in that, but now…

Draco reached out then. Harry pulled his feet tight under him out of the way but they hadn't been what Draco had been reaching for. He watched as those long, powerful fingers pulled Gristlebeck's book towards the vampire. There was a prolonged moment of silence between them for a moment, and then…

“This is what had you so upset?” Draco asked. “You were afraid of my influence?”

“I'm not afraid,” Harry snarled, “I thought you'd been using it on me and I summoned the mirror to
make sure you hadn't been messing with my head to get extra bites!"

Draco sneered. “You'd have noticed a significant growth in my abilities if I were doing that. And besides which, I'd much rather have you consciously aware of my touch. I want to look at the places I touch afterwards and watch you flush from remembering how good it felt.”

Harry did flush then, but he recoiled as well. “You're sick and possessive and you're bloody mad if you think either of those things are what I want in a lover.”

“Make up your mind, Potter,” Draco snapped. “I may not be up to your standard of human but it doesn't give you the right to mess around with my head. Make up your mind what I am to you.”

“I will when I find out myself!” Harry retorted hotly. “You think this is fun? That I want to be this bloody confused? I don't. I'd love to know once and for all if the things you make me say and do are all because of your dodgy vampire drool and influence or if I just fancy you that much that it makes me loopy.” He glared at Draco contemptuously. “If you have the answers, do let me in on them. But unless you do, don't you dare criticise how I feel. I've had enough of this. I've had enough of thinking I have my head sorted only to find out something that knocks me off my feet again.”

He turned his head away then, looking down to where his clothes had fallen and slowly redressing himself. Not only to regain some of his dignity but also to deny Draco the pleasure of seeing him.

“From what I understand of the influence,” Draco's voice said neutrally, “I need eye contact, but after the connection is established it will continue until I consciously release you. Your body and mind will obey my suggestions but you will consciously be aware that I am doing it to you. It is meant to be easier to influence a human that has shared blood with me as you have. I can even erase your memory, should I wish.”

The vampire’s tone was so calm, so careful that Harry paused in buttoning up his shirt to look at his own reflection. He did look like a seething, startled beast that Malfoy had a right to be cautious around. I look mental, he thought, trying not to grind his teeth at his sheer abhorrence to Draco’s words.

At least he was honest, his mind supplied. Draco knew him well enough to know that lies would not sit well with him. He wanted the truth, even if the truth was worse. It was his right to hear it, and Draco seemed to know that. He may think I'm an idiot, but he doesn't treat me like I'm too stupid to make my own decisions.

“How many times have you used the influence?” Harry demanded, his jaw set. Draco surveyed him silently for a moment, his fangs hidden once again, unlike earlier. The tension from that
argument was still heavy in the air, and Harry was now more than certain that he'd been right to question.

At last, Draco found his voice and forced himself to hold Harry's gaze as he said, “Just once before today.” He could see as well as smell the anger bubbling in Harry's blood. Blood that was rising up to colour those cheeks in a furious flush. He didn't know why it didn't unnerve him that he would notice such fine details about Harry's body, but he saw things so differently now that he could only see this as another instinctual change. As instinctual as his fangs extending for a bite.

“Back in the dungeons corridor, when you lost consciousness,” Draco began to explain, “the time you woke up in the Hospital Wing. I bet no one could fathom how I managed to stop you from blowing us all to smithereens, could they?” Harry snorted but Draco waited patiently. It had surprised him that the teachers had allowed him to go about his lessons as usual after such an explosion, but he had realised quickly that they had most likely assumed if he, Draco had managed to escape it, then it was not that serious a threat, not so much that Harry should be quarantined at any rate.

“It was…instinctual,” Draco continued. “I moved before I knew what I was doing. I used it to stop your impending explosion, but it had risen to such a strong point that you passed out from the pressure and I carried you to the Hospital Wing.”

Harry glared at him hatefully. “If your intentions were so innocent and honourable why didn't you tell me about it before now?”

That power, that stubborn fire, it made Draco’s fangs itch with want. What other human could match his own passion, his own strength? No other. It just didn't make sense that Harry couldn't see that as well. Pigheaded Gryffindor, Draco's mind snarled, this entire situation of Harry doubting if this was 'real' or not seeming so preposterous to him.

The more he grew into his own powers the more difficult it became to quell the urge to just hold Harry down and prove to him how real this was. He refrained from licking his lips. It was good that he was becoming so good at controlling his body so well. “I didn't realise what it was until I found the time to research it. It felt so raw and yet subtle, I wasn't entirely certain what it was, and once I'd found out, you didn't seem to care for anything I had to say.”

“You should know by now that I want the truth even if I might reject it. Half the reason I've endured you this close is because I thought you were the one person who accepted that,” Harry replied. Draco hated the evasiveness that was burning in those eyes now. Why was this man so determined to evade this connection between them? Why couldn't he accept that he, Draco could make him feel good?

Glancing to the place in the floating mirror where his reflection wasn't, Draco had to wonder, yet
again just how he looked to humans. He was beautiful once, unrivalled by the boys his age. But he had also once been of the purist blood the wizarding world knew. His parents were obviously bothered by how he looked now, but he had assumed it was because of his dirtied blood.

Vampires held high social standing in some places of the wizarding world. He had never seen one but he had heard of them. In positions of power, the lot of them. But what if he had been mistaken in his assumptions of his beauty only being enhanced by his change? What was wrong with him if a red-blooded human man like Harry Potter was striving so hard to escape him?

Suddenly, Harry's voice broke his reverie. “What else have you kept from me?” the chosen one snapped. “What else have you done to fuck with my head!!”

Draco's head whipped back round to Harry so fast that he saw the man jump in surprise. “Nothing, though the brutal honesty has gotten me nowhere, it seems,” Draco replied icily.

“Right,” Harry sneered disbelievingly. “Right, so tell me straight, what the hell does your spit do to me? Why does it make me incapable of rational thought? I saw what it rendered you to when that vampire bit you in the dungeon, I felt it myself—”

“Do not speak of that night!” Draco snarled, lashing out at the mirror in place of Harry. It flew across the room and shattered into a thousand jagged pieces. “Do not speak of it. I will not remember it.” Large, green eyes were trained on him now, as if judging if he would lash out again.

Draco snatched up the book laying open nearby, fuelled by bitter anger to settle this subject once and for all. He looked at the spine questioningly. Gristlebeck, well at least Potter had a reliable source, he thought venomously. Gristlebeck had been one of the tomes he had studied over the summer. Flicking rapidly through the pages, he tossed the book onto the bed in front of Harry so that it lay open on the correct page.

“Read it for yourself, since my word no doubt is worthless. The vampire's saliva is there to take away your inhibitions. It numbs the affected area so that pain inflicted by the bite turns to pleasure. Pleasure so intense that the victim is made hyperaware of touch. In a sense, it is the world's most powerful aphrodisiac. So strong because it needs to make the bite pleasurable for the victim.

“Virgins are even more susceptible because they have never felt pleasure of that sort as a rule. But it does not rob you of conscious will or thought. No more than pleasure does normally. Firsts are meant to become more accustomed to it the longer they are exposed to their vampire—”

“Ha!” Harry snapped, “as if that's something I want to get used to. I don't want that lack of control every time you... I don't want to lose control over myself like that.”
“Don’t be so bloody stupid,” Draco retorted. Harry really had no idea, did he? “It doesn’t make you lose yourself. It only has the same effect incredible arousal has, meaning you would feel the same lost in the throes of passion with a human. You’d give up the most basic kind of pleasure man is meant to feel all for control?”

Draco saw a flicker in that expression then, a look that told him that Harry was realising the truth at last. Then, a sigh tore from the chosen one’s lips. “It’s not that easy for me, after everything that’s happened to just give control of my life to someone else,” the man explained.

“But that lack of control has nothing to do with my kissing you and me being a vampire,” Draco explained roughly, “and everything to do with me kissing you, and you liking it.”

“I know,” Harry grumbled, not meeting his gaze now. “I understand now, your weird spit thing doesn’t work that way. The books I researched over the summer just told me about vampires in general, not about their affects on humans. I didn’t know that before.”

Draco raised a brow. “And now that you do?” he prompted.

Harry shrugged. “It doesn't really change much. I still find it hard to surrender control to anyone, to lose myself… And I still don’t forgive you for keeping the fact that you used the influence from me a secret.”

Rolling his eyes, Draco got off of the bed and crossed the room to begin picking up the pieces of broken mirror and pile them together. They had scattered about the room in random places from the force of its landing, but luckily, his keen sight allowed him to see every single piece. “The influence grows more potent as the vampire comes more into his powers. But if anything, the affect of my saliva on you will lessen over the years. You’ll become accustomed to it.”

Harry snorted. “Years? You think I want you by my side that long? As soon as you can go any length of time without my blood you can piss off and only return to me for blood once every blue moon. We can have our lives back. I was mistaken to think I wanted more than that.”

Draco growled again, pausing where he was crouched over a few more scattered shards of mirror. “You didn't even give it a chance—”

“Chance enough to watch you betray me by using your influence on me,” Harry spat. “I don't care for the intentions. I can't be the lover of someone who could take my will away.”

_The same bloody circles_, Draco thought with irritation. “Again, do you realise that a human could easily take your will away with a spell? A muggle could even tie you up and force you to do what
they wanted. Even if you claim your life won't be spent with me, you will have to give up control, have to trust someone eventually. Is this about me being a vampire or me being your lover?"

“You're not my bloody lover!” Harry howled in frustration.

“I want to be, and you want me to be as well, though you're so afraid of the worst happening that you won't admit it,” Draco drawled. “And I won't use the influence on you again unless you ask me to. I only used it in the first place as a last resort. I can't afford to be seen doing dark magic or using supernatural abilities while I'm at Hogwarts. No one can even suspect what I am until I've graduated.”

Harry’s expression told Draco that he didn't quite believe what he was hearing, but time would prove Draco's honesty in the end. And he had plenty of time ahead of him.

“I will never ask you to use that,” Harry said vehemently. Draco turned back to the task at hand, gathering the mirror fragments strewn across the room.

“Your word doesn't hold much stock with either of us though, now does it?” Draco mused. “You're frantically denying everything to keep me away, out of a determination to be unhappy and alone, because it’s safer that way. Because you're afraid this will all end badly. I never thought being afraid would stop Harry Potter from doing anything he wanted. Didn't you say that no one would rule your life from now on? You're letting your fear do exactly that.”

“So I'm cautious, can you hardly blame me?” Those words were hot with defensiveness. Draco could feel his panic at the truth of those words pulsing through the room. “You think I haven’t learnt what happens when you fall in love? When you let a family accept you as their own? When you try to call a place your home? You get hurt, that's all. As soon as you get used to being with others, you find yourself alone. I don't need that pain. Not again.”

There was a thoughtful silence then. One Draco could not bring himself to end. He could feel the way Harry's body shivered with realisation, of just how destructive and foolish his words had been, but also just how defensive and bitter his voice had sounded. After a moment, there was movement at his side. He did not so much as blink when he saw Harry's hands in his eye line, Harry was helping to gather up the broken pieces of mirror and drop them onto the pile Draco had created.

The man had revealed much more than he'd bargained for just then, to both himself and Draco. He wasn't just afraid of opening himself to Draco or a lover in general, he was afraid of that werewolf and his family, his friends, those Weasleys, and he was terrified that the moment he accepted them in his life, he would be left alone again. After all, hadn't that happened to him more than once before?

*The war has left scars on all of us that sometimes we don't even see,* Draco thought. He listened carefully to Harry's breathing, to his softly thudding heart and waited patiently for him to find his
words. Eventually, he spoke. “I know all that is irrational,” Harry murmured, “I know it’s stupid, but knowing it doesn’t change the fact that that’s how I feel.”

“Naturally, it's something that comes with time,” Draco said, “you'll have to push your own boundaries, move past your uneasiness but eventually that irrational discomfort will go.”

Draco watched as Harry's body almost slumped in defeat.

“By the time that happens everyone will have given up on me and left anyway,” he mumbled, as if not really wanting Draco to hear him. Unluckily for him (in this case) Draco was a vampire.

“The only person that has given up on you is you, Harry. You need to stop retreating into that shell of yours and walk face on towards your problems; the way you walked straight into Voldemort's clutches to save us all!” He stared firmly into Harry's face, even if the man was avoiding his eyes. “Loathe as I am to admit it, they're all better than that and will wait for you. Those worthy of you won't so easily abandon you.”

Harry snorted derisively then, although there was the tiniest flicker of amusement in his voice now. “And you count yourself in that do you? As worthy?” But before Draco could answer, Harry let out a hiss of pain. The man brought his forefinger to his lips, sucking at the thick bead of blood welling from the wound the last shard of mirror had created.

Draco's eyes darkened with desire, his mouth swelled with moisture. Instinctually, before he could curb the urge, he had brought that finger to his lips and was lapping carefully at the wound. It was like the most delectable caramel rolling over his tongue and yet different, richer, better. Long after the wound was healed, that finger remained in his mouth, being worshipped by his tongue. It was only when Harry gave a little groan that he was drawn from his reverie of bliss and released that finger.

“I'm not ready to push that boundary yet,” Harry whispered out huskily. Yet, Draco thought. He'd definitely heard a 'yet'. His vampire instincts were roaring with desire inside him at that taster of blood, and it was a struggle to push it back from the forefront of his mind, to just nod understandingly instead of throwing Harry back and taking him then.

It was proof of how much stronger he was getting that he could resist such a call. Would his powers ever stop growing? The books had said he would reach his peak after a short while drinking his first’s blood and then, over the decades, would gain the strength only age could give. But no one could rely solely on the text books if their first was Harry Potter.

“It's got forever to wait,” Draco assured him, his voice thick with want. He stood up then, drawing his wand and turning it on the complete pile they had gathered. “Reparo!” He chanted. The fix was cleaner, almost perfect since they had taken the time to make sure every shard was in
range. He looked on it with satisfaction. No one would know the difference. “But right now, we have bigger problems to face.”

“One of them being Caius Alaric,” Harry murmured, looking at Draco now as if worried for him. Draco was not sure whether he liked that or not.

“I do not yet know whether Alaric is aware you tore him from me the other night,” Draco said, his voice devoid of emotion. Any mention of Alaric made him think of all the revenge tactics he longed to use, if only he didn't need to keep such a low profile. “It'll be best if you act normal around him despite…what you know.”

He watched Harry's expression darken with what he could only name as a mixture of guilt and frustration. “I know that you can't report him,” Harry began, “can't fight back but you could at least tell Snape, he'd sort the bastard out.”

Again, Draco was not sure whether or not the protectiveness, the anger on his part in Harry's voice pleased him or not. “I cannot risk Alaric leaking a word about what I am. However, once I have passed my NEWTs I will allow no one to hurt me again without recompense.”

Harry turned away from him, as if to hide an odd look in his eyes. “If I catch him at it again, I'll throw the arse off the Astronomy tower and Obliviate him just in case he survives the fall. You can't be seen doing those spells, can't have them on your wand, but I'm Harry Potter and I bloody well can.”

Unable to help himself then, Draco chuckled. Some of Harry's fire had returned to his eyes as he spoke of defending him. He knew that he liked that. Not that he would ever tell anyone that, not even himself.

Harry felt blood suffuse his cheeks with slight colour. He hastened to move over to his bed and take a seat there to have a chance to hide the blush. Although he thought Draco could somehow smell it, even if he hadn’t caught a glimpse. How was it that he was able to drag him through an emotional rollercoaster so easily? Fill him with lust and hate and frustration – everything, from one moment to the next? He didn’t even know how it was possible for one man to feel so many things in such a short space of time.

Staring at his feet in silence for a good while, Harry thought about the situation they had found themselves in, just wishing he could end the confusion. Draco permitted him the silence, the pensiveness for longer than any human could have, of that Harry was sure. In fact, he did not speak, even when he stepped towards Harry, his shadow falling over him. Harry awoke from his reverie, but did not move, not even when Draco’s fingers rose to brush Harry's messy locks away.
from his eyes. And his scar.

At that specific touch, Harry did look up and directly into those piercing silver eyes. His breath caught in his throat. Draco’s hair was swept back today in a seductive disarray, his pale, pointed face shadowed by the light in a way that made Harry's cheeks burn darker. Those cool fingers swept through his fringe again, stroking the place where his faded lightning scar remained. He felt strangely vulnerable looking up at someone like this, having someone’s full attention on such a sensitive part of him. Although it was not precisely a bad feeling.

Shuddering, Harry drew back but a fraction, uncertain of the feelings that were fluttering in his chest at such a simple touch. Draco seemed to recover himself, for he also moved back a little. “Sorry,” he murmured.

“No,” Harry replied huskily, “I’m sorry – about what I said yesterday, I was… I was out of order. You didn’t deserve to get the brunt of my confusion and frustration, I said some things that I didn’t–”

Suddenly, two palms had pressed to either side of his throat. Those thumbs caressed the shape of his jaw as Draco dipped down to his level, his face descending towards Harry’s. The firm but protective pressure of those hands, the passion in those eyes all gave Harry the impression that this was an instinctive move to protect the view of his precious throat from the view of others. Of course, the fact that no one was there made little difference, and Harry found that again, that possessiveness didn’t rankle him as much as he would like.

Then, those lips were against his and all coherency was blown from his mind like dust swept away by the force of a sharp gale. Harry's lashes fluttered with his heart and he couldn’t help but gasp into that mouth. But before he had the chance to recover from his dazzled state enough to return the kiss, Draco’s mouth had retreated. Those hands remained, that face so close to his that he could taste that breath on his kiss-dampened lips. Those eyes glistened.

“What was that for?” Harry managed to gasp out raggedly. Draco replied first with a flicker of a smile.

“My forgiveness,” Draco breathed, holding his gaze for but a moment longer, before releasing him. Harry stared up at him as the blond took several steps back, and the chosen one tried to keep the confusion and disappointment from his own face.

“Errr, didn't Snape spread it about that you were away from Hogwarts?” Harry asked, only just remembering in his search to find something, anything to say to break the silence. “Wouldn't it be a
bad idea for anyone to see you about the castle?"

Draco raised a brow. “It is ridiculous to assume that anyone, even a vampire can stand to be
trapped in the same dark rooms for days on end. I needed a change of scenery before I went mad,”
Draco replied, although his tone was a tad evasive, as if that were not the only reason he was here.
“Besides which, I'm faster than the human eye now, when I choose. No one will see me unless I
want to be seen.”

Harry nodded lamely, it was shocking just how powerful Draco was becoming, and so quickly. *(I
suppose with such potent magic swimming through my blood, the blood that he drinks, I can't
really be surprised if that magic helps him to grow in power. It made sense. There was a sense of
satisfaction at the thought that at least one good thing was coming out of all this. He was glad that
he could help Draco, it was a start, after all the blond had done to help him.)*

“I know what you mean, about the room, I mean,” Harry mumbled, remembering being locked in
that cupboard or the bedroom of Privet Drive for weeks on end at times. What a pitiful childhood
he had lead.

“You're Harry Potter,” Draco replied, “you are no prisoner, of anyone or anything. You have
always been able to come and go as you pleased.” He sounded confused, and Harry wondered just
what fantasy home life Draco had imagined up for him in place of reality.

“Now, yes,” Harry said with a bitter smile. “Let's just say my relatives hated all things magical and
took extra care to keep my abnormality, sometimes my existence from everyone. Even myself.” He
blinked then, hearing the words leaving his lips and wondering why on earth he had spilled such
personal information to Draco. About something he had only ever discussed with Ron and
Hermione on the rare occasion. He bit his lip, hearing his voice back in his head and disliking how
easily it had all toppled from his lips.

“I'm well shot of them now, of course,” he added hastily. “Never have to see them again and like
you said, I can go where I please.”

Draco took a step closer, his eyes locked with Harry's suspiciously. “I can smell you, you know. I
can smell a lie and I can smell a half-truth just as well.” He punctuated his words by setting his
hands down either side of Harry's lap, his body leaning in towards his. Harry swallowed, glancing
away to the side to avoid that gaze once more.

“Were you abused?” Draco asked when Harry said nothing for some time.

Harry winced. “No. Not like that, neglected, if anything. I never got presents for birthdays or
Christmas, or anything really, and if I did it was only ever a broken or tattered hand me down of
my cousin’s. They made me do a lot of chores, my cousin used to bully me when we were children.
I wasn't always allowed to eat as much as I'd like either but that was it, I wasn't beaten or tortured
Draco leant in closer, his eyes smouldering and bright from the blood he had taken from Harry last night. “I don't have to imagine anything. I saw it all, all of it when we shared memories, feelings. You saw mine and I saw yours,” Draco revealed. The more he explained, the more Harry wished he wouldn't. Harry's face dropped with horror. He had seen!

“Yes,” Draco continued, obviously able to see the thoughts written on his face. “I saw it all. Evidently you weren't aware of how much I saw or you wouldn't have tried to play it all down, or leave out the most important parts.” He glared at Harry accusingly. “Locked in a bedroom with bars on the windows? No food, and when there was food there was never enough. Living in a cupboard for years?”

Harry scowled. “You're making it all sound worse than it was,” he insisted. “I was unhappy, in pain even sometimes but I was never hurt. Neglect, like I said. Not abuse.”

“One is just as bad as the other,” Draco snapped. “Both are punishable offences, even in the muggle world, surely? You are just so used to it all that you can't see how awful it was. Just because you survived doesn't mean it was any less of an offense. You survived the killing curse, it doesn't make it any less of a crime!”

Grinding his teeth, Harry forced himself to meet Draco's eyes at last. He squirmed out from under the vampire and got to his feet. The pleasant feeling he experienced from being towered over like that had dissipated somewhat now. “I know what they did was wrong, I'm not stupid, you know. I know they were awful and I know that I didn't deserve it. But it's in the past now, I don't need to dredge up all that, Christ,” he ran his fingers through his messy hair in frustration.

“I don't even know why I tried to empathise, why I shared that with you. It was obviously a mistake. I just thought you would feel better knowing that I understood, that's all. My past is exactly that. The past. Leave it be, Draco, as I have.” With that, he snatched up his jumper and cloak and made for the door. He needed some fresh air. And there are still things to do, he reminded himself. In the fleeting time it had taken him to pick up his cloak and jumper, however, Draco had put himself between Harry and the door.

“Don’t be such a drama queen, Harry,” Draco said. “You saw just as many personal memories of mine as I saw of yours. Neither of us could control it, it was a stage of the bond we share, brought about because you willingly gave yourself to me.”

Harry winced. “Now who is being dramatic? You make me sound like a maiden for the sacrifice. I willingly snogged you, I might have even willingly rubbed off against you, you needn’t make it sound poetic or anything to try and seduce me.”
Draco smirked at those words, taking a step closer and tilting his head just enough that Harry could see the way the light played across those fine cheekbones, along the pale column of his throat. Harry unconsciously licked his suddenly dry lips. Silvery orbs followed the motion with rapt attention.

“Everything about this, about us is poetry in motion,” Draco breathed, “And it’s a bit soon after the last time I forgave you to be requiring it again – do you really want to start an argument over something we both have no control over?”

Harry glared venomously at him, raising his chin in defiance. “Whether I end up choosing to be your lover or not, concern of you being angry with me won’t stop me from expressing my dislike of something. I don’t want to row with you, but I can’t help but not like the fact that you came to know private things about me that I hadn’t chosen to share with you.”

Draco’s smirk only broadened at that. “But you just a moment ago, you were divulging that information of your own free will regardless.”

Harry’s glare turned into a more disgruntled grimace. He wanted to say that he probably wouldn't have told him that much, but it would only cause another argument and what was done could not be undone. And like he said, neither of us did it on purpose, Harry reminded himself with a deep sigh.

“It's in my past, that's all. I don't need or want to dredge all of that up so I'd appreciate it if you just consider yourself grateful that you're one of the few people that know about that part of my life, and leave it at that.”

Draco now wore the expression of a man who was far too pleased with himself; with the fact that he was privy to some of Harry's deeper secrets, that he was one of the few who was permitted this close. He's smug knowing that he's important to me, Harry realised. I suppose I can't blame him for that. Everyone wanted to feel significant to those they cared for, after all. He himself had been guilty of feeling pleased that Dumbledore had been focused on him more than any other student, despite knowing where that attention had originated from.

“Why does the blood bond between a first and vampire allow us to share memories and thoughts like that anyway?” Harry asked then, “what's the point of it?”

“When you give yourself to me willingly, you are entrusting me all of you, a First is often the vampire's most precious, after all.”
Harry snorted at that. Draco ignored him and continued.

“I don't know exactly why it happens, but I for one find it intimate beyond anything any mortal couple can achieve.” His eyes were hooded with arousal now, his voice low and husky. “When we are connected that way, we are closer to each other than any human couple can even dream of. I feel what you feel, see what you see, remember what you remember. Two bodies and minds perfectly intertwined, it gives me a sense of unrivalled pleasure and warmth and security all at once.” He gave Harry a challenging stare then. “Do you deny you feel the same?”

Clearing his throat uneasily, Harry found a particularly interesting patch of wall to fix his gaze on. He really wished he was in a position to lie. “Of course not,” he murmured awkwardly, “I've never denied that I felt like that, only questioned why I felt it.”

Suddenly, Draco was directly in front of him, his hand rising to run the backs of his fingers down Harry's gently. Harry shuddered again.

“And are you clear on that front now?” Draco breathed.

Harry nodded. “Yes. But I still haven't decided what I want to do, and I will never forgive you if you use the influence on me again.”

Draco smirked again. “Never again, until you ask, that I swear.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “It'll be a cold day in hell before I ask you to rape my mind like that again,” he said bluntly, pulling his cloak on that he had picked up earlier and tying the clasp. He'd made up his mind now, he had things to do.

“Where are you going?” Draco asked, a brow raised questioningly despite the disappointment ebbing at his words. He's lonely, Harry thought, knowing how isolated the blond must feel, stuck in that room all day, not even able to have Snape for company, since the man had his duties to attend to.

“The night is still young, I need to get some things from Hogsmeade,” he explained evasively. The shops stayed open late on a Saturday, they all knew this. But he didn't want any of his classmates to know what he was after there; just as well they were all off getting pissed in the Three Broomsticks.

“You're being purposefully vague,” Draco said. “What is it you aren't telling me?”

Harry gave him a meaningful look. “I need to fetch a few bits and it’s not exactly something I want the rest of our year to hear me enquiring about. That’s all. There’s no secret.”
“Then I will come with you,” Draco said quickly. “You can’t use your wand without losing control, you can’t protect yourself right now. Let me come with you.”

Harry winced. “I’m not a helpless child—”

“Those wolves and their masters are out there somewhere still,” Draco snapped, “You can’t go out there alone. Whatever it is you want from Hogsmeade isn’t worth your bloody life, surely?”

Harry glanced away from him distractedly. “Is this you wanting my company or you insinuating I can’t take care of myself?” he griped.

Draco snarled under his breath. “Don’t be a prat, Harry, you know as well as I that you’re as far from helpless as humanly possible. You’re so far from helpless that if you try to lift a finger to defend yourself you could blow us all to smithereens!”

“So that’s a bit of both then,” Harry replied flippantly. “Look, even if you wanted to come with me for the right reasons, no one can see you anywhere near Hogwarts, Draco.”

“As you said,” Draco breathed, “my reasoning stems from a bit of both sources. I’ve been smuggled away in that room all day, thinking of you and I will not let you fob me off now.”

Harry fidgeted uncomfortably under that very personal revelation, under that forceful gaze. Draco had been thinking about him – all day. He couldn't help but feel his insides flutter at that. Who had ever spent that much time thinking about him in such a way?

Clearing his throat awkwardly, he finally found his words. “You'll still be seen,” he murmured, although his voice was half-hearted now. Would it be so terrible for Draco to come with him? Did he really want to escape the blond's company?

“Are you a wizard or not?” Draco replied derisively. “There are ways we can venture outside without being recognised.”

~To Be Continued...
Courtship Dance

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

: chapter twelve:

COURTSHIP DANCE

The sky above was dark, thick with clouds that eagerly swallowed the stars like a tide devouring the shoreline. The moon, however, shone glaringly through its frame of darkness, making itself seen from behind the clouds determinedly. The night itself was calm but cold and Harry pulled his cloak tight around himself as a sharp breeze ripped through him. This cloak had been a gift from Remus when he'd first moved in with them - it was charmed to adjust its warmth according to the environment. So now, it was as warm as snuggling under a duvet. He smiled sadly. He missed Remus and Tonks, and even little Teddy, who he loved but wasn't entirely sure of.

“Chop chop, Harry,” Draco said from beside him. His own, lighter cloak was swept back off his body, leaving the moonlight to catch on his crisp white shirt and milky skin. Harry could not help but feel his eyes linger on the slither of chest visible at the top of that shirt. He shivered, but not from the cold. Draco looked the same to him as he always did, but to everyone that looked, they would simply see an ordinary looking boy with sandy hair, at about Harry’s age. Harry himself had opted to stay visible as Harry Potter to the public, it was sort of necessary to his plan...

They walked the path down to the front gates, which was illuminated with hundreds of floating bluish lights. Like fireflies in the night. Eighth years and teachers could come and go as they pleased of a weekend, and so the gates were often lit up and of course, the transportation was waiting for them. A cluster of carriages stood by the gate, the very same that carried them into school at the start of term. The ones pulled by thestrals. “I suppose you can see them now, the thestrals?” Harry asked as he and Draco moved towards one of the nearest carriages. Draco had seen death now, after all.

“I saw them at the start of term,” Draco said flippantly, holding open the carriage door for Harry to get in first.

Harry started at that, not certain how to take the chivalry. In the end, he climbed into the carriage regardless. “This isn't a date, Draco; you don't have to be so--”
“Considerate? Date or not, I want you, I intend to show you what you're missing.”

Harry glared at him as the blond climbed into the carriage after him, taking a seat opposite him and carefully arranging himself so that his knees and feet touched Harry's. Harry glanced quickly out of the window. Why was such a simple touch making his heart pound rapidly? The carriage jerked into motion and Harry felt Draco take the opportunity to graze the side of his ankle with his foot distantly. It reminded Harry of their 'footsie' session in that detention with Professor Alaric and it brought a tinge of heat to his cheeks.

“Never, err, realised how…cosy these carriages were,” Harry murmured, trying to break the silence in an attempt to get that unfathomable gaze off of him. It didn't work.

“I'm making you nervous again, aren't I?” Draco smirked.

“You wish,” Harry snapped, none of the bite he wished was present reaching his lips. He just sounded like an awkward blushing virgin. It was warm in the carriage now and he shrugged off his cloak, unable to escape noticing the way Draco's eyes roved his body. His heart was thudding faster now. Why had he agreed to this again?

“Don't get yourself so worked up,” Draco murmured huskily, leaning forwards to rest his hands on Harry's knees. “We've done more risqué things than share a carriage, Harry.”

Harry could see right down his shirt from this angle. He couldn't help but imagine what it would feel like to touch it, to do all the things he'd dreamt of being done to him. Oh Merlin, he thought. I definitely do fancy blokes. Or perhaps just the idea of sex in general. Draco had left him hanging last time, his body was being wound up even more easily, craving the release it had been denied. His lips parted and a soft exhalation of hot air whispered out into the air between them. At that, Draco leant in closer, as if longing to catch it on his tongue. Those long, dextrous fingers slithered up his tense thighs.

“Must you grope me every time we're within five inches of each other?” Harry panted, sounding far from inconvenienced. Those fingers caressed him with sinful skill, sliding up dangerously close to his hot groin. His body arched against his will, his legs tensing and his head pressing back into the carriage behind him as he stared down into Draco's face.

“Tell me to stop and I will,” Draco all-but purred. “It's not as if I'm doing something you dislike, now is it?”

“Arrogant arse,” Harry growled out through clenched teeth. Draco knew exactly how much he wanted this, and also how much he didn't want to surrender to that at the same time. The subtle rocking of the carriage and the flashes of moonlight through the window reminded him where they were, just where Draco was seducing him. It helped, despite the close, intimate dimness of the setting. He couldn't lose control regardless, but he most certainly couldn't afford to in an unstable
environment. There wouldn't be a repeat of the incident in Alaric's office again.

But then, suddenly, Draco was on his knees on the floor, sliding between his legs which tensed as those hands caressed their full length now. Harry gasped, he couldn't help himself, even with his own hands now on Draco's shoulders, trying in vain to push him away. Draco bowed his head to rest it against Harry's stomach. He exhaled softly, and Harry's skin quivered at the feeling of that breath tickling his skin. Beneath the blond's chin, his cock was pressing against the fabric of his trousers, as if reaching for Draco's mouth.

It struck him as odd that the blond was on his knees in front of him and not in the least bit bothered by his position. He doesn't feel subservient or dominated, Harry realised, he's so confident. He still has the power, even if he is physically lower. He closed his eyes. Yet again, nothing was making sense, and Draco's lips hadn't even touched him yet. I reckon that means him and Hermione were right then, he thought dazedly, just as one of those conniving hands began tugging his shirt up to reveal the taut plains of his stomach. He groaned, his hands tightening on Draco's shoulders and tugging hard when he felt that mouth dance across his happy trail.

“Wh-What are you-?” He couldn't quite form words, or remember even where to start.

Draco tore his lips away then to glance up at him with a devilish smirk. He leant up on his knees, bringing their mouths dangerously close together. “Let me show you how the men play, Harry,” Draco breathed, his hands reaching forward to open Harry's belt.

“Sex before the date has even started?” Harry panted, “what bad manners.”

“I thought that this wasn't a date?” Draco replied, successfully yanking Harry's trousers open. Harry gave a grunt of relief as his erection sprang forth, still trapped beneath the thin fabric of his boxers but fairly visible now. Even in the dimness of the carriage. A sound of bliss sounded from Draco, as if nothing were as pleasurable as being close to him, seeing Harry's body. It was overwhelming how much the vampire seemed to relish touching him. When the slender fingers slipped inside his boxers, touching his hot, hard flesh directly for the first time, there were two groans of pleasure between them. Harry’s hand shot down to grip the wrist of that hand inside his boxers, but as he made to pull it away, those deft fingers squeezed in all the right places. Stars exploded behind his eyes. No one had ever touched him there, least of all caressed his taut, hot skin with their bare hand. The coolness of those fingers felt so good against his throbbing erection. He gave a choked gasp and felt a pulse of pre-emission dribble from the head of his swollen prick. “T-Too much!” Harry panted. He was losing his mind already, at such a comparatively simple touch and Draco's saliva had nothing to do with it this time, of that he was certain.

Suddenly, Draco seized him roughly and yanked him forwards until he tumbled onto his lap. His cock peered out from its cloth prison and rubbed shamefully against Draco’s clothed stomach.
Harry groaned even as he squirmed for freedom. Draco’s only reply was to tug him closer, resting his lips against the flushed shell of Harry's ear.

“Don’t tell me you’re still confused,” the vampire breathed, “Because from here it seems crystal clear.”

Harry’s expression of blissful abandonment merged into a glare then. Here he was with his cock hanging out of his trousers obscenely whilst straddling Draco Malfoy’s lap and in all truth, the only thing that had changed since their argument was that he knew he enjoyed this. That did not eradicate the shame, however, or the inescapable feeling that he should not be surrendering to this.

*What if I fall for him?* He asked himself. *What if I do, his feelings still only came about because he is a vampire and I am his first.* He winced. It wasn’t unlike the event of a prisoner falling for their captor. Draco was only with him because he had no other choice, not because he had chosen him of his own free will.

“Sorry,” Harry mumbled out through clenched teeth, his innards twisting in negation as he struggled backwards out of Draco’s embrace, tucking himself away and straightening his clothes as he did so. He slumped into the seat he had previously occupied, staring determinedly out of the window even as his cheeks burned from the remaining lust.

“You’re sorry?” Draco repeated in near disbelief, taking the seat opposite Harry again. “So you should be. You’re making my head ache with this hot and cold attitude. You’ve admitted that you like how I make you feel, that those feelings are your own. What more is there to hold you back now?”

Harry grit his teeth harder, fighting the temptation to just give in to the persuasive drawl of Draco’s voice. How simple life would be, if all he had to worry about was if this man liked him or not. But that was not all that was at stake here. He couldn’t bear it if he fell for him, only to end up alone and lumbered with guilt because he had known Draco’s feelings didn’t stem from a place in his heart, but from the unfortunate circumstances they found themselves in.

*He’s a prisoner of this life, Harry thought wretchedly, and I am his only opportunity at feeling these things, of course he would grasp at me, see beauty and kindness and love if he is forbidden by his very nature from finding that elsewhere.* The thought made him feel quite sick, that Draco was being forced to sleep with him simply because he was his only choice. His eyes stung treacherously.

“I just still can’t be sure that your feelings are your own, and not just your instincts preventing you
from seeking anything better – what you really want,” Harry murmured distantly. His fingers clenched into the leg of his trousers. “Look, you have to admit it’s a bit suspicious? I’m everything you hate. I’m a scrawny, unkempt, bespectacled, short half-blood, why would you want me unless circumstance dictated that I was your only choice?”

A deep, rumbling growl filled the carriage, and Harry’s head shot round to see Draco’s eyes glowing ominously in the dimness, his face twisted with rage.

“That is the most sickening, offensive thing I have ever heard anyone say to me,” Draco snapped, his voice low and dangerous. “I’m a vampire, does that mean I cannot feel the same as you? Will I not bleed if you cut me? Does your Lupin know how to love? To Bleed? He’s just a monster as I, isn’t he? Does that mean that any feeling he has for his wife is all because of his animalistic urges? If he was able to successfully breed with her that must mean she was his mate, does that mean that his love for her comes solely from his instincts? Are his feelings meaningless, like mine?”

Harry just stared at him, his mouth agape. Not only because he had dragged examples into their argument that Harry struggled to argue with, but also because by comparing them both to Remus and Tonks, Draco had implied that his feelings were deeper than Harry had expected them to be.

This is worse than I thought, he winced, clawing at his own leg now. If he is forced to love me, that is the most unbearable thing I can imagine.

“I never said you were incapable of love, you prat,” Harry growled back firmly, “I’m just saying that any feelings you have for me are irrational, against the very fibre of who you used to be. I cannot believe that all the hate you once had for everything I am has just gone away and turned to love, those feelings don’t just come out of thin air.”

Draco scowled. “You missed your own point there, Potter. Used to be. I had not been the boy that hated you for a long time before we experienced that twist of fate in the dungeon. Surely you of all people can believe that a man can change? I am a completely different person to who I was a few years ago. And how many times must I say this?! My feelings for you have been growing ever since you saved my bloody skin back in those dungeons.”

The blond winced at the memory of that night and glanced away, as if meeting Harry’s eyes whilst speaking of that event caused him physical pain. Harry sighed. “I just… I’m not attractive or clever or particularly talented. And it’s quite clear you don’t care for my fame, I have nothing to offer you, nothing that would attract you. I can’t believe someone like you would want me. Draco, be reasonable, you know that these feelings only surfaced after you bit me.”
His voice was careful, imploring Draco to agree, whilst his inner voice was screaming at the top of its lungs for Draco to ignore him. The first person that has ever made you feel alive, and you are shoving him away with everything that is in you, the Malfoy-sounding voice hissed. Would it be so bad to lay back and enjoy being loved for once in your life? Being cared for?

It would be, Harry argued with himself, if the only reason he loved me was because of something other than his own heart. I don’t want to fall for him, only to be hurt because his feelings aren’t real. I won’t fall so eagerly into that trap.

“Someone like me? And just what is that?” Draco seethed, “Who are you to judge whether my feelings are real or not? To insinuate that I would settle for anything but what I believe is the best just because circumstance says I should? You think so little of me that you think I would allow who I choose to be dictated to me by instinct and magic?”

Harry frowned. “Don’t turn this around on me. I’m just trying to be honest. I was more insulting to myself than you. I just don’t want to be with someone who is only with me because they had no other choice.”

“Oh, is that all?” Draco replied shortly. “You thick-headed little Gryffindor. I knew I was right when I said you’d always find an excuse to run from me. I don’t care what you say, Potter, you’re just trying to find justifications for feelings you can’t hope to comprehend. Depths of emotions so intense that they terrify you. I am trying to get closer to you, to show you how to live and to live with you – is that so bloody unbelievable? Is the fact that Draco Malfoy feels anything so strange an occurrence that it can only come from supernatural means?”

Harry grinded his teeth together furiously. “You’re taking everything the wrong way–”

“And what other way is there to take it?” Draco snarled, “That I am too simple to realise what are my true feelings and what are merely influences from my vampire urges? I’m intelligent enough to realise that I want you. I’ve told you before, as a man and as a vampire. You argue that it is the situation that has made me want you but then any human can argue that. Perhaps your werewolf only fell for his wife because of the situation the war put them in, because they were both in that Order of the Phoenix. Does that make their feelings any less real?!”

Harry opened his mouth to reply, only to have it shut soundlessly again. He glanced out of the carriage window. The world was rolling gently by, the moon bathing the trees with a beautiful, pale light. He sighed heavily, chewing the inside of his lip. He could hear the truth of Draco’s words ringing in his ears, but he wasn’t sure if he dared believe it.
He would probably never be able to be completely certain if Draco’s feelings stemmed from his own heart or simply the situation they had been thrust into, but Draco was right in that no one could be entirely sure that their partner truly loves them for them. They just have to trust that they do, his mind supplied. And just because he is right, doesn’t mean I have to demand his undying love for me. Things can move as slowly as we please. Yes, Draco would have to endure a long, odious courting period if he really wanted Harry. The chosen one’s heart wouldn’t be as easily won as that.

“Why should I trust you enough to let you in?” Harry asked then, his eyes still focused on the dark world beyond the carriage window.

He could hear the smirk in Draco’s voice when he said, “many reasons, one being that I have not betrayed you once yet. The other being that you want to, the other being this.”

Tearing his gaze from the landscape outside, Harry glanced over to Draco and the small, shining orb that the vampire had produced from inside his robes. Harry flushed. It seemed like a silly, inconsequential idea now. Draco probably thought it was laughable that he, Harry Potter was giving such sentimental gifts to a man in any case. Did men give each other gifts? A few times Hermione had hinted that he should give Ginny gifts when they’d been going out…

Harry had just opened his mouth to defend his moment of madness, of sappy stupidity, when Draco cut across him.

“It’s no secret that I have been a spoilt, ungrateful little brat since I was born. I have always had whatever I wanted whenever I wanted it,” Draco began, “But I have never been given something like this. Something I didn’t ask for, so simple and yet so full of meaning and feeling. Your feelings.”

Harry’s cheeks darkened and he fidgeted uncomfortably. Draco leant in closer, the ethereal light from the sphere illuminating his sharp features. “It makes me want you even more,” the vampire breathed. Harry’s tongue darted over his suddenly dry lips that he had chewed until they were sore. He looked everywhere, anywhere that wasn’t Draco’s face in an attempt to stifle his embarrassment.

Eventually, he leant back against the wall of the carriage and sighed. “It’s like a rollercoaster, being with you, we were rowing a moment ago and now you’re talking to me like…” He trailed off thoughtfully, wondering how two people as virile as them could ever possibly work together. Surely it was impossible? “It’s so intense and unbalanced and… raw, it’ll probably never work.”
Suddenly, the soft glow from the sphere vanished and Draco’s fingers were pressing firmly on his chin, turning his face so that his nose was almost touching Draco’s. “Yet what you have merely tasted of the connection between us, it tells you that it’s worth the risk of trying, doesn’t it?” Draco murmured, his cool breath dancing across Harry's sore, bitten lips. Harry said nothing, didn’t need to, all the hesitant agreement Draco would ever need was burning like a beacon in his emerald eyes as he leant forward in an attempt to seal their lips together.

Draco’s finger came up to prevent their mouths from connecting. ‘I’ll take that as a ‘yes’. And I believe that you want to kiss me, don’t you, Potter?’ There was an edge of challenge in his voice. Harry glared. Draco grinned as he drew back and the carriage drew to a graceful halt simultaneously. “If you prove to be an adequate date tonight, Mr Potter, perhaps you’ll have your kiss,” Draco mused, pushing the door open and hopping out. There was a mischievous glint in his eyes when he stood back to allow Harry to get out, a glimmer that told Harry this was Draco’s revenge for being ‘messed about’. He wasn’t sure whether he deserved it or not, but decided not to forgo any more of his pride in asking. It’d taken enough of a bashing for one day and he still had a few degrading tasks to perform before the night was out.

The houses of Hogsmeade village were quiet, with their windows glowing with comforting light. A majority of the shops were still open (apparently as usual for a Saturday night) and bustling with life – no doubt thanks to the new eighth year patrons. The Three Broomsticks in particular seemed to be roaring with life and vitality, so much so that Harry supposed the residents nearby must have set up silencing charms to get any sleep. It was good though, he supposed, that many were moving on with their lives after the war. The extra money that the eighth years brought in would help the sleepy village recover from its post-war slump.

“Rumour has it a new Apothecary opened a few months ago in Hogsmeade,” Harry said as he walked the streets, Draco close behind him. He seemed to like watching him from behind, where he thought Harry couldn’t see. The air was crisp and chilly but the lightly flickering lights from the surrounding buildings left a distinctly warm feeling brewing in his stomach. That and his cheeks were still burning from recalling the incident in the carriage. His steps sped up at that. “A Matilda Mawndwilis has been said to have opened it, she sources ingredients and potions from across the globe that are delivered at high speeds, if necessary.”

Suddenly up alongside him, the vampire gave a derisive snort. “Don’t sound so excited, we are wizards, you know. I can transport any object from here to Timbuktu for a price. What business do you have in an Apothecary on a Saturday night?”

Ignoring that last question, Harry continued to walk towards the location he'd heard that the shop resided in. Somewhere around here, he thought. “Money is no object,” he said simply, pulling his cloak tighter around himself. It instantly warmed his skin. He loved magic.

Before long, the shop stood before them. It was a wholesome little place, simple, clean black lines
formed the windows of the outside of the shop, which was filled with an odd assortment of ingredients and brewing utensils that Harry had never even heard of before. He swallowed uncertainly. He knew why he was doing this, but he wasn’t looking forward to it, and he wasn’t sure he wanted witnesses…

“Will you wait outside for me?” he asked carefully, not certain that Draco would agree. “I just don’t want her asking questions about who you are, the glamours you’ve used means you’re nothing like yourself after all. I don’t want to arouse suspicion.” He glanced at the vampire out of the corner of his eye and saw that expression flicker with thoughtful scheming. What’s he up to? Harry wondered.

“Only if you agree to come with me, no questions asked once you’re done here,” Draco bargained, punctuating his sentence by tipping his head to indicate the apothecary. Harry’s eyes narrowed. Draco’s smirk broadened in answer. “I promise I’ll have the prudish little chosen one back well before daybreak. I’ll even cast a few glamours on you so that no one can tell who you are, if you’d prefer.”

Harry just shrugged in the end, not knowing what to say in all honesty. What could he say to that? Especially before he knew what the blond was planning. Except, you can’t deny you’re a bit intrigued, the very Malfoy sounding voice whispered at the back of his mind. He really needed to shut that portion of his brain off. “Whatever, there’d better not be any funny business, that’s all,” Harry grumbled at last, pushing the shop door open. He heard a faint whisper of, “No, no funny business at all,” just as he closed the door behind him.

He could not help but shiver at the possibilities of those words. Draco was planning something and far from worrying he wouldn’t like it, he was concerned that he might like it a little too much.

The Matilda Mawndwilis Apothecary was just the same inside as it was outside. The floor was a clean, sterilised wood, whilst the magical light from above illuminated the sleek, simple lines of the black beams and shelves, lined with countless ingredients, utensils and potions. He could only guess at the identity of some of them. This was for the advanced brewer it seemed. Beyond the stacks of shelves at the far wall stood a long desk carved from black wood, again a simple, clean design that Harry thought looked oddly modern compared to other shops in the wizarding world. He supposed Matilda Mawndwilis must have had some modern day muggle influence. It just went to show how much the world had changed after the war. He wasn’t sure this would’ve been acceptable before then, everyone who was anyone had once been far too conscious of the fatal possibilities any anti-muggle wizards could bring them.

The shop itself was deserted, no doubt due to the majority of the patrons currently populating the Three Broomsticks. The only other living being besides him in the shop was a tall, slender woman behind the desk. She was easily taller than him, with perfectly straight black hair that was tied back out of her pale face, exaggerating her large, brown eyes which were already riveted to Harry. Harry
already felt distinctly uncomfortable, before he had even opened his mouth.

“And here I was thinking I’d have a slow start collecting business,” the woman said as he approached the counter, her voice low and smooth, not at all unpleasant but oddly unnerving. She had an odd appeal about her and yet Harry couldn’t help but think that most people might find her intimidating. “And already, I have a reputed patron such as Harry Potter in my shop. How might I help you, Mr Potter?”

She wasn’t falsely sweet or bursting with over exaggerated pleasantries, which Harry was grateful for, it was refreshing to deal with another human being that wasn’t overwhelmed by his fame. There was no mistaking the glint in her eyes, however, she knew that Harry buying something in her shop would be exponentially good for business, especially if Harry allowed her to use his name. That will make what I have to do a lot easier, he thought. With a final glance back at the closed door, beyond which Draco was standing somewhere, he set his hands on the front desk.

“I require a few ingredients, some rare, some not, but most ridiculously expensive. Money is no object, I need them and as quickly as you can get them to me,” he said bluntly, deciding it was best not to beat about the bush. It had all come out as an abrupt, hasty explosion of information and he regretted how rude it had sounded, but Mawndwilis simply smiled at him.

“A man to the point and honest, I admire that, you don’t see such admirable qualities very often, Mr Potter,” she replied simply, “Although perhaps it was a mistake to be so forthright with how much money you are willing to spend?”

Harry shrugged, at the same time reaching into his pocket for the list of ingredients. “There’s no sense beating about the bush, I want these ingredients and I want them urgently. Money is of no importance if you can get them to me,” he said, again bluntly, though with more of an edge of politeness this time as he passed her the sheet of parchment. Again, she gave him a slight, genuine smile before scanning the list.

“There are some seventeen items here, Mr Potter, some of which are most costly,” she began. Harry opened his mouth to remind her that money was no object, once again, before she cut him off. “But as long as you’re sure. These products are in plentiful supply, but a selection of them are held on a wait list due to their sheer delicate nature. Only a certain amount can be shipped at any one time. I’m afraid the wait list for the most expensive of the supplies is seven months minimum.”

Harry winced. No, Draco can’t wait that long!

“With all due respect, Ma’am, that just isn’t good enough,” he said, staring meaningfully up into
her face. “I am willing to pay any price necessary to get them. Another week is too long to wait.” This was the part he’d been looking forward to least of all.

“Even money cannot speak amongst some circles, Mr Potter.”

Harry inhaled sharply, deciding that just spitting it out before he lost his nerve was the only chance he had of going through with this. And helping Draco. “No, but my name should speak loud enough for any culture or society,” he said.

Mawndwilis raised a brow. “Just what are you saying, Sir?” she asked, as if wanting to make sure what she was hearing was correct.

Harry reached into the innermost pocket of his robe and drew out a weighty leather bag that clinked in a tell-tale manner when he dropped it onto the counter between them. “There’s your fee and more there, that’s all yours and if you can get me the specified ingredients in three days—”

“Three days? It’s impossible, Mr Potter, be reasonable!” She began, Harry however, was making good of his promise to not allow himself to be walked over anymore. He wasn’t afraid of collecting the debt that everyone kept saying the wizarding world owed him if it helped those he cared for.

“Three days, Madame Mawndwilis,” he repeated, “If you can deliver in that time, that there is your fee. And in addition, I will allow you to use my name as an advertising campaign to draw in more business.” She seemed stumped for words. The opportunity was a great one indeed, he could see it in her eyes. That was when he forced his chin up, drawing on all of his determination to aid Draco to say, “I would much prefer my name benefit someone like you, Ma’am, but if you cannot help me then I am sure that there are many other reputable retailers that will find a way to help Harry Potter.”

Never, ever had he used his name to gain anything and never would he again. He’d made an exception in order to help Draco and even still, his morals were roiling in his gut in self-disgust. He didn’t like this, not one bit. But if it helps him…

“You drive a hard bargain, Mr Potter,” Mawndwilis said at last, “I admire that. You’re a man that knows what he wants.” Harry snorted at that. If only, he thought as he watched her consult the list once more. “It will be a stretch, of course, but perhaps if I make clear who this is for, I can get it to you within the specified time.”
Harry bowed his head slightly, barely refraining from giving a sigh of relief. “I would be very grateful, Ma’am.”

The air outside the shop was a shock to his warmed skin. He shivered despite himself as he closed the door behind him, waiting for the coat to work its magic and warm him once more according to the temperature change. Its heat had lessened whilst he was inside the warm shop. Just as it began to warm him again, however, than he was frozen still by the mere look on Draco’s voice. His eyes widened. Draco was standing exactly where he’d left him outside the shop, with an unmistakable look on his face.

_I should’ve realised there were no silencing charms on the shop by the fact that I could still hear the music from the Three Broomsticks_, Harry thought, cursing his stupidity. He hadn’t wanted Draco to hear or even know what he had been up to, but it appeared he had – every word.

“A fascinating thing, my growing abilities,” Draco said carefully. “It turns out that I can now hear this faint sound, a white noise whenever a privacy spell is cast. My supernatural hearing allows me to differentiate between true silence and magical silence. So I temporarily removed the one surrounding this shop, just long enough so that I could hear every word you said.”

Harry just stared at him. He didn't know why, but he didn't want Draco to know what he had done and was on edge waiting for his reaction.

“Why did you do it?” Draco demanded. “You paid that woman a small fortune and flaunted your name, something I know for a fact behoves you to do. I would know why.”

With no little amount of discomfort, Harry began walking away from the shop. “I said I wouldn't let you rot away in that room, that I wouldn't let Alaric win, didn't I?” He replied, his voice stiff with embarrassment.

“Money is no object to a Malfoy either, why did you take this task upon yourself? I can't allow myself to be indebted to you, especially in monetary–”

“No offense, but since Voldemort, Potter money and the Potter name speaks louder than Malfoy,” Harry interjected. “Everyone is always clamouring after me to use my name to endorse their businesses, I knew this was the one certified way to get those ingredients as soon as possible.” Suddenly, Draco’s fingers locked around Harry's wrist, tugging him back roughly so that the man was forced to meet his vampire’s eyes. They smouldered with unrecognisable emotion.

“Why would you do something so against your own morals? Why would you disregard everything you believe in to help me?” Draco questioned, his voice insistent, unyielding. He seemed almost angry, and Harry couldn't fathom why.
“You've done a lot for me over the last few weeks,” Harry replied, trying for indifference as he struggled to yank his hand out of Draco's reach. Those fingers merely gripped him harder. Harry winced. “I couldn't bear to see you suffer a moment longer than you had to, you prat. It was nothing! Seriously, I–”

“I can smell the panic, the lies on you,” Draco cut across him. “Don't disregard this so easily. Acts such as these may be an everyday occurrence to you but they aren't to me. Especially when it cost you both your pride and your morals to do so. Why exactly, couldn't you bear to see me suffer?” He squeezed Harry's wrists tighter then, drawing him in close. “Shall I tell you why? It's because you care about me, don't you?”

Harry struggled ferociously now, disliking the way that even something as personal as that was said in such a goading voice. “I – I never denied I cared. How can I not? You're an important feature in my life now, I can't easily disregard your suffering. I can't easily disregard anyone's pain!”

“But I am important to you,” Draco pressed, tugging Harry's wrists down so that he could feel the heat radiating from Harry's torso unhindered. The way Harry had demanded results back in that shop, it had evoked a reaction in him so potent his insides were quaking with it.

Harry could say what he liked about how he would do the same for any sufferer; Draco had heard the way his heart had pounded in his chest, the persistence in his voice. That was not the way you did just any person a favour. He was important to Harry, there was no way that even Harry himself could deny it and that made Draco's very skin hum with the desire to crush Harry's lips to his own. The fact that he hadn't so far was a tribute to his hard-won control.

No one had ever made such personal sacrifices for him, with perhaps the exception of Severus and his mother. It was overwhelming. And Harry was trying to deny it? Escape from it? Never, Draco hissed at the back of his mind.

“Stop running scared of your feelings. What do you think I will do if you are honest, for once? Laugh?” He snapped. Harry jerked back then with all his strength and Draco let him go this time, watching him stumble backwards and scramble to stay on his feet.

“I don't give a shit if you laugh,” Harry retorted, although the sharpness to his words told Draco that that wasn't entirely true. “I just don't divulge my feelings easily anymore, especially when I'm not certain of them. I have no desire to hurt anyone like I hurt Ginny or Cho, or myself…”

Draco frowned then, not realising just how deep the guilt and fear of being hurt again was engrained into him. A defence mechanism, he supposed. Harry had most likely had enough pain to last a lifetime.
“Haven't I proved by now that you can trust me?” Draco said with a tone that was a tad softer than before. Harry just glared.

“Haven't I told you before that it's not you I can't trust, it's me? I can't easily push all of that uncertainty aside. I'm…” The man shook his head then, diverting his gaze and pulling that cloak around his body as if mimicking the comfort of an embrace. “I'm fucked up, Draco, you should realise that by now. My issues aren't going to disappear over night just because you want them to.”

Draco rolled his eyes, throwing the man a look that accused stupidity. “When have I ever asked for that? We will work through our problems together. That is the way stronger relationships are built. I am no fool; even a man like me knows such a thing.”

He relished in the stunned expression that twitched at that plush mouth. He could tell by the nervous palpitations now caressing that human heart, that those words were something Harry had wanted, but had never dared hope to hear. “You're so emotionally and intimately inexperienced, that perhaps I should spell it out for you,” Draco said then, tilting his head to the side just enough that he could see the pink scar that would forever adorn Harry's throat. “Even a person such as I can desire more than the most basic comforts. I want your mind, your body, your soul, for all eternity. Not just a twice-weekly fuck when I feed – all of you.”

“Nothing too intense then,” Harry snorted sarcastically, but there was an anxious flush touching his skin. Draco had affected him.

“And you want much more than that from me too, don't you?” Draco asked.

This time, Harry did not answer, instead he grumbled unintelligibly under his breath, shifting his feet distractedly beneath him. That was answer enough for Draco – for now at least. He cast a glance up to the dark blanket of clouds above, feeling the dull, distant twinge of the far off sunrise approaching. They had a while left before they had to be getting back. “Come then, you promised you would come with me if I waited outside,” Draco said.

“You eavesdropped,” Harry reminded him, “that surely cancels out the agreement?”

Draco smirked, feeling his slytherin roots right down to his core. “You specified my standing outside, nothing more.” He scanned Harry's body with his eyes then, lingering just enough on the man's crotch to catch Harry's attention. Sure enough, his companion fidgeted uncomfortably. “Come on, Harry, you must be interested, surely?” His voice was a low, seductive drawl and he could sense the way Harry's body temperature increased ever so slightly at the sound of it. His grin broadened.

“This is your first lesson in living, Mr Potter,” Draco recited in his best impression of Snape as he
drew his wand, casting the very same glamours on Harry as he'd done on himself. After a few simple charms, everyone except himself would only see an auburn haired, medium height man, nothing to even take a second glance at. Something inside Draco was unhealthily pleased that Harry's true image, for this night at least would be his and his alone to view. “Do pay close attention,” he added, walking close to the man's side as he led him toward the closest apparition point.

When they reached the slightly enclosed area, he stopped and turned fully to face Harry with a raised brow. Harry faltered and took a few steps back. Draco meanwhile could not help but find that hesitancy slightly endearing. “And now, a lesson in relying on someone other than your good self,” Draco mused, reaching out and tugging Harry roughly forwards until the man was trapped in his embrace.

His First struggled at that, even grunted in negation through clenched teeth. Lowering his head to bring his lips to Harry's ear, Draco exhaled softly against the soft shell. Harry froze, his back arching and his eyes widening as a shiver rippled across his skin. “Trust me,” Draco all-but purred, “rely on me. Let someone else care for you, if only for a few hours.”

Sensing Harry's hesitance, he ran his fingers through the haphazard locks at the back of the man's neck, the kind of doting caress only a lover could give. “What have you got to lose by trying?” He didn't have to hear Harry's thoughts to know what he was thinking now. *His pride, his remaining strength, his heart,* Draco's mind supplied. Harry could say what he liked. He knew the man better than most.

After a few moments, he felt Harry relax slightly in his arms. It was a subtle movement, barely noticeable to anyone except himself, but it was a vast milestone in their relationship. Dipping his head a fraction more to inhale Harry's throat, Draco focused on their destination and disapparated.

* * *

“I can't believe you brought me somewhere so…so…”

“Luxurious?” Draco suggested, looking around at the softly lit restaurant. The whole place was dressed in lavish decorations, the main colour a royal purple with golds and silvers accenting every feature. Even the table cloth beneath the expensive settings was a rich golden satin. Draco smirked devilishly at Harry's face as his fingertips slid suggestively across the silken fabric.

The mood was calm and each table had a courtesy privacy spell which was complex enough to involve a soft background musical concerto catered specifically to each occupant's taste. It was a very intimate setting, one that Harry seemed embarrassingly aware of. *Part of his punishment as well as his lesson in living,* Draco mused, sipping at his tall class of the champagne. The bubbles
felt nice on his tongue, but the taste was nowhere near as pleasant as he remembered. He did miss enjoying the simplest of things such as food…

“I was going to say precocious,” Harry replied, prodding at his appetiser with the wrong fork for a salad. Again, Draco only found it endearing. “How did you get us into such a snazzy restaurant without reservations?”

“The Malfoy name still holds power also,” Draco murmured. “This place is held in highest regard for not only its food, but its privacy. I was able to call upon my name, even though I do not look like myself. The presence of my money is enough to convince them of my genuineness. A lot of patrons come here in ‘disguise’ to have a quiet evening. Only the most prestigious witches and wizards come here.”

“Snob.” Harry rolled his eyes then, shovelling some finely sliced lettuce and tomato into his mouth so that the sauce that covered it nearly escaped his lips. Draco winced. “You have to let me pay half of the bill,” Harry insisted. “I won’t let you pay for all of this. It must cost a fortune.”

“Is that why you spent some time making sure you ordered the cheapest thing on the menu?” Draco enquired, setting down his glass with a raised brow. “What part of letting someone else care for you includes you paying for any of this?”

“I’m not the kind of person that will be seduced by money, you know,” Harry warned. “You can’t buy me.”

Draco sighed, making a show of eating his lettuce with the correct fork, despite how pointless it was for him. Eating for him nowadays was just going through the motions really. It dissipated in his stomach uselessly, giving him no sustenance at all – unlike Harry’s blood. “I’m not buying you,” Draco said impatiently. “I'm treating you, it's what people do for the person they are courting.” When Harry moved to open his mouth again, Draco added quickly, “you can pay the bill next time we venture out.”

Harry grunted and finished up his salad just in time for the main course to arrive. The man seemed so mesmerised by the gourmet roast dish that he didn't even react to the fact that Draco had insinuated they would do this often.

Harry’s appreciation of food was interesting now that Draco had eyes acute enough to notice. He savoured every bite, every morsel and yet seemed to be unconsciously trying to hide that appreciation. He had seen that in Harry’s memories as well, being starved or fed what only a pigeon could live off of. He hadn’t always been allowed to eat what he wanted to eat. Draco would make sure that he would from now on, amongst other things.

“So was there a point to bringing me here?” Harry asked, tucking into his fine slices of chicken. “Aside from sitting there and staring at every bite I eat?”
Draco smirked subtly. “Only getting to know each other better,” Draco replied. But then he remembered that Harry appreciated the full, raw truth, in all circumstances. “I thought this would be the best way to show you that things between us could be more than the furious frenzy of passion whenever I bite you.”

Harry was only partly looking at him as he said, “at least you were honest. But really, I don’t need a fancy dinner every–”

“I didn’t mean the fancy dinner,” Draco replied shortly, “I meant the fact that I am spending time with you, showing an interest in you outside of the crescendo of ecstasy and blood we share twice a week. Honestly, you are so jaded and afraid to expect too much of anyone that you always assume the worst. I can spell it out no clearer, surely? I want us to belong to each other, in every way possible.” His tone was blunt and hard with frustration then, he couldn't help it, but for the first time ever, Harry was staring at him with his full attention. He looked like he fully believed him, at last.

It wasn't what Draco had said, but the way he had said it – without conscious effort to school his words in a way Harry would find more acceptable. No, he had automatically said they would belong to each other. It was the first time Draco had spoken of their potential relationship as if it would be equal, and that was the kind of union he, Harry was interested in. Not any on-going battle of vampire and donor.

They spent the rest of the main course conversing over much lighter subjects. Harry had been fascinated by the difference in his muggle primary school education and Draco’s private school tutoring before Hogwarts. They had similar elements of course, Maths, English, but with wizarding histories and wizarding activities in their P.E. Lessons. Harry had sat almost agape as Draco had described how their coverage of the muggle gladiators had included a moving, talking model of an arena where re-enactments took place in the middle of the classroom. He couldn't help but wonder just what it would have been like to have known about magic all of his life. It was the first time in a long while that he had wondered how a childhood where he had been raised by his real parents might have been.

Their war-time experiences had been a similarity they unfortunately shared too. It had been peculiarly easy to tell Draco about some of the things he’d had to endure that he had never divulged to anyone besides Ron, Hermione, Remus and Tonks. After he’d told the vampire how he had lost Hedwig, Draco told him about how Bellatrix’s first lesson in initiating him into the Death Eaters had been to force him to watch as she used the killing curse on his own owl.

So many similar painful experiences, he thought, we’re more similar than I’d ever have imagined a few weeks ago. In a moment of swelling appreciation and bravery, he reached across the table to shyly brush the back of his index finger across Draco’s knuckles soothingly. It felt good, touching someone, being close to someone that understood him.
Harry had been disgusted and yet touched when Draco had trusted him enough to quietly explain just how he had ended up in that dungeon in the first place. The thought of Voldemort raping Draco was enough to make his teeth clench. He withdrew his hands and they clenched into tight fists that quivered with rage under the table. For a very fleeting moment, he was almost grateful he had killed the bastard. He choked at that thought, however. *The curse killed him,* he quickly reminded himself.

“He didn’t, you know,” Draco said suddenly, seeming to have taken Harry's withdrawal the wrong way. “He didn’t touch me. When I refused, he gave me to Greyback to torture into madness as punishment for my disobedience.”

Harry shook his head slightly, the movement barely visible to the human eye. “No, I… It’s not that, I just…” He chewed the inside of his lip for a moment as he struggled to find the words to express the emotion building inside of him. “I don’t know how you did it, refused him, even knowing what he would do to you, that was so–”

“Foolish and arrogant,” Draco finished for him, “I was more concerned about sullying my pure, *perfect* body than dying.”

“I was going to say brave, actually,” Harry corrected. He saw disbelief touch those usually well-controlled features. Features he had, at some point, come to admire with an embarrassing kind of fervency. “I admire that kind of uncompromising sense of self-worth.”

Draco snorted at that. “I didn’t feel particularly brave at the time, crying out for my mother like a snivelling brat as that thing ripped the body and face I was so proud of to shreds.”

Harry frowned, hesitating a little before he said, “I suppose in some ways, being a vampire has been a blessing – in that instance I mean.” He remembered the smell of stagnant, infected flesh, the sight of those bloody wounds as he had been chained to the dungeon wall. Draco would not have healed from those scars naturally, even with magical help, had he remained human. He winced at the memory, Draco’s screams echoing at the back of his mind.

Present day Draco, however, was staring at him carefully. “So tell me, Harry Potter, just how has my being a vampire been a blessing in terms of my appearance?”

Harry prodded his roast potatoes distractedly. “Well…you know, after *that* sort of torture…” His lip stung where he had gnawed at the inside of it now. He supposed blurting it out was the only
way he’d say this properly. “You look exactly the same as before, paler, obviously and your eyes change colour if you’re…worked up, but aside from that you’re just as perfect as you always were.” He could feel the blood colouring his cheeks as he glanced up to Draco again, but the vampire looked oddly stunned.

Then, suddenly, it all made sense. “You…you did know how you looked, didn’t you?”

With a partly embarrassed and partly overwhelmed sneer, Draco turned his head away. “It’s hardly as if I can check a mirror, now is it, Potter?” he murmured bitterly, though there was a thickness in his tone, betraying his emotions. Harry set down his knife and fork, staring at the vampire. Had Draco really thought he had been scarred from Greyback’s torture all this time? Imperfect?

Surely he would have realised that vampires healed rapidly, and that logically, those wounds would have too? But perhaps, amidst the hunger pains, amidst the confusion and misery, the darkness he had been locked away in during most of the summer, there had been no room for common sense. Draco isn’t as sure of himself as he used to be, not that he would ever let me know that, Harry thought. And without his parents or a mirror, his insecurity probably festered. He was sure the vampire would’ve rather died than ask Snape such a thing, after all. He was far too proud.

“But you…you’ve been so cocky and overconfident about me fancying you all this time,” Harry gaped. Draco merely sipped at his champagne uneasily, evidently not ready to face Harry again yet. Something flickered at the back of Harry's mind then. Not so much a memory, more of a feeling from the times he had been privy to Draco’s innermost memories and emotions during the bite. Draco felt like his appearance had been all he had to offer, he had taken pride in it, and the melancholy locked deep, deep inside of him was largely because he thought his beauty had died along with his purity and his humanity.

Clearing his throat awkwardly, and thinking that he’d rather go back to the Hospital Wing and listen to Hermione talk about periods and clumsy sex with Ron again than say this, he swallowed his pride. “You should know…you look…you look really good,” he mumbled uneasily. “I mean, I think you must know that I like the way you look with the way that I… But yeah, you look… Bloody hell, you look perfect, you arse hole, alright?!”

For once, his inarticulateness, his inability to form simple sentences seemed to have benefitted the situation. For Draco could not help but give a small smile as he set his glass down. Harry felt mortified as his own words revolved around and around in his head like a broken record, the only constellation was that Draco was looking at him again, that devilish smirk gracing those lips.

“Perhaps you should tell me clearly, just why you like the way that I look,” Draco teased. The overwhelming relief he felt upon realising his appearance was just as pristine as always, seemed to have been inundated by his delight in Harry's blundering honesty. Not that that helped Harry's
Harry stared at him in surprise, not realising until then just how well Draco had come to know him. The vampire smiled, as if reading his mind.

“I do not for one moment expect you will have to do that alone, however,” Draco said flippantly.

Harry sat up a little straighter in his chair. “Of course,” he said slowly. “I'll need someone who can think like a sneaky slytherin to ensure I'm not hoodwinked.”

Draco smirked again. “I daresay you will.” He sipped deeply at his beverage then, his eyes riveted to Harry's the entire time, as if picturing Harry's taste in his mouth instead of the inadequate brew. Harry shuddered, wondering just when he'd begun to think such perverted things. He twisted the
napkin even harder in his grasp, feeling heat brew just beneath his skin.

Suddenly, Draco's hand shot forwards, with vampire speed and yet butterfly delicacy that caused a shudder of ethereal, feather-light pleasure to ripple through Harry's fingers and up through his entire being. Draco's hand remained over his for a moment, a prolonged minute where he had no choice but to think of all the other, less subtle pleasures those fingers had brought to his skin. His breath stuck in his throat as he choked on his words.

Slowly, Draco traced the shape of his knuckle, staring straight into his face as he did so, as if daring him to deny how good it felt, to pull away as he had done so many times before. Swallowing his roaring pride and uncertainty, Harry managed to stay perfectly still, even if his awkwardness did make his mouth spit out senseless questions in an attempt to alleviate the sinfully delicious tension.

“Err, so...you're always going on about what you're going to make of yourself,” Harry tried shakily, “what exactly do you hope to do once we leave here?”

With a sly smile, Draco drew his hand away, taking with it the abused napkin Harry had been clutching like a lifeline. “I've always been promised to the political domain,” Draco said airily, folding the white napkin in precise, sharp lines that Harry could not help but watch with interest. “My father had it in mind for me ever since I was born, I think.”

Harry frowned, even as he continued to watch the way those fingers twisted and folded the fabric into specific positions. “But...didn't your parents sort of... You said that they'd barely spoken to you, that's all. I thought—”

“They are still my parents, and their silence and withdrawal is purely in mourning of the life they now think I can never have. I will show them that their son is still very much alive. I have changed, of course, but their connection to me can never be altered. Politics is the best way to raise my family name from the gutter as well as my own name from the darkness my parents believe I have been lost to. I may be a 'beast' but I can still be a man, I need to prove that to them as well as the rest of the world, that is all,” Draco explained. “I will make them proud again, show them that this,” he gestured to himself, “this is something to be celebrated instead of cursed, if used in the right way.”

Harry stared as Draco lifted the origami shape into his palm, a finely shaped swan that the vampire set down in front of Harry's hand. It reminded Harry a little of the paper bird Draco had charmed to fly across the room and taunt him with potential quidditch mishaps that day in Defence Against the Dark Arts in third year. He smirked a little at the memory. Whatever happened between them now, things would inevitably be different to how they'd been back then. Without meeting Draco's gaze, he picked it up and put it in his pocket.
“No offense, but your parents’ love isn't something you should have to win, they should love you no matter what. You shouldn't have to prove anything to them,” Harry said.

Draco bristled. “They do love me; they love me so much that they cannot look at me now because it only reminds them of how they believe they failed me. How they believe they caused me to suffer,” he snapped. “I will give them something to focus on with my success,” he assured him, “a brighter light to chase away the shadows.”

Just then, Harry could fully imagine Draco as a public speaker, someone important to give speeches and captivate his audience, make them believe in whatever cause he decided to pursue. He himself felt riveted to Draco at that moment, to that intensity, that sheer conviction, and he could not help but admire it.

“You have direction,” Harry said then, after a moment or two of silence. “I envy you that. I have no idea where to go or what to do with my life. I feel like a headless chicken.”

With a small laugh that crumbled the tension a little, Draco leant forwards across the table to him so that their hands nearly touched. “Almost everyone our age has no clue what to do with themselves, that's only normal. And you have plenty of time to decide. Once you've left Hogwarts you can have a few months off to decide, it's not like you can't use the holiday.”

With a small snort of amusement, Harry glanced distractedly at the area beyond the tables. He could only hear the music of their own table of course, but on the modest dance floor not far away, a small cluster of witches and wizards were dancing to another tune. It seemed a fairly slow, yet positive sort of dance, easy to follow. A young girl that must’ve been the same age as them was smiling with giddy bliss as her male companion twirled her on the spot. Harry could not help but smile at the happiness evident in her expression.

“Would you care to dance?” Draco asked, his voice snapping Harry from his reverie. Turning his head to gaze at the man across the table from him, Harry stared with wide, disbelieving eyes.

“What?” he all-but gasped.

“You seemed to be staring at them,” Draco said simply, his face devoid of emotion as he studied Harry fervently. “Would you like to dance – with me?”
Flushing furiously, Harry gaped at him. “A-Are you joking?” he choked. “You must’ve seen the spectacle I made of myself at the Yule Ball in fourth year. I didn't stumble all over the place for my own amusement, you know. I really am that bloody awful at it!”

Smirking again, Draco glided elegantly to his feet and extended his hand for Harry to take. “You obviously need an excuse to live, so I do believe you owe me at least this for being such a stubborn, offensive arse over the last few weeks.”

Harry looked again to the dance floor, the music had changed to a more modern, yet soulful waltz that was audible to him now. The music at their own table seemed to have died when Draco vocalized his intention of joining the dance floor. He felt quite sick at the prospect of dancing. It just wasn't something he did. He did remember that Draco had (of course) been exceptionally good at it. It had been hard not to notice at the Yule Ball. “I really can't dance,” he insisted again. Draco stepped closer, snatching Harry's hand and tugging him towards the dance floor.

“And I really can. I will lead, it's only a waltz, it's not that hard, just follow me,” Draco said, his voice thick with the proud superiority Harry had always known him for. *He probably wants to show off to me a bit*, Harry thought, remembering how he himself had pulled a daring death dive back on the quidditch pitch only a few days ago in a bid to impress the vampire. *That and it's uncomfortably intimate*, his mind supplied, heat burning in his cheeks. *He probably thinks it will bring us closer or something, emotionally as well as physically*. He ducked his head at that thought, hiding his mortified expression as he was lead onto a space on the dance floor.

The problem was, he was sure it *would* bring them closer, that was what he feared. But he did owe Draco this, and more, and that sense of duty, combined with the edge of curious desire to feel that nervous fluttering in his stomach that the vampire incited once more, was what made him comply. Draco seemed to sense the surrender and pulled him in close at that moment, one arm taking hold of Harry's waist while the other gripped his hand firmly. Harry kept his gaze on his feet. He was too close, he couldn't meet those grey eyes.

“We're blokes,” Harry mumbled, but whether that was in a last ditch effort to escape this humiliation, or to let Draco know one of the other reasons why this was bothering him, even he couldn't be certain. He just felt very uncomfortable being looked at, very aware of how good it felt to be locked in Draco's arms and sick at the thought of falling flat on his face. “Everyone is watching us.”

Then, he was being pulled in one direction, guided across the dance floor at a slow, easy pace in time with the soft, thumping rhythm of the music. Hyperaware of how fast his breath was leaving him – embarrassingly fast, just like his heart rate, he forced it to slow to match the beat of the music. But it felt oddly reassuring that he wasn't expected to lead or plan the next move. This was probably the only time he would be grateful that Draco was in charge. *Not the only time*, a voice whispered with suggestive passion at the back of his mind.
“They are only looking at you because you are staring at your feet and flushing like a virgin school girl and it is endearing,” Draco clarified, his tone as simple and unaffected as if he hadn't just inadvertently said that people found him, Harry cute. He wasn't sure how he felt about that peculiar complement. “Look at my face and we'll blend into the background like the rest of them. The fact that we are two men is irrelevant in wizarding society – I've told you that before.”

And so has Hermione, Harry thought, it doesn't make all those years of the Dursley's prejudice vanish into thin air. He could still remember Vernon Dursley spitting out vile insults about the 'faggot' Dudley had beat up on a regular basis at Smeltings. In some ways, the Wizarding World and the Muggle World were similar and yet still decidedly different. I suppose the Wizarding World has its own prejudices about other things, Harry thought, setting his jaw and forcing himself to look up into Draco's face.

Those keen eyes were on him, and he felt the urge to look away again in discomfort, but would not allow himself to surrender so easily. He held Draco's gaze. Thinking of it like a challenge helped to ease the embarrassment he felt pulsing at the back of his mind. Long, hungry fingers tightened on his waist and around his hand, reminding him of who was in control, who would not let him fall.

I reckon if he can help me dance without stumbling over myself like an idiot, then he deserves all of the trust I can place in him, Harry mused, feeling his way after Draco's footsteps, following them easily. People were still watching, of course, murmuring something Harry couldn't hear. Just as Harry glanced to the side in an attempt to catch their words, however, Draco swirled him around and lead their dance in another direction. He was grinning.

“What are you smirking at?” Harry groused, still a little uncomfortable, and awkward with how much his skin was tingling under Draco's touch. He swore that the places they were joined were glowing with that cool, comforting touch.

“They say that you must be very much in love with me, with the way you can barely meet my eyes,” Draco replied, his tone ripe with amusement. “What do you think of that, Potter?”

“I think you like people gossiping about you, about us,” he snapped, disgruntled.

“I happen to think that there is no such thing as bad publicity,” Draco replied, “But they are not gossiping about us – we do not look like us, remember?”

“But you wish that we did,” Harry said. He was surprised how he didn't even have to think about
the next movement now, merely followed Draco without difficulty, secretly relishing in the little jerks of pleasure that tore through his stomach each time their bodies pressed tightly together. It was just moving his feet in time with Draco's really. And being in sync with him is surprisingly… natural, Harry thought. As easy as breathing.

“I won't deny that I'm hoping next time you'll agree to be seen in public with me, as yourself, but that's a very small priority on my list of desires. I know how much you hate being in the public eye, after all,” Draco said, his eyes burning with all of the other desires and sinful wishes he had for Harry. Harry swallowed again, his throat very dry tonight.

“That's another thing – you say you want to be in politics, that involves some amount of public attention.”

“The more the better,” Draco added.

Harry frowned. “I'm not sure I would ever want that kind of attention, not ever again. It's too much as it is. I don't even take The Daily Prophet or any other wizarding paper anymore because I don't want to see myself on the front page if I so much as sneeze wrong.”

The music was pulsing in a dramatic finale now and Draco leant in close, his lips almost touching Harry's as he breathed, “If you think I would ever allow anyone to harass you like that if you were mine, you are sorely mistaken. You will live your life the way you chose and I will do everything to protect that, if you let me.” His words were filled with such conviction and passion, such fervent desire that Harry thought he could be talking about sex and something as simple as this and he'd never be able to tell the difference. Would Draco always be this intense? This…passionate? Would he, Harry be happy or disappointed if he didn't? He was still so very unsure about everything. The only difference was that now, he would not run from that any more.

Suddenly, Draco twirled him dramatically as the final notes of the song died in a beautiful burst of sound. He was twisted back into Draco’s chest and his hands came between them to cushion the blow against the vampire’s hard chest. Their eyes locked, inciting Harry’s heart into frantic, dazzled palpitations.

“W-Why do you…? I don’t understand how you…you can want me so much,” Harry breathed. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“Emotions never do,” Draco replied, his voice as soft and smooth as caramel. Harry swore he could taste it. He licked his lips, very conscious of how close Draco’s were to his now – anticipating a kiss that he didn’t know why he wanted so much. Was being a man always this
The kiss never came, however. The fingers on his waist caressed his side tenderly, and that face was touched with a hungry expression as the vampire inhaled him deeply. “We should head back,” Draco practically purred, taking a slight step back as if to resist temptation of taking Harry right there on the floor. The mind bond didn’t have to be open for Harry to see that in his eyes.

“Have to get delicate little Potter home before midnight.”

Harry gave a scowl he didn’t fully mean. This playfulness, it was new and odd, a development from the snide remarks they had once tossed at each other so easily in their youth. He could not help the disappointment that twitched in his belly as Draco lead the way back to their table, away from the scene of the most recent development in their intimacy.

“Well, Potter, was I an adequate first date?” Draco asked derisively, leaving a very generous pile of shining, golden galleons on the centre piece. But there was an edge of uncertainty under his cocky exterior that Harry could not help but empathize with. Even a proud, self-important vampire could have insecurities, it seemed. As confused and dazed as he was by the entire evening, Harry could only smile in answer to Draco’s question.

~To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

I am recording this story into a podfic. Does anyone listen to them? Would anyone be interested in listening to this story when I am done? I've done the first few chapters already...
Asphyxiated

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

There's a few of my own spells in this chapter, if they aren't JKR's then they are mine, do not borrow them without asking first and crediting me:

Silverae Laceratum - from 'silverae', an adaptation of the word silver and 'Laceratum', the latin word for wound or more accurately a cut.

Aequuserium - from the word 'Aequus', the latin word for calm.

.: chapter thirteen:.  

ASPHYXIATED

It was a quiet pair that made their way back through Hogsmeade. Once the bedazzlement had faded somewhat at the easiness, the niceness of the entire evening, Harry could not help but ponder the words Draco had spoken with such heartfelt conviction as their dance had ended.

“If you think I would ever allow anyone to harass you like that if you were mine, you are sorely mistaken. You will live your life the way you chose and I will do everything to protect that, if you let me.”

Somehow, that stuck in his head as soon as his disappointment at not receiving a kiss had faded. Sufficiently distracted by the revealing, heartfelt declaration his companion had made back on the dance floor, Harry was far too lost in thought to protest much when Draco beckoned him into his arms and apparated them back to the sleepy village. The noise of from the Three Broomsticks had died down somewhat now and the shops were closed, the streets all-but empty. Harry allowed Draco to lead the way back to the carriage, and watched his back in thoughtful silence.

Wasn’t this what he had always wanted? Someone who cared about him more than anyone else, someone that wanted him for who he was, someone that would challenge him and make him feel things that he had feared were lost on his previously numb body. Yes, that was the best way of
describing it. He’d been numb before Draco had forced his way into his life; it had been all but meaningless with Voldemort gone. Here was someone who would push him to live again – wasn’t it just too poetic that that person just happened to be a vampire?

_This is exactly what I want and more_, he thought, Draco’s determined words revolving around and around in his head, a testament to his unspoken feelings. _So why am I so bloody terrified?_

Glancing up to the cloudy sky, Harry sighed as he watched the partially invisible moon shine mockingly down on him. Back on that dance floor, he had felt safe despite the unease of being stared at, had felt pleasure at the fleeting, cool touches. Nothing was certain, there was still the possibility that it would turn out he’d be right about everything, but the difference now was that he didn’t want to flee like a coward any longer. He wanted to give it a chance, wanted to make this work.

He bit his lip, not sure what he thought of his mind drifting to such sappy, idealistic places. He still couldn’t get over the barrier he had erected, the instinct that told him it was better to shy away from any happiness that held potential pain. _No, I can’t get over it alone_, he thought glancing at the back of Draco again. _But I’m not alone, not anymore._

“This isn’t the end to our evening that I had planned, you know,” Draco said suddenly, whirling to face him with an expression that seemed torn between amusement and uncertainty. “You, trailing behind me reeking of confusion and melancholy. The scent is enough to banish my appetite.”

A glint in his eyes gave Harry no room to misinterpret what appetite that was and he glanced away awkwardly, coming to a halt just before Malfoy. They had reached the carriage, he realised now as he came back down from his daze, but Draco was standing in front of it, watching him carefully.

“Oh?” Harry asked aloofly, having forgotten that Draco could smell his moods. He didn’t want to dwell in misery any longer. He missed his old self, the self that Draco preferred, that _he_ preferred. The one that would meet Draco’s passion and vitality blow for blow and then some. “What did you have in mind then?” he asked, raising his chin boldly to counteract the way his voice shuddered.

“You know, I much prefer it when you’re your usual tactless, intrepid self,” Draco murmured, stepping closer to breathe in Harry's scent. He closed his eyes. A sharp breeze whisked past them then, ushering Harry's smell shamelessly into Draco's nostrils, assaulting his senses it seemed. The vampire paused, as if basking in it for a moment, before cracking open his eyes that were now ablaze with want. “How far can I push you before this fragile new change of heart falters and you begin to flee again?”
Harry supposed it made sense that Draco was waiting for that, it had happened so many times before now, after all. *But I won't be a coward anymore, no matter how afraid I am of inadvertently laying myself bare to him, vulnerable to heartbreak.* Terror gnawed at his senses with every moment they were together, but the bliss was fast winning the fight to root him in place. He had faced more terrifying horrors than heart-ache, hadn't he?

Chewing his lip for a fleeting moment, Harry stepped closer, spanning the gap between him and Draco. He opened his mouth to speak but could force no coherent sound out, his words seemed to have lodged somewhere in his throat.

Vivid silver eyes scanned his expression, gauging the purpose of his movement, no doubt. Lucky for him that Malfoy had been right about at least one thing, he knew him better than he'd thought. “Is this my invitation to test your boundaries?” the vampire asked. Harry's eyes dropped to those lips, they were hovering just a few inches from his own now.

“As far and as hard as you dare,” Harry challenged quietly. Draco swept in then, as if carried by a breeze himself and Harry's entire body shuddered in apprehension of pleasure as he breathed in that musky scent. Those lips ghosted over his own, foreshadowing the kiss he was furtively hungering.

Suddenly, the wind assaulted them with another, sharp burst and this time, Draco stiffened, a look of profound horror touching his usually cocky face. Just as Harry's lips parted to ask him what was wrong, however, a bone-chilling howl tore through the night, piercing the quiet village with foreboding. Harry had heard that kind of ravenous cry before and it didn't belong to those hellish hounds they'd encountered in the forests with their cloaked masters. This was undoubtedly a werewolf. The night where Remus had changed before his eyes and unwittingly tried to kill him would forever remain imprinted in his brain.

“A werewolf,” Harry murmured, his eyes scanning the world around them frantically as he heard chaos begin to erupt in the village.

“Greyback,” Draco corrected, that revelation much worse than simply any other werewolf. Particularly if the way Draco's voice twitched was any indication. Harry watched him worriedly for a moment, wondering how Draco would feel when faced with the creature that had tortured him for days on end. But that train of thought was quickly silenced by another, shuddering howl.

“We need to get back to the castle,” Harry said hastily, glancing at the carriage. Draco said what he was thinking.

“Too slow, he'll be on us in an instant.” The doors of the *Three Broomsticks* and the other
surrounding building all began to glow warningly, their wards erected and shimmered against the sound of the on-coming threat. Harry could only hope that anyone not safely behind those doors was back at the castle already, but did not feel any urge for heroics that he could not handle, only a deep-set concern for his classmates. He knew he could not go rushing in blindly into danger to save people that might not even be there, he would not so easily go back on his promise to not take every problem on his own shoulders. Especially without a wand, he reminded himself.

“Are you very opposed to my carrying you?” Draco asked, his gaze studying the buildings, the shadows around them critically, as if any slither of darkness may be hiding the approaching beast.

Harry grunted. “Enough, but not enough to want to face Fenrir Greyback without a wand,” he murmured, marching towards the nervously fidgeting thestrals by the carriage and slamming his hand down on their rumps. The dull blow sent them fleeing into the darkness back up to Hogwarts. He couldn’t just leave them here to be werewolf food. He turned back to Draco then, approaching his back, but instantly, the vampire’s head shot in the opposite direction. Harry only had time to blink and the vampire had bolted forwards to stand before him, eyes riveted to the nearby building that just happened to be Madam Puddifoot’s.

“Too late,” was all that Draco could say, his right arm raised like a shield as a low, rumbling snarl that did not emanate from his vampire filled the air. The shadows above flickered and Harry glanced up, his heart stopping in his chest. A large, bulky frame clothed in thick, greying fur stood above them on the roof, silhouetted against the white, eerie moonlight.

Narrowed, gold eyes glistened menacingly as it stared down at them and Draco backed up, forcing Harry to move with him. Harry reached for his wand, drawing it regardless of the dangers of him using it. If it came down it, he would simply have to take the chance and use his magic to defend them.

Draco's lips drew back to expose pearly white fangs that had emerged in warning. A rumbling snarl of Draco's own making vibrated through the air. There could be only one reason why Fenrir Greyback was risking arrest by coming to the wizarding village most watched by the new ministry. Aurors are probably already on their way, Draco thought, taking another step back and keeping Harry behind him. He didn't doubt that his companion could and would defend himself, but he did doubt Harry's body's ability to fight off werewolf venom.

Suddenly, the beast on the roof dropped down onto the ground a few feet away. It glared menacingly for a few, stagnant moments, as if hoping to draw out the initial horror at his arrival. Draco knew that the creature could smell his fear as well as Harry’s, but he also had a strong suspicion that Greyback knew exactly where his fears stemmed from.
That form began to twist unnaturally then, the muzzle and animalistic arched hind legs morphing back into human shape with sickening crunching and fleshy sounds. He felt Harry wince in disgust behind him, and barely schooled his own features not to make the same movement. What kind of brute could have learnt to endure that kind of agony, that kind of twisted pain and not so much as cry out? There was not so much as a trace of humanity left inside Fenrir Greyback.

Finally, when the nauseating cracking and groaning of limbs had ended, a very naked, very dirty and very tall man was standing before them, ragged teeth bared in a sharp grin. “By the stink of your fear, I’d say you remember me fine,” Greyback barked with a dark laugh, his eyes still golden and glimmering in the darkness, reflecting the same sadistic pleasure Draco remembered from the dungeons.

“And by the stench of you I can't believe I didn't smell you coming a mile off,” Draco countered, fangs still bared, his own eyes burning an inhuman silver. He wouldn't let Greyback forget so easily that he wasn't dealing with a scared, pathetic human boy any longer. He was ashamed of every cry and tear he had shed, every moment he had begged for mercy. That time was his greatest shame; he would never be reduced to that again, never made vulnerable, by anyone.

*Except perhaps, by Harry,* his mind corrected quietly.

“What do you want?” Harry demanded from behind Draco, his wand still drawn and fully visible in the moonlight. The half moonlight, Draco realised, sparing a fleeting glance up to the sky. He hadn't heard of werewolves that had managed to learn to change at will instead of under the presence of the full moon. That was not good. Greyback could change at any moment, was an even greater threat than he had imagined. He poised his body, ready to attack at any moment, preparing himself.

*I can't let him near Harry,* he thought, knowing that Harry would be the one he attacked first; he was the only one present that was susceptible to the curse, after all.

Another bark of a laugh cut through the air. “Now, that would be telling, wouldn't it?” Greyback leered, taking a step closer, evidently unaffected by the fact that the only cover on his body was ground in mud and dirt.

“Well you can't be here for revenge,” Harry said, his voice unshaken by the werewolf’s presence. “You didn't give a shit about Voldemort or the Death Eaters. You hate wizards.”

“Yeah, but little scrawny ones like you are perfect for picking my teeth with,” Greyback growled, advancing toward them. Instead of pushing Harry back this time, Draco surged forward a snarl
tearing through his bared teeth like the warning of a savage animal. He was right in Greyback's face now, and fear or no fear, the beast was not getting past him. Greyback chuckled darkly. “Oh, someone's come into his fangs then,” he taunted, “I remember those pretty little teeth chattering with fear back during our time together.”

“You'll find that I'm a completely different person now,” Draco warned, staring challengingly into those golden eyes as if he were standing up to a yorkshire terrier rather than a werewolf. It wasn't that he wasn't afraid, he was, and he was certain that this werewolf's presence would always have that effect on his body, but he feared what the creature could do to Harry more than he feared what it could do to him. There were very few ways to kill a vampire but many to kill a wizard.

“Yes, you're a perfect little animal, just like me,” Greyback grinned, “A tainted beast.”

“He's nothing like you!” Harry hissed from somewhere behind Draco, his voice rich with loathing. Despite their situation, Draco could not help but feel oddly touched by that declaration. “I don’t know what the hell you came here for but I suggest you leave before the aurors get here.”

Greyback's gaze turned to Harry then, staring over Draco as if he weren't there. A malicious smile cracked his unwashed face. “You haven’t changed at all, have you, Potter? Still don't know when to shut up, do you?”

Draco could smell Harry's fury brewing, but his attention quickly flew back to his own swelling unease as Greyback added, “But rumour has it you're this vampire runt's first. That makes things a lot more interesting.”

Gnashing his teeth again, Draco drew Greyback's focus back to him. “Yes, that's right, he's mine. Back off.”

But the beast's rancid smile did not falter. “Ah, but you see a friend of mine has called in a favour,” he retorted darkly. And it was all of a sudden glaringly obvious who that 'friend' was – what the connection was here.

“Alaric,” Draco hissed.

“There is a brain in that air-head of yours then, runt,” Greyback laughed darkly.
“Why would you team up with Alaric?” Harry asked, “You hate wizards.”

“Common interests,” Greyback growled, “he has a vendetta against your vampire and I owe him from back during the war.” Draco felt Harry's eyes dart to him at that, but Draco did not tear his eyes from the werewolf. Werewolves held debts as seriously as wizards did, so what had Greyback done to owe Alaric such a risky favour?

“What does he want from me?” Draco demanded through clenched teeth, tired of these games.

“Your suffering, your pain,” Greyback sneered.

“Alaric said someone else is after me, who is it? Death Eaters?” Every one of those sharp, serrated teeth were visible as Greyback smiled menacingly in response.

“That would be telling, now wouldn't it?” With another rumbling chuckle, he stepped forwards. Draco snarled, his hand shooting out and slamming hard into the werewolf's chest. The beast of a man shuddered backwards, a venomous growl on his lips. “Don't make me snap those pinpricks off,” Greyback warned, glaring at Draco’s bared fangs. “You won't be much threat without those.”

“You'd be surprised,” Draco murmured darkly. He could see his strength had concerned Greyback, whatever he may see. He knew that a youngling shouldn't be as strong as he now was. *He didn't bank on Harry's power causing mine to grow exponentially, it seems.* Underestimating Harry Potter always had been evil's greatest mistake. It seemed that this fool hadn't learnt that lesson just yet. “I'll render you nothing more than a neutered puppy if you touch him.”

Suddenly, Greyback launched forwards, barrelling into Draco with a roar and sending them both flying across the muddy ground. Dirt flew everywhere, showering their surroundings with the impact of their collision. Large fangs gnashed scant inches from his face. He pressed his head hard into the unyielding earth in an effort to escape it, his hands flying up to seize the wolf's head.

Draco’s iron-hard fingernails gouged deep into that grimy flesh. He felt it give way, felt the brute's vile blood burst from the wounds and ooze from under his fingers. The metallic tang was foul on the air. He would know a werewolf's scent a mile after this. It reeked of death and dirt and dog all at once.

Pain didn’t seem to affect Greyback the same way however. That only made Draco want to hurt him more make him pay for every second he had suffered under his hands, begging for mercy that
never came. “You'll regret ever touching me, ever meeting you stinking mongrel!” Draco snapped, digging his fingers in deeper, feeling the bones of that skull groan under the pressure. Greyback howled with manic, sadistic laughter, tearing a scream from Draco's lips as two meaty fists seized his shoulders, slicing into his marble-hard flesh like butter.

Liquid fire burned through his body. The werewolf twisted his claws in the wounds they had created, tearing gaping holes in Draco's shoulders. With a grunt of searing pain, Draco threw himself upwards, slamming his knee hard up into the beast's groin. That made the creature roll off of him with a howl.

Scrambling to his feet, Draco flew to Harry's side, crouching down before him, eyes trained on the wolf just a few feet away. There was no time. The wolf was on them again, bolting through the air and before Draco could shove Harry out of the way, Greyback had them both beneath him, Draco sandwiched between them, the only thing between Harry and the werewolf's venom. Shoving fiercely upwards and throwing all of his strength into it, Draco fought to keep Greyback at arms length, he felt Harry's vulnerable body crushed beneath both of their weights, felt his body groan under the pressure. He snarled again, slamming his head hard into Greyback's. Something gave an audible crack, but the werewolf merely pressed harder against the restraints of Draco's arms.

“He's all that sustains you, isn't he?” Greyback hissed, spraying Draco's face with spittle. Draco winced. “He's your reason for being, and I could sever this precious bond you share, end your life in an instant with just one little bite.” His eyes glowed with malice as they focused on the man trapped beneath Draco's body, and Draco understood what Greyback meant instantly.

Werewolf blood would be no good to him, Draco and if Harry were turned, Draco would eventually starve to death without him. That blood would not offer him sustenance any longer. But that was not his biggest concern right now. Whatever Alaric had sent Greyback here for; the werewolf was uncontrollable and would do whatever his foul instincts suggested, debt or no debt. He was like a rabid dog starved of chaos and finally let off the leash.

It happened in slow-motion then. With a blood-thirsty cry, Greyback threw his head forwards, fangs flying for Harry's throat. Draco shoved hard at the heavy body above, sank his nails into the hard flesh of the wolf's stomach. Bracing himself for the pain, he lurchied sideways, throwing his own flesh under Greyback's fangs in place of Harry's.

Harry's eyes widened as it happened above him and he was powerless to stop it. He watched with horror, screamed at the top of his lungs as Greyback's ragged teeth sank into Draco's throat. Blood splattered his glasses, flying from the vicious wound along with a chilling cry from Draco when the wolf shook him like a ragdoll. Harry felt more than saw Draco's hands scrambling for purchase, to hurt, to wound, anything to get Greyback off of him, but the wolf had a grip on him now. He
Swallowing the panic that threatened to rise in his throat like bile and choke him, Harry's fingers tightened around his fallen wand. “Silverae Laceratum!” He screamed with all of the power in his being. A blinding silver light tore through the air and exploded like a firework. The fractures of silver shrapnel zinged down like missiles locked on their targets.

Greyback howled as the silver rained down on his flesh in a furious hail. The beast threw himself back with a snarl. The second that they were free, Harry rolled quickly, taking Draco with him and covering the vampire with his own body, protecting him from the downpour of silver. There was a moment then, in which they were laying on top of each other in the dirt, Harry’s heart hammering frantically, pressed against Draco’s ribcage with their faces a mere centimetre apart. Those eyes were alight with the reflection of the silvery explosion and Harry was stunned to stillness for a fleeting second that felt like an eternity.

Another snarl from the wounded werewolf snapped Harry from his Draco-induced daze and realized that the rain of silver had ended. He bolted to his feet, dragging Draco with him. “We have to get to the gates,” he gasped, his body shaking with spasms of magical aftershock. He felt dizzy with the sheer force of the power thundering against the cage of skin and bone. But this was not the time to lose himself to magical exertion – or practice Snape’s calming technique.

For a moment, Harry thought that the vampire might ask him if he was strong enough to hold onto him, but before Harry could even scowl, Draco had seized his arms. Throwing him sharply across his back, the vampire flew across the muddy path, Harry hastened to lock his quavering arms around that neck as the wind pounded on his face, threatening to tear him straight off Draco’s back at the speed they were going.

A piercing, pained and furious howl filled the air again and the sound of footsteps slamming into the mucky earth signalled Greyback’s pursuit of them. Harry squinted through the brute force of the rain and could just make out the hazy shape of the Hogwarts gates drawing nearer with every second. Draco was definitely faster than he had been last time he had run with him, that was the only coherent thought Harry could decipher through the panic and magical tremors that were coursing through him.

“The gates!” He grunted through his clenched teeth, fighting off the fitful shaking. “They’re protected, we just have to get through them!” Of course, Draco knew this, but Harry had to say – do something, anything besides just hang off of him like cargo. He felt far too weakened by that spell. His entire body clenched with inner fury. How had he failed to harness himself so spectacularly in Snape’s lesson? He was in serious trouble!

They were nearer now; the gleaming bluish lights were clear as day hovering around the gates – as...
were the straggling students lumbering with drunken clumsiness along the path. His chest constricted with horror.

“I can’t, Harry,” Draco called back to him, sensing his source of unease, no doubt. “He’s too close. I have to get you through the gates!”

“You can’t let him hurt them!” Harry insisted, already struggling to get off Draco’s back. He couldn’t let the bastard hurt anyone right before his very eyes. Magic or no magic.

“Greyback is after you—”

“And he’ll go for them the moment I’m out of range because he knows it’d kill me to see them die!” Harry was almost bellowing now, despite knowing Draco could’ve heard a whisper even with the wind howling in their ears and Greyback snarling and snapping at their heels close behind.

Harry’s fingers clenched tighter into the fabric over Draco’s chest where they had previously clung to for extra purchase, his jaw set as he hissed out, “Please. For me.”

With a rumbling, ragged sound that was part snarl, part pained cry, Draco threw Harry from his back and tossed him through the gates as if he were a ragdoll. Harry grunted as he hit the ground with a thunk and scrambled backwards on his arse in the dirt, ensuring he was completely enclosed in the protection of the grounds. The blur that was Draco wasn’t even visible to Harry’s eyes. The next that he knew of his vampire was the tangle of inebriated bodies that suddenly landed a few feet away from him within the boundaries of the castle.

With his head swivelling round in search of the vampire, Harry jumped nearly clean out of his skin when two cool hands touched his face, firmly tilting it upwards until he was staring right into vibrant silver eyes. “You’re shaking,” Draco breathed, his voice unnaturally even and yet ragged with a panic similar to Harry’s.

Harry tried to force his body to relax, tried to stop the magic from pounding its fists against his ribcage. He closed his eyes, drawing back within himself in an attempt to find the calm Snape had spoken of the other day, but the magic was throttling him. He couldn’t breathe!

The fingers that had his chin captive squeezed harder. With a wince, he opened his eyes to find Draco’s so very close to his once more. “The magic is scaring you more than the bloody werewolf. You need to stop panicking, I can taste it,” Draco hissed, “If you don’t calm yourself down, Potter,
Greyback will be the least of your problems.”

At the mention of the werewolf’s name, Harry’s head whipped back around. At that moment, the beast had reached the gates. It skidded to a halt, stalking the boundary like a dog gone mad that had finally reached the end of its long leash. The gates stood open, but the magic of the wards would not let him put so much as a paw onto the grounds. He snarled and howled, the drunken students nearby cried with horror and scrambled to their feet.

Dimly, Harry recognized Lavender Brown, the Patil twins and Seamus and Dean, none seemed to have realized that Harry and Draco were even there, but they had certainly noticed the werewolf snapping at the boundary line, even as drunk as they were.

Suddenly, Draco’s hands were either side of his head and had forced him to face the vampire once more. He struggled, he sneered in irritation but could not escape Draco’s grasp. “Get off of me!” He demanded. “You only make it worse, you know! Snape was mental to recommend you to help me, every time I’m around you make me–”

A smooth thumb caressed his ranting lips and he stopped, staring wide-eyed and confused at the odd look that had crossed Draco’s face. The digit on his lips trailed down slowly, leaving a feather-light line down his chin, neck and chest, until a cold palm lay flat over his heart. Harry inhaled sharply as his body throbbed at the touch.

“D-Don’t!” He hissed out. “Even – even that, it doesn’t help me relax, you twit. It only makes my heart pound all the more!” He was mortified to admit it even, but he had no choice. He had to make Draco understand, had to get the vampire away from him. Whether he’s pissing me off or feeling me up, it makes my heart pound like I’m under attack, he can’t help me here, Harry thought frantically.

Escape seemed impossible, however, as Draco drew nearer, resting his forehead against Harry’s. “That isn’t what this kind of touching is. Relax. Match your breathing to mine.” The vampire, of course, not requiring air, had no trouble at all schooling his merely habitual breathing to a slow, steady pace, one that Harry could not help but listen to when it was dusting his chest and throat in an oddly soothing way. He swallowed hard but concentrated on matching his breathing to Draco’s.

It had been an impossible task, to calm his breathing back in Snape’s office but it was easier now that he had a beat on which to focus. Draco’s calming breaths coerced his own into a tranquil beat.

“Keep doing that,” Draco murmured, his voice a quiet, lulling drawl that made a little colour touch Harry’s face. Even amidst the chaos, the panic, he could not help being embarrassed by the
intimacy thick in the vampire’s voice. He glanced sideways as a particularly blood-thirsty snarl tore from Greyback just a few feet away, but Draco’s free hand tugged one of Harry’s to his own, cool chest, so that the unnaturally sluggish heartbeat thudded dully against his warm palm.

“Ignore him,” Draco commanded, his tone still smooth and persuasive. “There is nothing else, no other sound except my heartbeat. Nothing.”

Harry blushed profusely at that, and though he schooled his breathing into an even rhythm like Draco’s, his body still shook, his skin still glowed with the ominous light of his power seeking escape. The cool hand pinning his own to Draco’s chest pressed a little harder. “Close your eyes, just breathe. Fill the space around you with light and air and nothing else.”

Grateful for the chance to hide from Draco’s forceful gaze, Harry hurried to do as suggested, feeling his stomach roiling as the unbridled magic twisted his innards. He tried to push that unsettling sensation to the back of his mind, the vile noises from Greyback, the sounds of his drunken, schoolmates fleeing up to the castle. Light filled the space around his present thoughts, a shield against the anxiety, the panic threatening to allow his magic to swallow him whole.

The shield was not impenetrable. He could still sense the sources of his panic, his fear, still feel the magic reaching up with quivering hands to strangle him where he sat. But there was also Draco’s hands, his breath, everything so cool and soothing, like a breeze tearing through the stifling heat of summer.

Control was still an issue, as was the power bursting to escape him. He was still dangling on the precipice of disaster, but the ledge he was clinging to had strengthened. Then, that voice swept through him again, enforcing his grip on his inner calm as surely as the hand still pinned his own to the vampire’s chest. He wasn’t even sure what Draco was saying, but it felt good drifting over his ears. Never before had anyone made him feel this...at peace. Granted, it was not anywhere near complete tranquillity, it was a flawed calmness, but it was the most peaceful he had ever remembered being in a long, long time.

Then, at that moment, he felt the subtle presence of a wand tip at his temple. “Aequuserium!”

Suddenly, the magic fighting for release was blown back from the bars of its prison by the unyielding, hurricane force of the spell. His barrier of pure white calmness was grasped with cool hands and spread across his entire being, until the aching, terrifying force of the swelling magic had been forced back into slumber.

Harry gasped for air, as if just breaking the surface of a placid lake. He reached out, grabbing for
the first thing he could find, his fingers sinking into Draco's arms while he tried to process what had just happened. He was on his knees now, Draco doing the same so that their faces were level once again. The barrier of calm he had erected had faded now, but it had done its job. The magic had retreated – with the help of Draco's spell.

*He must've known what spell Snape was going to teach me,* Harry thought, realising that it must've been the very same spell Snape had said required peace of mind to be effective. Only now, did Harry understand what that had meant.

“T-That was—”

“Are you alright?” Draco asked, his eyes searching Harry's for sign of the spell's effectiveness. Thick embarrassment rose in his throat at the memory of how intimate Draco had looked and sounded, how gently he had coerced him into calmness.

Glancing away, Harry scrambled to his feet. *No one has ever made me feel that calm, that safe,* he thought, not sure what to make of that.

“You were able to relax quite well, considering,” Draco pressed, “I thought you said you were rubbish in Snape's lesson.” Harry said nothing, but the sight of a self-confident smirk on Draco's face told him that he didn't have to. “Or is it simply that you couldn't quite manage it without me?”

Harry glared. “You gave me something to focus on, that's all,” he insisted. “It's not like I've had much practise, being calm and…contented, Snape just expected me to know how that felt.”

“Most people our age have relaxed at some point in their lives, you know, Harry,” Draco said carefully, his tone betraying his underlying venom towards whatever had kept Harry from experiencing that. “I'm glad that I helped you, however.”

Risking a glance back at the blond, Harry saw that concentrated stare again and quickly looked back to the gates. His heart stopped. Greyback had vanished. The second he opened his mouth, however, Draco cut across him. “Perhaps I should sit in on your next lesson with Snape and see if I can offer some assistance?” he murmured, his voice much closer than Harry remembered him being.

“You, me and Snape all alone in his chambers does not exactly bring back fond memories,” Harry winced.
Draco smirked. “I’m thankful that me groping you is always at the forefront of your mind, but that wasn’t what I was suggesting,” the vampire mused, “I can help to focus you while you're still trying to get the hang of controlling your magical outbursts.” The way he sniffed the air subtly suggested to Harry that Draco did not entirely mind the magical outbursts at the moment, since they were giving him a direct bridge closer to Harry, but he pushed that thought from the forefront of his mind. He’d built many bridges tonight with Draco, most of his own accord. He didn't intend to start making backwards steps now.

In the mean time, Draco seemed to be pressing in exactly the opposite direction – for more.

“And don't forget, I believe you owe me for saving those miserable classmates of yours,” Draco drawled, a lazy, suggestive smile tugging at the corners of his lips while he stared into Harry's face. “You said for me’, didn't you?”

Harry scoffed. “Don’t be ridiculous, you great prat,” he snapped, turning his attention back to the vacated space beyond the gates once more. “We have more important things to worry about. Where did he go?”

As if only just recalling the situation they were in, Draco turned his attention to the gate. He inhaled tentatively, as if it were not a smell he particularly liked, before his head whipped back in the other direction.

“What’s the matter?” Harry asked quickly, “is it him?”

Rather than answer, Draco seemed to follow his nose, setting off at a brusque pace up the muddy path. Harry scrambled to keep up with him, luckily Draco wasn’t moving at vampire speed, or else he’d have no hope of even keeping him in sight. He felt alright now the magic had retreated back into its cage, the overwhelming weakness and shivers had vanished, Draco had helped him with that.

*Stop thinking about how good it felt, now isn’t the time,* he scolded himself, running after Draco now as he watched the vampire bolt across the wooden bridge and take a sharp left at the end. He was heading toward the boat house, Harry realised with confusion. But as he shot round the corner after him, he almost ran straight into his drunken classmates, that didn’t even seem to realise the danger they had been in.

“Oh, Harry!” Seamus cried with inebriated amusement, staggering backwards as Harry narrowly
avoided a collision with him. “Eyes open, yeah? We brought some firewhisky back from the
Broomsticks – come and have a few with us.” He waved the bottle in question at Harry.

Harry glared at his friends, not even able to comprehend how people could drink themselves into
this state, to the point where they didn’t even seem to realise that they had nearly been ripped to
shreds by a werewolf a few moments ago. *You’re definitely not a normal teenager, Harry thought, I
should be out getting pissed with them and enjoying my youth, shouldn’t I?* That thought was the
only thing that allowed him to refrain from snatching the bottle out of his friend’s hand and tossing
it into the lake.

At least they’re too rat-arsed to realise what happened with Draco though.

“It’s late, you should get back to the common room and drink that there, Snape will be doing his
rounds to snap up anyone wandering the halls.” It was true that they had no ‘curfew’ as such, as
legal adults, but one of their responsibilities that accompanied that privilege was that they could not
wander about the castle at night disturbing the other students. The mention of Snape seemed to
register in even their intoxicated brains.

“Oh no!” Lavender cried with a hiccup, tugging frantically on Parvati’s arm. *They didn’t notice
Greyback snapping at their heels until Draco had shoved them through the gate but they blanch at
Snape’s name.* Harry barely abstained in shaking his head in dismay. If only the potions master
catching them making a ruckus after hours were his only problem.

Casting a quick glance to the stairs leading down to the boat house, Harry advanced in the
direction Draco had gone, calling back to the others, “Quick, he’s coming, I’ll distract him!”

The girls screeched and they, along with Dean and Seamus scrambled towards the main doors.
Content that they were safe within the castle walls, at least until the aurors arrived, Harry flew
down the steps. Draco was nowhere in sight. His heart pounded. Had he smelled Greyback? Here
of all places? How did he get inside the grounds? And why did Draco bolt off without him? It
wasn’t like the domineering vampire at all. *I can’t get him to piss off when I want him to,* Harry
thought as he took the winding stone steps down to the boat house two at a time. How far could
Draco have gotten in the few moments he had been delayed?

And why is my bloody heart pounding at the thought of something happening to him?

The blanket of dark clouds above had swept across the moon now, plunging the world around him
into darkness. He strained to see where he was going, stumbling on the stairs in his near blindness,
only just saving himself from a fall by clawing frantically at the stone balustrade. He was reluctant
to use his wand again, however, even for something as simple as *Lumos*. He had only managed to call himself back from explosion with Draco's help and was certain he wouldn't be able to do it himself yet. Cringing at that lack of independence, he pushed on through the dimness. The torches spotted along the stairs did help to shed some light, thankfully.

Those stairs had never taken so long to descend in his life. The moment his feet touched level ground he flew forwards around the boat house's structure, the dark lake surrounding it like a black void without the moon to illuminate its surface.

Gasping for breath, Harry skidded to a halt when he saw Draco, standing at the very edge of the waterfront. He looked almost haunting in the darkness, his hair swept back in a handsome, tame disarray whilst his silver eyes gleamed in the darkness with a cat-like glimmer. Cautiously, Harry approached him, stopping just to the side of the silent vampire and frowning when he did not look at him.

Draco always looked at him. Something was wrong.

“You could've waited for me,” Harry part gasped, part snapped. Still, Draco did not even acknowledge his presence; he merely continued to stare out across the dark abyss of the lake, towards the very edge of the forest in the distant shoreline. There was a vague look twisting the vampire's expression. Harry definitely felt uneasy now.

“What's the matter with you?” he demanded, seizing Draco's arm and yanking him roughly so that he was in front of him. Still those glowing eyes focused on something in the distance. Unease bubbled in his gut like a vile, searing acid. It was like the vampire was in some kind of trance. He could feel the anxiety swelling in his throat, pressing viciously on his voice so that it cracked when he cried, “Draco! Look at me! *LOOK AT ME!*” With a snarl torn between frustration and panic, Harry tried to shake the vampire back to his senses, but it was like trying to move stone.

With terror settling in, making his bones quiver, Harry blindly threw himself into the first idea that came into his head, as usual. He slammed his fist into the rough stone wall of the boat house. A hiss of pain left his lips as he drew his hand back, staring at his broken, bleeding knuckles. It stung, but a sudden movement from the vampire beside him made it worth it.

Draco's eyes, still glowing in the dimness were fixed on him now, on his face and then on the blood weeping from his hand. Relief whisked through Harry's lungs as he heard Draco inhale the scent of his blood deeply, as if savouring a beverage.

“Draco?” Harry asked carefully, and those silver orbs rose to his face, as filled with desire as
always. Whatever had seized hold of the vampire had lost its grasp on him now. “What just happened?”

Staring at him for a moment as if trying to remember, Draco dropped his gaze back to Harry's wounded fist. Conscious of the pain now, Harry tucked his hand behind him whilst taking a step back towards the open entrance to the boat house, giving Draco space to think without being inebriated by the scent of his blood.

“I just smelled…something. Something familiar, I think, although I cannot remember where I knew it from. It was calling me…summoning me and I just felt like…like I had to follow it,” Draco explained, sounding as if he weren’t quite sure how he knew this. “It was almost…no; it was like I didn't even think to question where the call was leading me, or where it was from. I just followed.”

Harry frowned. Wherever the origin of the call, it couldn't be anything good to take hold of Draco's senses like that. His stomach was still clenched, and he fidgeted awkwardly on his feet in an attempt to hide the concern that was surely written all over his face. If he hadn't gotten to Draco sooner, what might have happened? He could have lost him, and for some reason, the very thought of that made him feel quite sick. His fists tightened at that thought and a shallow hiss tugged through his lips as he was reminded of the wound on his hand.

Abruptly, Draco's hand shot out with supernatural speed, tugging his injured limb up until the vampire was staring at the offending lesion across his skin. I could've lost you, was all Harry could think as he watched those hooded eyes survey his flesh intently and those lips lower to brush across his knuckles. For a moment there, when Draco had been beyond his reach, he’d lost the ability to breathe. I could’ve lost you without ever realising what this is that we have. It stung at first, a sharp pain that reminded him of their dangerous situation, allowing him to stay sober as that mouth and tongue kissed away the blood and hurt until all that was left behind was pristine, unmarred skin.

“Y-You’re…” Harry gasped out unsteadily, “You’re far too easily preoccupied with me when there are bigger things to concern yourself with. Something just stole control of your body, what the hell would’ve happened if I hadn’t found you and snapped you out of it?”

“Hmm, it is curious that my bond with you was stronger even than that overwhelming call,” Draco mused aloud.

Frustration and unease rippled through Harry's body. He yanked his hand sharply from Draco’s grip, glaring at him. “Could you at least pretend to give a shit?!” Harry demanded. “You want me to believe that your – your feelings are truly yours but when you can’t even focus on a problem infinitely more important than me, can you really blame me for doubting that?”
Draco inclined his head to the side, as if truly not understanding what he was saying. “Have you never been the most important thing to someone? Is the notion so foreign to you?” he retorted. “There is nothing more important than you. Is it so unbelievable that I might care for someone else more than I care for myself?”

Harry growled through clenched teeth at that accusatory tone. “That’s not what I meant, don’t twist what I’m saying. I’m saying if you want me to believe that your feelings are real, prove it to me. How can you not be disturbed by the fact that some mysterious call just summoned you? Took away your will?”

Draco raised a brow at that. “Don’t be ridiculous, of course I’m disturbed by it. We all experience our emotions differently, just because I don’t explode with panic and charge into danger hot-headedly doesn’t mean I’m not concerned by this, Potter. I was a death eater for nearly two years – I learnt to deal with my fears differently. You seem to think that there’s only one way to experience emotions, and that’s your way.”

“Stop accusing me of being a bigot every time I say something you dislike,” Harry snarled, ruffling his hair in irritation. “Bloody hell, you’re more sensitive than a girl. It’s unbearable, you overreact at every little thing I say or do–”

“In that case, we are even more perfect for each other than I had imagined,” Draco drawled, turning away from Harry and moving back to the edge of the dock again. Harry grunted under his breath, opening his mouth to bite out another retort, but then he caught sight of the spiteful, open wound that Greyback’s teeth had torn into that shoulder – a wound that had been intended for him and his mouth snapped shut.

It must have hurt, but Draco was trying to ignore the pain to save face in front of him. Harry winced as he paid attention to the bloody mess for the first time that evening. It wasn’t healing as well as a normal injury might have, perhaps that was because of Greyback’s werewolf venom, but whatever the reason, it caused him his argument to die on his lips. Instead, he swiveled on his heel and marched straight into the darkened boat house. He didn’t want to argue, he was probably even a little in the wrong but he was sick and tired of Draco acting like that ‘wrongness’ was one-sided whenever they argued.

With a weary sigh, Harry ran his hand down his face, wondering how on earth he and Draco seemed so connected to each other one moment, and so perfectly wrong for each other next. Maybe it’s like Hermione says, and we’re both such volatile people that not only is the sex between us explosive with passion, everything else is too. Again, he found himself unsure if this passion was a good thing or a bad thing, and if he could live with this on a constant basis.

The darkness helped to clear his head, to banish the irritation and overwhelming fear that had
gripped him so tightly it had *throttled* him from the moment he’d been unable to reach the vampire. He loathed how concerned he’d been then, how greatly it had affected him. But most of all, he loathed how the first best evening he’d had in an age had been shattered by the meddling of others.

Alaric, Greyback and whoever else it was that they said was coming after him personally, they would hang over their heads, linger in the background like a foul smell until they got rid of them once and for all. And despite not knowing much else, not knowing whether he could live with the intensity, or whether he would live with Draco or not, he knew he couldn’t live like that anymore. He couldn’t live in hiding, in apprehension again; he’d endured that for too long when Voldemort had been alive.

*And the only way we’re going to get rid of them is if we work together,* Harry thought, setting his jaw in determination as the darkness calmed him, enabled him to think clearly. *Draco was right in that together we probably have the ability to do near-enough anything. That scares me, that power, almost as much as the thought of losing him scared me.*

*Which is why you overreacted and lashed out at him, again,* the Draco-sounding voice at the back of his mind added, driving an exhausted sigh from his lips. He would have to apologise to Draco for exploding like that. *He’ll probably be giddy to know the reason why,* Harry thought dully. But once it was done, they could decipher how to face this – end this once and for all.

Swallowing his pride, Harry turned around slowly with the intent to do just that, but as he did so, a blinding flash of bluish light crashed across the entrance to the boat house just before him. He leapt back in shock, seizing hold of one of the ropes suspending the rowing boats from the ceiling to save himself from flying backwards into the section of the lake the boat house was built around. The flash faded, but in its place was a glowing magical barrier, neatly covering the entrance – *and the exit,* Harry’s mind supplied.

Draco was on the other side, Harry could see him throwing himself at the barrier, trying to break through, hear his voice calling his name. But Harry’s eyes were focused on the dark figure that was stood between himself and the wall of magic. He shifted agitatedly to the side, looking for something to use as a weapon, another means of escape. He knew there was a portrait at the far side of the building that would lead back into the castle, but as if guessing his thoughts, the man before him raised his wand menacingly, silently bidding him to stay still.

He didn’t know why this man was here, with his wand aimed at him as if he were his greatest enemy, didn’t know what was going on, but Harry knew enough to be wary and he froze on the spot. His eyes flickered briefly to Draco, who was still enough to be wary and he froze on the spot. His eyes flickered briefly to Draco, who was still pounding furiously on the seemingly unbreakable barrier, the magic hissed and spat ferociously as it came into contact with Draco’s skin. The smell of burning flesh filled Harry’s nostrils.
“Draco, stop!” Harry screamed, but as he surged forwards, the man moved into his path, his wand pointed directly between Harry’s eyes. At that moment, the moon broke free of its cloudy prison, illuminating both the frantic vampire, unable to reach him and the dark man standing before him. Despite the fact that he could not use magic without dangerous repercussions, despite the fact that Draco could not reach him, that he was entirely alone, Harry lifted his chin, defiance shining in his eyes as the moonlight caught them.

“What do you want, Zabini?” Harry demanded in a coarse, steady murmur. An odd look was on the dark boy's face, illuminated by the ethereal glow of the magical barrier effectively keeping Draco away from them.

The man walked slowly towards him, a lackadaisical air about his every step. As if he couldn't care less what happened next. There was an odd look on his face, an expression not dissimilar to the one he had worn that day at the quidditch pitch. Something was off about everything, even the way the man’s voice sounded as he said, “lately you've been so far up Draco's arse you haven't been able to see sunlight.” There was a distinctive distance within those words, an unnatural one that set Harry on edge. Something told him he wasn’t just dealing with Blaise Zabini at that moment. And then, the man was speaking again. “Since we returned he's barely said a word to us, his friends but he's followed you around like a whipped dog. So tell me, Potter, why is that?”

Harry scowled. Perhaps there was more Zabini in there than he’d first thought. “I think Draco told you once, Zabini, but since you're so thick, I'll say it again. It’s none of your business.”

With a smirk, Zabini replied mockingly, “oh ‘Draco’, now is it? How interesting. Tell me Potter, what did it take for Slytherin’s notorious philanderer to prise apart the prudish chosen one's quivering thighs?”

Harry recoiled, revolted by that statement. “You're repulsive,” he snarled. “Just what the hell do you want? Or are you here to complain about how I’ve stolen Draco, is that it? What are you, jealous or something? I suppose death eater spawn aren't quite as trendy now the war is over? Is that it? You’re not quite as popular with the ladies as you once were so you're chasing around after some arse?”

A growl of fury tore through the air and Zabini leapt towards him, wand drawn. Harry instinctively reached for his own wand, but remembered just in time not to cast a spell. Diving into a barrel roll, he dodged Zabini's cutting curse and bolted to his feet, sprinting up the stairs up into the rafters of the boat house.

Draco was roaring with fury now, and Harry felt the boat house tremble, felt the walls themselves groan. He didn’t have time to glance down at the magically sealed doorway, however, footsteps scrambling on the stairs after him signalled Zabini’s approach.
“In your dreams you prick!” the man snarled as he lunged for him. “You're up to something, with Draco. You had something to do with that howling in the forest! You're the reason that my family are in Azkaban!”

Giving a bitter smirk then, Harry edged backwards, looking for an opportunity to survive this next turn of events. He had to avoid using magic at all costs and he was trapped between an armed Zabini and a sharp fall into the water below.

“But that's not just it, is it?” he murmured, “Who sent you here? That can't be the only reason you'd go to such measures, just because a coward like you can't do anything without mummy and daddy to hold your hand–”

“At least I have parents, Potter!” A bright red light flew at Harry then. He ducked and stumbled. He was on the very edge of the upper level now, the water that the boats were lowered into, the water that lead out into the lake glistened in the dimness below. Maybe he could swim under that barrier?

“I have them, and mine weren't low life criminals either,” Harry sneered. “I never wanted anyone to suffer, but I'm not sorry for your parents being in Azkaban – they supported Voldemort, helped him to torture and kill people. They deserve to be in there!” Another dazzling red light. Harry grunted as he dropped to the floor to avoid it, his chest bruised by the impact. He crawled forwards to put some space between him and the edge of the lake, but not enough. Zabini was suddenly right in front of him.

“What's the matter, Potter?” Zabini sneered, glancing to the wand still clutched uselessly in Harry's hand. “You're making this too easy, where's your fight gone? You're almost taking the fun out of it.” Suddenly, Zabini's arm swung out, his elbow cracking into Harry's gut with a sharp, winding blow. Harry gasped, his arms instinctively flying around his stomach. His wand dropped uselessly to the floor. “Almost,” Zabini added sadistically.

Harry shoved hard at Zabini's larger body but then blinding pain stole Harry's vision. He stumbled backwards in agony, his body ricocheting from the blow of Zabini's fist slamming into his face.

A choked, gasp of pain tore from his lips, he glanced down at his wand through his broken glasses. He couldn't use it, he couldn't! All of this was too severe for someone like Zabini to have plotted, something wasn't right. Something else was at work here. Regardless, he wasn't the same person he once was, he wasn't going to think twice about defending himself, whatever evil was at work. He wanted to live. He would live.

Suddenly, with a burst of strength and a roar of adrenaline, Harry threw himself at Zabini, his shoulder cracking into that chest and throwing the man backwards. Staggering senselessly, Harry struggled to see how Draco was fairing with the barrier below. It was spitting frantically now, searing Draco's flesh as he fought against it. He had not given up but he had not triumphed, either.
There would be no one to save him this time. *The one time I'm ready to let someone help, typical,*
he thought, pain throbbing in his now bloody nose and aching gut. He couldn't exactly say he didn't
deserve it though. He needed to–

“**Incarcerous!**”

“Argh!” Harry cried as thick ropes appeared from nowhere, coiling around him like the body of a
boa constrictor. He grunted. The ropes squeezed, crushing the air from his lungs until he could do
nothing but gasp frantically for breath. Zabini was before him again now, malicious intent in his
eyes.

“I'm not the only one after you, you know,” Zabini smirked, “there are so many of us plotting to
end you for what you've done, *Chosen One.*” Zabini placed a hand on his chest then, and Harry's
arms tensed where they were bound at his side. “Just remember that it was me that finished you, as
you panic, as you fight with all you have left not to die. It's a shame I won't be able to hear you
scream.”

Harry glared stubbornly. If Zabini was waiting for him to plead for his life, he'd be waiting an
eternity. With all the defiance left in him, Harry spat in the dark boy's face.

A snarl of fury rumbled in that chest and the once slytherin had only one final answer. He shoved
hard at Harry's chest, sending him flying back into the water. Harry heard Draco's voice scream,
“Harry!” and he managed to draw one, quick breath before he was plunged into the abyss of the
lake. Water swallowed him, swirling around him in a mess of confusion, pain and icy cold. He felt
the life slowly strangled from him, frozen and crushed and on fire all at once. All while his vision
darkened. Well… He had died once already, hadn't he? What was one more time?

*                      *                      *

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*The world outside the tent was so cold that a mist was forming, not unlike the mist whispering
through Harry's lips. He shuddered, pulling the blanket that hung around his shoulders tighter to
his skin, though he did not move from where he sat on the floor in the doorway.*

*It was apparent to him that he hadn't spoken or even moved for hours, that Hermione and Ron
were staring at him from where they sat at the table, surrounded by the destroyed horcruxes.
Thanks to his friends and Snape, that was all of them gone. All except Nagini. Even the one that
had been inside him had vanished. He closed his eyes against the harsh world, trying not to
remember that moment. In vain. The memories slid through like a knife sliding into butter.*

*He had known the truth for some time, he realised. But it was only after Snape had arrived with
the missing sword of Gryffindor and Ravenclaw's diadem, after their escape from Gringotts that*
he had truly known. When the man had helped them to vanquish the cup and the diadem and he had felt that emptiness at their destruction he could ignore his suspicions no longer. He was a horcrux. He’d had to die and in the end, Snape had been the one to do it, had used some of the Voldemort’s power buried in his dark mark in combination with spells and modified poisons to do it.

Perhaps that was why the man had found them. That and he had managed to steal the sword from a dead Griphook's hand from behind Voldemort’s back. The man had always known Harry had to die, and despite all his faults, the man had arrived to ease that horrid realisation. To help.

Harry shivered harder, pressing his slightly faded scar into his knees where they were drawn up to his body. Pressing hard, until it hurt. He needed the hurt for a moment, needed to realise he was truly alive after being dead. It was all hazy now but there had been a potion, one without much hope for his survival. The horcrux was dead, slaughtered in the moment he’d wandered the crisp white oblivion of limbo. He had seen Dumbledore, seen the horcrux die but he had also seen Snape’s memories.

Due to the nature of the potion, the way in which they had channelled Voldemort's intent into the potion through Snape's dark mark, the torrent of memories had been an unexpected side-effect. And when the potion had started to work, when Harry had started to scream and writhe, Snape had pinned his arms to the chair and just stared into his eyes. That was all Harry could remember consciously.

Somehow the potion had taken into account Snape’s involvement, the fact that his body was used as a conduit Voldemort’s dark magic and in the moment that Harry’s life had flashed before his eyes, it had been mixed with images of Snape’s life. Harry’s mother! Harry squeezed his eyes tighter. That was just too much to think about on top of everything else. Snape, killing Dumbledore only because he’d asked, no demanded it. Snape in love with his mother?! And I was dead, and now I'm not...I think, Harry thought, rocking slightly back and forth.

Another sharp breeze tore through the opening in the tent he was staring out of, and he embraced it as it tore at his icy skin. It hurt. He needed that. That was what he’d felt in life. If it hurt, it meant he was truly alive again. In his limbo he had seen Dumbledore, his parents and Sirius. They were not here now. It was cold here despite the charmed blanket around him. It was real.

“Death does not mean the end,” a cool, soft drone murmured from beside him. Harry tore his gaze away from the outside world beyond the tent and looked up into Snape’s eyes. The man stood over him just as he had the first lesson of potions, towered above as if he were still the student and Snape still the teacher. That helped him a little to ground himself. Much more than Hermione and Ron’s coddling had.
“You still have work to do, Nagini and then the Dark Lord himself remain,” Snape continued.

Harry swallowed, moistening his dry throat before struggling to find his voice for the first time since his ‘death’. “I feel like I could sleep forever,” Harry murmured, his voice husky and rough with lack of use. “Stupid I know, after being dead.”

Snape glanced over to the two at the table before looking back to Harry again. “What you suffered was a very serious, very disturbing experience, Potter. I would not be surprised if this, combined with the numerous horrors you have seen, finally shatter you. But you have one more task, just one and then you may have the rest you deserve.”

Harry frowned. The masks had come off since Snape's arrival with the sword. There was no reason to be overbearing and hateful simply for the sake of it. Granted, the man was never nice but there was no unnecessary bile or loathing, only irritation and bitterness that, after seeing the man's memories, Harry could do nothing but respect.

He saw so much of himself in Snape that it brought a bad taste into his mouth when he thought of all the times he'd doubted his goodness. Severus Snape was the bravest man he knew. He stared into those dark eyes, on the verge of saying something about what he’d seen. But he decided against it at the last moment. Snape knew he'd seen them, knew that he understood and probably didn't care to face the humiliation of discussing his most private, darkest secrets. Harry could understand that.

“Only one task?” Harry said instead, confused by Snape's words.

“Your cohorts and I will end Nagini, I know of her location. It will be simple, but you must face Voldemort alone, you know this,” Snape said. Harry just nodded.

“Yeah, I…” He glanced back to Hermione and Ron, the two of them whispering to each other, lost in each other's eyes. Harry thought of Ginny then, a sad realisation touching his heart. He didn't look at her that way, or feel that urgent longing for her. He couldn't even truly say that he missed her now. He hadn't even thought of her in the moment he had died. That, amongst other things, was what had made everything crystal clear for him. He didn't love her like Ron and Hermione loved each other. Completely, desperately, both because of and in spite of their faults. Shoving that thought to the back of his mind, Harry continued. “I have a plan.”

Snape raised a brow. “Pray, do tell me of this great plan,” the man replied derisively.

“You, Hermione and Ron get the snake and in the mean time I walk right out into Voldemort's grasp. I finish this once and for all while I still have the energy left.”

Snape looked at the two at the table again, a flicker of concern in his eyes. “Both brave and
“My father, I know,” Harry bit out snappily. He knew that they both understood the reason for his tone.

“Albus,” Snape corrected, silencing Harry's bitterness. “You are a good man to have faced death and still be willing to walk straight back out to face it again for the sake of others. Perhaps what this world needs is a touch of foolish goodness to end this chaotic evil.” The man surveyed him for the first time ever then with respect and even a touch of concern in his face. “You plan to do this now, don't you?”

Harry didn't say anything, only plucked up his wand and shrugged off the blanket, before walking out of the tent. He had not made it a few paces before he heard Hermione and Ron's voices calling after him. Harry broke into a run. Throwing a stalling spell over his shoulder to delay their catching him, Harry flew down the dewy bank of the lake they had camped by.

The icy, piercing wind burned at his lungs, clawed at his skin as he ran and ran. His legs screamed, his body groaned but his heart was thudding with frantic madness. This was it, what he had lived, what he had survived death for. He was going to end all this suffering once and for all. When he was far enough from the defences Hermione had set up, Harry skidded to a halt and apparated. A sharp tug had him hurling through the world at warp speed. He clenched his eyes shut, his fingers locked in a vice like grip around his wand. He was tired and he was in pain, both physical and psychological, but it would be over soon, one way or another.

When he opened his eyes, he saw Malfoy Manor looming darkly before him. A terrifying beacon of hope – the end was in sight. Inhaling softly, Harry braced himself for what was to come and then said softly, “Voldemort.”

Suddenly, the air around him was filled with the sound of apparation. Death eaters had hold of him, summoned by the sound of their master's forbidden name. A sharp, blinding pain slammed into the small of his back and he screamed. His wand was torn from his grasp and then everything went black.

* * * *

From the smothering blackness, from the suffocating depths of the lake, Harry's body jerked with its final burst of life. Bubbles rushed from his mouth as he drowned, his body went into a panic at the prospect of a more final death and yet his mind was suddenly filled with life. With a desperate voice – thoughts. Draco's thoughts.
He couldn't make sense of them, couldn't make out any specific word except his name, his name laced into the frantic senseless mayhem. *I'm here,* he thought, his world swirling into blindness, everything obscured by the murky water around him. There was but a split second then, when he felt his body dying. How much time had passed now? Surely too long. It had felt like an eternity.

Suddenly he felt the water around him move, as if under a living being's power and just as he felt himself fading, two strong arms seized him roughly. He couldn't see or hear or smell anything except the water corroding his senses, stealing his life away. He felt suffocated and freezing and burning hot at the same time, that was, until he was pressed into a firm, powerful body. Draco?

*Me,* Draco's thoughts replied, and Harry thought he was saying something else, or perhaps this was all a hallucination, the kind people had before death, because his world faded away then at last.

~To Be Continued...
Charmer's Song

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

Spell explanation (all of my creation, please do not borrow or use without both my permission and crediting/linking back to me. Thanks):

Driaridium - a take on the word 'dry' for obvious reasons.

Torpus - Derived from the Latin word 'Torpeo' meaning, I believe 'numb'.

Censium Valetudus - Derived from the Latin word 'Valetudo' meaning health (generally bad health) and 'censeo' which, in Latin means I believe 'assess'.

: chapter fourteen:

CHARMER’S SONG

A sharp, blinding pain brought him spiralling back towards a glaringly bright light. The pain was his body colliding with cold, unforgiving stone. His head was throbbing, his lungs aching. He groaned in pain but could do no more than that as he felt the rope binding him burst into nothing at the sound of Draco's urgent, “Relashio!”

Harry gasped and spluttered, coughing up water and choking on his body's desperation for air. A harsh breeze of movement was his only warning before he felt Draco's hands on his chest. Abruptly, breath rushed into Harry's lungs, forced into him by the cool, hard lips against his own.

How peculiar, he thought hazily, as reality slowly bled back into view, that a vampire should breathe the life back into me. His head was still throbbing but he was breathing normally again. And although his vision was a tad blurry, his senses had returned. “W-Where are my glasses?” He forced out. The next thing he knew, his spectacles were being slid onto his nose and he could see a dripping wet Draco Malfoy hovering over him.

“Did I hear your thoughts?” Harry asked hazily as he sat up. Merlin his head hurt! “I thought we only had that when we shared blood?”
Draco was surveying him carefully, as if assessing his health. So intense was his roving gaze that it took him a moment to forge a reply. “We can't have entire conversations. In a time of need we share flashes, images and words, feelings – it's a vampire power, a link forged to ensure that I have more chance of finding you if you're in danger.”

He was still so close, his cool body was pressing against Harry's through the soaked folds of clothing so that he could feel every smooth, hard contour. Harry didn't feel as uncomfortable as he would've liked, either. Even with those wet blond locks hanging seductively into those smouldering eyes, framing that pale face.

“Thanks,” Harry chattered, starting to shake now with the cold autumn air on his wet body. “F-For saving me.”

Draco turned his wand on them both then, no touch of a smile on his face. “Driaridium!” He chanted and Harry felt a rush of warm air blast the cold dampness from his form. He touched his hair gingerly. It always stuck up more with drying spells, but at least he was warm and dry now.

“Thanks,” he said again, feeling quite stupid and a bit disorientated from his near-death experience. “Err, are you alright?” The wound at the vampire's shoulder looked even nastier this close up, he could see the blood oozing from the gaping wound, the skin an angry red as it tried to knit itself back together. Yes, vampires couldn't be affected by the curse of the werewolf's bite, but the venom in those fangs made healing a difficult and slow process.

Harry winced, it looked painful, just as the blistering mars on the blond's hands did. Those slender fingers and palms were a violent, sickening colour. The smell of burnt flesh was thick in the air and Harry could not help but suspect that somehow, the magical barrier must have incorporated silver into its construction to have harmed Draco so much.

And Zabini wouldn't have known to use silver, or been able to conjure a shield that powerful, Harry thought, his mind already forming its suspicions as slowly, he began to feel a bit more 'sensible'.

Draco glared at him. “Am I alright?! You are the one who nearly just drowned! You'd be dead if I'd been a second slower!”

“Well it's not like I did it on purpose!” Harry retorted venomously. “I don't make a habit of going swimming tied up, you prat!”

Aiming his wand at Harry again, Draco hissed, “Censium Valetudus!” A little, bluish spark illuminated the end of Draco’s wand, shining like a weak Lumos just as Harry felt an evasive tingle
ripple through him. After a moment, the blond grunted incoherently and tucked his wand away. “No damage from lack of oxygen or the water.”

“How reassuring,” Harry snapped, wondering why on earth Draco was acting so vile to him, as if he’d tied himself up and thrown himself into the water.

Suddenly, Draco reeled around and that was the first Harry noticed of the barely conscious Zabini laying there on the floor. They were out on the stone ground outside the boat house, the moonlight beaming down on them fully – the glaring light Harry had seen. It was also hard not to notice the gaping hole in the wall of the boat house. That’s how Draco got to me, Harry realised. But then, Draco was surging towards their fallen enemy. Harry sat up a little straighter but Draco was faster – of course. He shot through the air, landing with a hard crack on Zabini’s ribs. The man screamed.

“Draco, no! Alaric has him under the Imperius Curse, I’m sure of–”

“What does that matter?! He nearly killed you!” Draco snarled at Harry, cutting short his protests. His eyes were dark now with the lack of blood. His body using up its supply to heal his injuries, Harry thought. They were now a terrifying jet black, shining with rage.

With his long fingers wrapped in the dark boy’s robes, Draco slammed him into the stone. Blood splattered from Zabini’s lips and Harry saw Draco's eyes move to it immediately. “What did Alaric say to you? What did he give you to make you attack Harry?” the vampire demanded, his voice dangerously low.

“You're bloody mad! Mad and a demon! I'll tell everyone!” Zabini shrieked. “I'll–”

“Listen to me,” Draco said then in that low, hypnotizing drone. “Look into my eyes. You were the reason he took our detention the other day, I know you were. So tell me exactly how you’re involved with Alaric. Now.”

Harry saw Zabini’s body twitch, as if wanting to fight the wave of compulsion running through him. But the man was not strong enough, Draco's gaze was too powerful. Harry stepped forward, motioning to stop this. But something stopped him, the memory of casting the Imperius Curse on Bogrod the goblin, of breaking even his own strict morals to fight Voldemort, to protect his friends.

The inner battle of right and wrong caused his body to quiver slightly. He didn't know what to do. He only knew that something about Draco using his influence rubbed him up the wrong way. But then, so had killing, and he had killed…
The curse did that, not me, he thought insistently, clenching his hands into fists. I didn't do it. He didn't care if it made him a hypocrite at that moment, he only knew that he couldn't stand there and watch Draco do this.

“Draco,” Harry began, willing the uneasy shudder from his voice. “Draco stop it. I don't–”

“He nearly killed you,” Draco spat, never tearing his eyes from Zabini's face. “He's working with the man who wants to kill me. The man who hurt your friend. Now is not the time for your misguided morals, Harry.”


Zabini was forced to remain still, as still as stone whilst staring into Draco's eyes, but Harry could see the terror glowing there in that slightly glazed look. “Yes,” Zabini gasped.

“Excellent,” Draco sneered. “So tell me now, Blaise, how are you involved with Caius Alaric?”

Harry frowned, stepping closer until he grasped Draco's wrist. The vampire snarled, dropping Zabini's body hard on the floor and whirling to face him. Harry winced as he felt that cool breath on his skin but did not retreat. He wasn't afraid. “I don't want you to use the influence,” he said stiffly.

Draco glared. “Whether you want it or not, we need to find out what he knows. Don't fight what you know is right.”

Harry grit his teeth. “This is anything but right,” he ground out.

With that, Draco tore his arm from Harry's grasp and turned back to Zabini. “No,” he agreed darkly. “But it's necessary. Just like you killing Voldemort was.”

Anger swelled in Harry's gut at that, but before he could say a word, Zabini began shaking uncontrollably. Draco's shadow loomed over him, his fangs ominously visible now, peeking obviously from behind his lips. It must've been quite the sight to someone like Blaise Zabini.

“I'll tell you,” the dark boy hissed, desperation touching his hypnotised voice. “Weeks ago, he told me he recommended I ask Fliwick for immediate help in Charms, he said if I hoped to stay on at this school to finish my NEWTs. I couldn't refuse, not the way he said it, I – I just did it. I didn't know he had it in for you, I swear!”

Harry's brow furrowed with confusion. When he had been under Draco's influence it had felt like a wash of calm almost. He hadn't felt panicked like Zabini. He supposed it depended on Draco's
intent, however. And he had to admit, Draco had intended to help him with the thrall when he’d used it on him.

“But you found out he was after me when he asked you to find something on one of Harry's friends, didn't he? You knew what he wanted when you stalked Weasley and Granger to find something that Alaric could use against Harry. Against me.”

Harry's eyes widened. He had wondered how Alaric had found out about Hermione's condition in the first place. Was Zabini really his spy?

“He said that you would be keeping too close a watch on Potter!” Zabini declared, “Said we had to attack from the outside. I heard her mumbling to herself, I saw her looking at herself, it wasn't that hard to figure out. I took a guess and with the right prompting from the professor she confided in him.”

Harry bared his teeth then. They had abused Hermione's situation, her fear and had used it to get to him and Malfoy. He felt the voice of reason inside him, the one whispering incessantly that Draco using his thrall on Zabini was wrong, grow quieter and quieter inside his head.

“So you were his sneak, always diverting students and staff away from his classroom whenever he was in there torturing me? You're a little weasel, but you're not stupid. Why did you come here today?” Draco demanded, stooping over Zabini's body then and hauling him up so that his body hung a few feet off the ground. Harry could not help but stare. Zabini was taller and bulkier than Draco, but here Draco was, holding him up like he was nothing more than a ragdoll. The vampire's powers were growing alarmingly fast.

“I hate Potter, I want him dead for what he did to my family—”

“But you're not stupid, Blaise,” Draco cooed with false softness. “You knew Harry Potter could slay you in a fight, with or without me. So why are you stupid enough to be here, trying to kill him?”

Zabini seemed to be having trouble with speaking suddenly as if something were trying to quash the words on his tongue. He was like a zombie still, eyes wide, body limp and his voice was just as empty and devoid of life as he answered shakily, “Alaric said Potter couldn't use magic on me, that I should toss him into the lake without any trouble at all. I didn’t want… I knew I was getting in too deep but he… I didn’t have a choice.”

No choice. That confirmed Harry's suspicions then – Zabini had originally been driven by hatred for what Harry stood for, for the loss of his parents, but when he had tried to back out, Alaric has used the Imperius Curse on him to force him to obey. It was so glaringly clear now, from the way he had seemed bleary eyed when chasing Harry, to the impenetrable barrier that had kept Draco separated from him. Zabini wasn’t strong enough to create that kind of barrier. It made sense now.
But his mind was concentrated on the previous revelation that had left Zabini’s lips. Harry’s panicked eyes flew to Draco. “It’s public knowledge now? I can’t have the whole world knowing my magic is unstable, for more than the obvious reason! I have Voldemort’s power inside of me – they’ll lock me up!”

Draco did not reply, only slammed Zabini hard into the wall of the boat house. The dark man continued without more prompting. “Only a few know, Greyback, Alaric and…he said that others knew who were coming for Potter. He said it couldn’t be public knowledge because he’d made a pact with them.”

Harry sneered. “Trading me over like cattle? Well that plan would’ve been generally fucked since you nearly drowned me!” Harry bellowed. “What would throwing me in the lake have achieved?”

Zabini said nothing. Draco pressed him harder into the stone.


“There was something about that being the only way they could reach you whilst you were at Hogwarts. He said if Greyback failed to reel you in and you reached the castle I was to act,” he panted, sweat gathering on his dark brow now. “I don’t know more than that, please don’t kill me. I told you all I know.”

It seemed that Draco’s influence was stronger than the Imperius Curse. His demanding ability had broken the other hold on Zabini’s mind. That’s interesting, Harry thought, as the vampire dropped the man carelessly to the ground and turned to face the lake, a look of haunted pensiveness touching his pale face.

Harry followed him with his own eyes, confused. It was almost as if Draco was seeing something he wasn’t. He walked up to Draco’s side where the vampire stood on the edge of the lake. Those otherworldly, silver eyes were scanning the horizon, the flow of the lake for some time, the very molecules of the water, it seemed. It wasn’t until a sharp breeze ripped through the air, dragging a gasp from Harry's lips, that the vampire looked at him.

“There is a spell on the water, it’s not visible unless you’re looking for it,” Draco began, his voice low and anxious as he stared into Harry's eyes. “It’s a tide tugging everything towards the edge of the forest. The bank is downwind now, I can’t smell any presence there but I am sure they were waiting there to get you – that was until they saw, or sensed something had gone wrong.”

Harry understood. They had planned to let Harry be pulled them by the tide beyond the barriers of Hogwarts, where they could get to him. That explained why Draco had found it hard to find him under the water – the ‘current’ had been carrying him so fast that he’d nearly been out of reach.
Those wolves had been able to get through the barrier. But the cloaked creatures in red hadn't, were they the same evil that wanted Harry? He frowned. Whoever they were hadn't seemed to be interested in him, they'd only been interested in Malfoy. It didn't make sense that it was them. Some death eaters, perhaps? And were they still there? His panic, his confusion must've registered in his heartbeat or his scent then, because he felt Draco slide against him, his body practically touching Harry's. Harry inhaled uneasily, unnerved by that familiar passion shining in those dark orbs.

“I won’t let them hurt you,” Draco swore solemnly, his eyes shimmering with possessiveness. Harry was sure the vampire in him would have bitten him all over right then and there if it could get away with it. But he wasn’t sure how he felt about the vibrancy of the dominance there.

“I’m not afraid of pain, or death,” Harry replied evasively, motioning to take a step back from Malfoy’s body. Two strong hands seized him suddenly by his forearms, holding him still. He frowned, watching Draco inhale him deeply, as if to assess him.

“You nearly died,” Draco said darkly. “Even if you don’t like to believe that I am concerned for your welfare, believe that I am concerned for my own. If you die, I will follow.”

Harry winced at that, that Draco should assume he was that pig-headed. “I know that you care whether I live or die,” Harry snapped. “I just don’t know if that’s because I’m your First and you’re a vampire or because you’re Draco and I’m Harry.”

Despite the situation, Draco laughed at Harry's inarticulateness, making Harry scowl. How was it that two people so different could be drawn together? Supernatural circumstance or no…

“You know as well as I that it’s both,” Draco growled, his fingers digging into Harry's arms a little. Harry didn’t move, but he did chew at his bottom lip uncertainly, only to hiss in pain. He hadn’t realised that the blow to his face Zabini had landed had split his lip. His tongue darted out, sweeping over the cut. “Bugger,” he grumbled, wishing he had the luxury of being able to cast a simple healing spell. He tucked his currently useless wand into his robe pocket. “Err, would you mind–?” He began to ask, but before he could even finish, the smooth pad of Draco’s thumb was ghosting over the weeping cut.

Blood. Right, he’d have to be more careful about his own blood in Draco’s presence, it was like waving a steak in front of a starving man, after all. And the blond hadn’t jumped him so far, he didn’t deserve to have his restraint tested.
For a moment, Draco seemed to be standing on the precipice of decision, confused as to which direction to take at the crossroads. Harry watched the possibilities whirl within those inhuman eyes, and waited, frozen in place as Draco’s thumb slid down from his lip to tilt his chin up.

At first, Draco leant down, as if to steal a kiss and Harry tensed, his slight movement stalling Draco’s. Then, at last, after a long silence, Draco drew his own thumb into his mouth, tasting the flicker of Harry’s blood there before drawing his wand.

“Episkey!” he murmured, and Harry felt his minor wounds heal over instantly. It was a credit to Draco’s control, Harry thought, that he had been able to stop himself. He was gaining control over himself far more quickly than Harry thought possible. Was that because of Harry’s blood as well?

“Whoever was meant to take you is not there any longer,” Draco said suddenly, his voice dragging Harry back from his thoughts. He looked up just as the vampire began moving towards the still prone form of Blaise Zabini. “That still leaves you, however.”

Harry started. Fear still prickled at the back of his mind as it pondered just who and what had been waiting to steal his half-drowned body from the river. But Draco's fangs were still exposed, his body moving sinuously towards where the still enthralled body of Zabini lay. Helpless to Draco's advances.

Harry started after him. “Wait!” he cried as Draco lifted Zabini up by his throat. Harry heard him choking, heard his lungs struggling for breath but the dark man's body remained limp and still. It was a haunting sight, Zabini's body terrified under the threat of death but unable to lift even a finger to help himself. That was Draco's power. It made him feel quite sick again, in a distinctively bad way this time. “You can't just kill him as easily as that!”

Draco did not look at Harry as he murmured darkly, “I have to, he has seen what I am. He's tried to kill you, he wants to kill you with or without Alaric’s assistance. That's what slytherins do, they hide, they plot – for years if necessary. They are patient but they will always get what they want.”

Harry stepped closer, angling himself at the side so that he could see Draco's face. Those cool features were set with impassiveness, and Harry reached up, laying his fingers on the pale hand that was wrapped tightly around Zabini's throat. “But he was your friend once!”

At that, Draco snorted, shaking Zabini roughly as if punishing him for being such a pitiful friend. “I may have looked on him as one once, but I was only ever a convenience to him. A popular figurehead with a powerful family that it suited him to hide behind. The moment my father was called in to question by the Dark Lord, the moment I was given the impossible task of killing Dumbledore to save myself and my parents, Zabini and my so-called friends fled for the hills. They wouldn’t even look at me. Much less help me.”
Harry stopped then, his chest contracting painfully at the memory of how lost and alone Draco had looked when he had seen him crying in the bathroom that day. That was a boy driven to despair, he hadn't realised until now just how alone Draco really was in the world. Even now.

*Explaining why he is hanging onto me with every fibre of his being,* Harry thought. It made sense that someone that had been so dependant on others and was now so alone would attach himself easily to any new friend that came along. *Friend,* Harry thought sceptically. *That's not exactly what I am to him. But I'm really the only person he can turn to except for Snape.*

It made perfect sense now – why Draco's connection seemed to have sprung from nowhere. With everything the once wussy little ponce had endured, it was no wonder really that he would want him, especially after spending a summer practically alone and thinking of nothing but his affliction and his hunger for Harry's blood.

Then suddenly, Draco was speaking again, that low, dangerous tone tearing through Harry's epiphany. “I would kill for you, and I would feel no remorse in making your life safer.”

“Then you're putting that blood on my hands!” Harry protested, thinking of how Voldemort's demise still plagued him. He couldn't bear it. And by the way Draco's face drew into a tight sneer, fangs bared with animalistic fury, Harry could tell the blond had realised that.

Suddenly, Draco pulled Zabini so close to him that their faces almost touched. Harry saw those silver eyes dilate briefly and then Draco was speaking in that deep, hypnotising tone once more. “Whatever misguided sense of vengeance you longed for was satisfied today, you will no longer crave vengeance or harbour any desire to harm Harry or anyone else in any way, however indirectly. Do you understand?”

Zabini nodded dazedly. His face was still strewn with sweat, his eyes still wide with terror. “Yes. I won't hurt anyone ever again, however indirectly.” That was a very broad generalisation that would make Zabini’s life very difficult, Harry thought, but Draco didn’t seem to care. As a matter of fact, Draco gave a sneer of a smirk.

“Excellent. And you will have no memory of what I am, of anything that happened here today. You will never aid Caius Alaric again, or anyone else that plots against Harry or me.”

“Never,” Zabini agreed.

Harry watched Draco's expression. It was going against the blond's better judgement to heed Harry's request, he could see that. But this was the right thing to do. He didn't even care so much that Draco was using his influence, it was better than the alternative after all.
“When I relieve you of my influence, you will fall asleep for a few minutes, and when you awaken, all you will know is that you dozed off here. You won't remember what I am, what I did or what I can do. But I will ensure that Severus Snape goes to McGonagall about your aiding that spurious professor in poisoning Granger and you’ll be out of the school on your arse. You aren’t getting away with this. Do you understand?”

“I will remember nothing of you, of Potter, of today. I will never help Alaric again. I’m not getting away with this.”

“Splendid,” Draco said simply, and with that, he stepped back from Zabini, releasing the man and letting him fall carelessly to the floor. Unconscious.

“Thank you,” Harry said awkwardly, “I know that was hard–”

Draco snarled at that, the noise slicing through Harry's words. “I didn't do that for him, or for myself. I did that for you, you'd best remember that the next time you question my feelings for you,” he hissed, seizing Harry's wrist and half-dragging him back up the stairs away from the boat house. They needed to get away before Zabini woke up.

As they ascended the stairs, however, Harry could not help but glance back over his shoulder to the edge of the forest across the lake. “I don't think that those things with the red cloaks and those pet wolves are the ones that are after me, the ones that are teamed up with Alaric, I mean,” he said, wondering what Draco thought. “When we overheard them in the forest, they didn't sound too impressed with Alaric, and besides which, they were talking about you, not me.”

Draco made a noise of agreement under his breath, his eyes focused on the path ahead up the stone stairs. He looked thoughtful about something.

“When we were in the forest,” Harry continued. “Couldn't you smell what they were?”

Draco shook his head. “My powers are growing thanks to having such a powerful donor,” he mused, a flicker of amusement in his tone as he referred to Harry in such a way. “But I am still new to it all. I can tell beings apart now, I could smell if it were you or Severus or even Filch behind me right now. But I have to have smelled it at least once to know the name or species specifically. They were supernatural, not human but I do not know what they are. Its familiar but... I may have smelled it before, but too briefly to recognise for sure.”

Harry nodded, that made sense. “You can tell a human apart from a dog for example, because you know both scents for what they are. If you were to have a previous, clear scent to compare those things to, you'd know what they were?”

They had reached the top of the stairs now and Draco stopped, turning to face Harry. Harry's hand clenched on the stone balustrade, having paused on the last step. That gave Malfoy's already
greater height even more of a boost, and Harry shifted uncomfortably as he stared up into Draco's face.

A sharp wind rushed through the castle then, so hard Harry felt it whip against the back of his neck and through his hair, sending his scent hurtling up into Draco's face. The vampire stiffened, his fingers clenching into tight fists, but otherwise he did not move. Harry flushed, however, knowing exactly what that scent did to his companion. Looking away awkwardly, he struggled to put arousal and attraction out of his mind in an attempt to get his words out coherently.

That's when that violent, bloody hole in the blond's shoulder reminded him of its presence again. He winced at the gory sight of it. Had it just been adrenaline, or was Draco just slowly accustoming himself to pain? “You…you're hurt,” Harry murmured, knowing that only one thing would help him to heal such a wound.

“It's only the bite,” Draco insisted, his voice husky, “The scratches and my hands are already healed, that bastard's venom just takes a lot out of me to heal, more than I can spare at once.” Those long fingers reached up to touch the gaping wound gingerly. Draco hissed. “He tore in quite deeply, that's all. I'll be fine in a few days with a bit of bandage to staunch the bleeding or something.” He watched those almost black eyes rove his form then. “You're not hurt?”

“You cleared it up with your spell,” Harry said, feeling a little discomfited just standing this close without the inebriating pleasure rushing through his mind. He fidgeted, glancing just over Draco's shoulder, only to flush when he remembered what Draco had said the people watching them dance had been whispering – about him not being able to meet the blond’s eyes.

“S'pose this isn't the way you hoped our first date wound end either, is it?” Harry mused in an attempt to alleviate the tension.

Draco's lips curved into a slight grin. “So it is a date now, is it?” he asked. But when Harry gave no reply, the vampire merely pressed him tightly into the arch of the stone, their bodies touching sinfully through the barrier of their clothes that Harry was sure seemed thinner now.

“Why is it that you can't look at me whenever we’re this close?” Draco breathed then, darkening the flush that had already risen to Harry's cheeks. “Careful, or you'll have me believing the suspicions of those old women in the restaurant. Perhaps you really do love me.”

Harry tried to glare up at him, but didn’t think it was anywhere near as ominous as he may have liked. “Up yours, Draco Malfoy, you shouldn’t have such a bloody high opinion of yourself. It’s a very unattractive quality.”
“Ah, but it hasn’t diminished your blush any,” Draco replied, his voice rich and deep as he inhaled Harry again, a guttural groan of the most intense arousal rumbling in his chest. “You reek of anticipation, of excitement – for me. Could it be that you’re still eager for that promised goodnight kiss?”

Harry shoved at Draco’s chest in an effort to escape the embarrassment, but the vampire seized his wrists – all too easily, as Harry did not exactly struggle. He watched those darkened eyes close and instinctively mimicked the action. His hands twitched in Draco’s grasp as that breath touched his lips. A moan so quiet only a vampire could hear it trickled out along with a final, panting gasp before that mouth descended onto his own and thick, delicious gratification rolled through him in heady waves.

Thrusting his body forward, he grinded it into every inch of Draco’s hard form that he could, seeking the fulfilment his tense body had been craving since their last meeting. The dance, the almost-kisses and the carriage ride had only intensified his longing and now he was positively burning with it.

Tearing his hands out of Draco’s grasp, he flung them round his shoulders, only to leap back in shock when he felt the blond hiss with barely concealed pain. He remembered then, even through the fog of desire. There was no way he could ignore the furious, yawning wound at the blond’s shoulder.

“Y-You…you need to feed, it’ll heal you,” he panted, his coherent thought quickly being swallowed by his need. Draco brushed him off, leaning in again to seize his lips for his own, taking another kiss.

“Not yet,” Draco murmured against his mouth, before sweeping his tongue across it, demanding entry.

“You’re in pain, you—” Harry’s words were stolen by that devious tongue as it swept inside, tasting him deeply. He groaned again, his hands rigid at his sides, almost shaking with the urge to reach up and plunge into silvery blond hair. But he didn’t want to hurt Draco again. A frown creased his brow, even as his mind was swiftly becoming more and more inebriated with pleasure. Draco must have been in immense pain from that injury, why wasn’t he more affected by it?

Harry suspected that suffering as he had, being what he was would allow for a much higher pain tolerance, but this was beyond that surely? Unless he’s up to something, Harry thought, his last rational thought before those hands seized his arse roughly, kneading the flesh through his trousers. He cried out into the kiss, lashing that roaming tongue with his own in release of his thrill.
Suddenly, those fingers gripped his arse tighter, lifting him off the ground and tossing him roughly onto the stone bench just inside the archway. He grunted as his back hit it, but chased that mouth as it tried to retreat. His tongue swept over Draco’s, beckoning it back to him, teasing the very tip wetly until he felt the presence of Draco’s fangs, a sign of his control waning.

Draco drew back then. Harry barely refrained from reaching up and dragging him back again, stopped only by the glistening, red wound marring that pale, perfect skin. He gasped, trying hard to control his embarrassingly fast breathing as he stared up at the vampire leaning over him, with the expression of a hunter that had caught its long-hunted prey. Struggling to grasp coherency, Harry insisted, “You need to... *drink me*, you’re hurt—”

“No yet,” Draco repeated simply, shrugging off his robe and reaching down to unbuckle his own belt. A wince broke his cool expression.

Whether in a last minute panic at such a brazen act, at the prospect of far deeper intimacy than they had shared before or in a desperate attempt to relieve Draco’s suffering, Harry wasn’t sure, but on seeing those sinfully long fingers working the fine dragon-hide leather, he inhaled sharply. “You can’t honestly allow yourself to suffer such pain just to give me pleasure!” He blurted out.

The blond surveyed Harry for a moment. Harry dreaded to think how he must look, sprawled clumsily over the stone bench, flushed with arousal, heart and lungs pounding furiously. In the end, Draco clucked his tongue in irritation and reached into his robes, pointing his wand at himself this time. “*Torpus!*” he chanted, before shoving the magical instrument back into the crumpled pile of his robes on the floor and descending on Harry again.

“Healing spells and potions won’t work on werewolf venom, but anesthetising charms work well enough for the pain for a short time. Will you shut up now?”

Before Harry could answer, that mouth was covering his again, coaxing sounds from him he had never made in his entire life. His control snapped and he did reach up then, scraping his blunt nails over Draco’s skull as his fingers swept into those locks. The breath was crushed from his lungs by the delicious pressure of that hard body above him.

Unyielding, hungry lips massaged his own, that tongue returning to taunt the length of his own with mind-blowing preciseness. Harry tugged at that hair, arching his body up and thrusting into Draco clumsily. It felt so good he swore his insides were liquefying with the heat of this embrace. There was a sense of urgency for more, *now* and yet at the same time, the desire for this to continue forever. This kind of heat, need, *passion*, he had never, ever felt this before and he thought now, that he would never experience this again with anyone else.
It feels like this because it's him, a quiet voice whispered amidst the explosive passion, quickly swallowed by the unbearable heat rising in his belly.

Those lips drew back wetly from his, a trail of spittle connecting them briefly before it broke. Almost black eyes roved his most likely kiss-bruised lips as frantic gasps for air tumbled over them. His hands slid from Draco’s hair, carefully avoiding the injury to his shoulder and gliding down to unwittingly trace hard pectorals, before coming to rest over that slowly thudding heart.

Draco’s body was slightly warmed by his own heat, and he could not help smirk at that thought. He’d done that. He may be inexperienced and clumsy, and he was too caught up in the flow of desire to think straight, but he was making Draco’s body warm, making him look at him with hunger in his eyes. He had just as much power here as Draco did.

“Is there something wrong?” Draco asked suddenly, no doubt referring to Harry's sudden stillness. Snapping back from his thoughts, Harry shook his head. He didn’t want Draco to think he was being a coward about something like sex. A smirk cracked that porcelain face. “Don’t tell me the Golden Boy is embarrassed that I’m looking at his knickers…”

“Shut up!” Harry cried, mortified, even with the countless, tiny jolts of ecstasy bursting along his spine. His hips arched subtly, the electric tingles intensifying when Draco’s mouth slid over that tense column of honey-hued flesh. Latching onto the unmarked side, the vampire sucking hard, as if this passion-induced madness demanded he suck the boiling blood from Harry’s throat. Even if that were so, Harry could not find the strength to care. His hands fisted in blond locks, tugging hungrily, his body ripe with desire for more closeness. Now that he’d had a taste, he was insatiable.

“Hmm, this is what I had in mind for the conclusion of our evening,” Draco practically purred as he pulled away from that throat, leaving one more, deep kiss on his tender lips before sliding down his body. Harry propped himself awkwardly up on his elbows on the bench, staring down at the vampire as he rucked Harry’s shirt up off his stomach and taunted the tense muscles there devilishly.

Those fangs grazed his skin with teasing, tickling touches while those lips tugged at the light trail of hair leading down into his trousers. He squirmed despite himself at the delicious sensations creeping up through his body wherever they touched. Icy heat radiated from those fingers, setting his skin alight with pleasure.

Suddenly, pale hands slid swiftly down his sides, before descending to tug sharply on Harry's belt. Harry groaned at the way those tantalising fingers brushed over his hardness as they fought to free it from its cloth prison. He reached down, hastily shoving his trousers down to mid-thigh. His cock
arched up against the boundaries of his briefs, straining for Draco’s attention. Breathing heavily in anticipation now, he seized the top of his briefs but Draco's hands caught his, stilling his attempt at removing them.

“Eager, aren't we?” Draco smirked, raising a brow as he gazed up at him through a curtain of sex-mussed blond hair. His hands curled slightly around Harry's, caressing the backs of them almost lovingly. That stopped Harry's breath for a moment.

Such a tender touch amidst the darkness and passion, it made him feel quite odd for some reason. That was something else he wasn't used to, had never experienced. Those fingers interlocked with his then, pushing his hands off to the side of the bench and Draco’s mouth hovered just over his hipbone. The already dark flush spread from Harry’s cheeks as he heard the vampire inhale him. His hips twitched upwards a fraction.

“You arse,” Harry swore under his breath, closing his eyes, unable to look from embarrassment. Draco’s hair trailed lightly over his skin when he head slid down a fraction more. “Why do you have to spin my head? I feel like I can't breathe or hear or speak it feels so…so good.”

He felt that smirk rub lightly over his crotch then and he groaned deeply, gripping Draco’s hand tighter as one of them escaped to caress the inside of his thigh. “Welcome to your next lesson,” Draco murmured against the apex of his thigh, “Your next lesson in living.” And with that, the blond's hand stole inside his briefs, wrapping tightly around his erection inside his underwear.

A sharp hiss of sheer delight left his lips and Draco groaned in response to the sound and no doubt the bead of pre-emission that wept from the tip of Harry’s cock, gliding down to meet Draco’s fingers. “You’re so warm,” Draco breathed against Harry’s thigh, his hair teasing his flesh until goosebumps rose on his skin. “Like my own personal sun…”

Harry flushed when he thought of the Solaris Sphere still sitting safely in Draco’s robe pocket.

“You’re going to burn me alive one day, Potter,” Draco murmured, so quiet that Harry wondered if the vampire had actually intended for him to hear, but before he could do more than moisten his lips with a flicker of his tongue, Draco’s hand moved. It squeezed his hard, leaking prick, caressing the length slowly, as if dragging the pleasure out of him with torturous slowness.

Electricity exploded behind Harry’s eyes and his groin pressed up shamelessly into that beautiful hand. He cracked open his eyes, immediately wishing he hadn’t when he caught sight of Draco watching him with a lustful grin. The hand around him moved faster. Those lips joined in then, mouthing his hard, throbbing shape through the thin fabric of his briefs.
“Hmm, not white this time, Potter,” Draco mused, his voice slightly muffled as he worshipped Harry’s cock through the material. “I’m disappointed.”

“F-Fuck you,” Harry growled out, but the growl was ragged with bliss and the fingers not tightly gripping Draco’s free hand were clawing frantically at the stone he was sprawled across.

“Not tonight,” Draco chuckled, “And it’ll be you first, I think, since you’re the cherry.”

Blushing violently at that, Harry reached down to shove Draco off but as if sensing the maneuver, Draco yanked his underwear down sharply, until his lower body was naked to the knees, where his clothes hung uselessly. Harry abstained from slamming his eyes shut as he caught sight of Draco’s fingers molesting his fully revealed cock hungrily. It was slick and shiny with pre-emission and throbbing eagerly in Draco’s grasp.

His erection looked a startlingly dark pink in comparison with Draco’s pale hand, the look on Draco’s face told him the blond liked what he saw as well, which helped to diminish some of the swelling doubt. Like any human being, he couldn’t help but be apprehensive of what his partner might think…

“Hmm, not bad, Potter,” Draco teased, squeezing a little tighter so that his next downward stroke tugged his foreskin with it and exposed the swollen, pink tip. “You look good enough to eat.” Those words inspired debauched visions to flicker through his mind, images that Draco seemed to guess the nature of. “Yes, you’d like that, wouldn't you? You only need ask, you know,” the vampire whispered, tilting his head so that his breath swept across the wet head of the organ in his grasp.

Harry groaned deeply, pressing himself up towards that mouth. This was the subject of every schoolboy fantasy, wasn't it? An attractive partner between his thighs threatening to suck him off. Only he had never dreamt it would be a man, much less Malfoy and a vampire making the very first offer, the first lesson of pleasure. That fact didn't bother him as much as it should have, in fact, it only intensified the feeling.

Each firm, precise stroke of those fingers teased his foreskin now, pinched the swollen head of his cock to coax more clear fluid from him. He closed his eyes then, at the same time as Draco released his hand. He couldn't help himself, it flew down to Draco's wrist, but whether it was to stop him or encourage him, he still wasn't sure. He was sure that such skill with another’s body could only be learnt through experience – and Zabini did call him a slut, Harry thought but his mind was too addled with carnal bliss to put that jealous suspicion into words at that moment.
A wicked chuckle left those lips hovering over his most private place, and Draco’s fingers slid around the hand on his wrist, intertwining them with his around Harry's cock. “Let me feel how you like it,” Draco requested darkly, “let me see how Harry Potter touches himself when he finds a moment of solitude.” There was an edge of taunting, of their boyhood banter in those words, but he found that he sort of liked it; it reminded him of who this was surveying him so intimately, where he had never ever trusted anyone to before. “Show me,” Draco urged throatily, pressing his mouth into the crease of Harry's groin and gently grazing the throbbing artery nearby with his fangs.

Shuddering uncontrollably at how amazing that soft scrape felt, Harry caught the section of skin just under his helmet and manipulated it with small, hurried gestures of his and Draco's interlocked fingers. He pressed his head hard back into the unforgiving stone in an attempt to ground himself, an attempt to stifle the embarrassing sounds of bliss that wanted to escape him. He could feel his climax barreling through him with the force of a hurricane, and he wasn't ready for it yet.

Draco was licking his pulse at the apex of his thigh now, pressing into it with the point of his tongue. His cock jerked in his hand, lavished with attention like never before, along with the rest of him. He squirmed down closer to Draco. His only warning was the soft brush of blond hair over his fingertips and a rush of negation as Draco tugged his fingers away, before those demanding lips slid over the length of his erection.

Crying out shamefully, Harry's hands fisted in the sleeves of Draco's shirt and he could not help but press up into the wet, open-mouthed kisses falling on his sensitive flesh. “B-Bloody hell!” He grunted from behind clenched teeth. White-hot liquid pleasure as he had never known it rushed through his blood at every sensation that lukewarm mouth was inciting from him. Parts of his body he had sworn were dead, or had never existed in the first place were on fire with ecstasy.

It wasn't clear now when exactly the effects of Draco's saliva had kicked in, but he knew they had, because the pleasure was blinding now. And he was cravings heavier, deeper pleasures that he would never consider so freely with his usual wariness plaguing him. He couldn't even lie still on the bench. But he didn't care. That ability was a part of the man coaxing such beautiful feelings from his body, it all felt so good.

“So good!” Harry panted, “How did you get so good?!” The words were just tumbling over his lips without his permission now, his brain melting in his skull from the powerful heat.

Draco smirked against his flushed column of flesh, pausing just long enough so that Harry cracked open his eyes to look down and see where the pleasure had gone. Those unusually dark eyes held his for a moment, one glance saying everything that words could not before he took Harry into his mouth. Harry froze despite the delight that rushed through his senses, at the feel of those fangs
scraping him gently.

They hadn’t hurt him, but they could – *a lot*, and his fingers tightened on Draco's arms at the thought. That gaze was still fixed on him, however and that mouth paused over his cock. It was the most erotic thing he had ever seen, it sent tingling shivers across his skin and yet at the same time, he swore Draco was waiting for his minor panic to cease, for him to remember exactly how hard the blond had worked to earn his trust. After a moment, inhaling deeply, Harry ignored the instinct to shove the vampire away as he had done everyone else, he forced his body to relax.

The Harry-warmed, wet mouth tightened around him, as if in appreciation. That tongue flickered torturously over the head before pressing into his slit, greedily lapping up the pre-come gathered there. Then Draco's head descended, those eyes still riveted to his as he did so. Up and down, slowly sucking as he moved, accented by that wicked tongue.

“S-Shit!” Harry hissed, gripping Draco's arms so hard he swore he felt his fingers ache from the pressure, all in his struggle to remain still. His hips desperately wanted to thrust up, to demand more of that mouth, to feel his whole organ immersed in that pleasure. But he could hardly blame Draco for his fangs, no more than Draco could blame him for his normal teeth.

Draco paused again then, closing his eyes, his face expressing a peculiar sort of concentration. Harry propped himself up on his elbows to look down at him, but he felt more than saw what Draco was up to.

Suddenly, those fangs retreated back into those gums and before he could even register what their disappearance might mean, his hips were seized roughly by those hands. He was tugged towards Draco's mouth so sharply he landed flat on his back on the bench again. A cry ripped free of his lips and he threw his head back when Draco sucked him deep into his throat with savage desire, lashing the underside with his tongue as his head dove over him, over and over again.

“F-Fuck me! *Bite me* – anything, please! I can’t–!”

Draco cut off his babbling by humming wickedly around his mouthful, and the hand that had been caressing his thigh reached across and rolled his tight, full balls in his hand. At that moment, Draco dipped his head until his nose pressed into the dark patch of hair at Harry’s base – the entire hot length engulfed in his tight, slick throat.

A carnal cry ripped through Harry. His hands fistèd in blond locks once more, tugging hungrily, not sure whether he was asking for more or for an escape. It was so good, so *delicious* it almost *hurt*. It was too much, he was coming undone, vulnerable and naked to Draco’s gaze. His glasses
had begun to steam up. Harry’s eyes rolled back into his head, his hips pushing upwards hopelessly into that luscious cavern of rapidly increasing heat.

Draco’s hair felt right under his hands, he scraped at the base of his skull and was rewarded with a vibrating groan that tortured his cock into a dripping frenzy. Draco’s throat was constricting around him now with every inward thrust, that tongue worshipping him with each backward motion. Everything was so simple and wonderful and… I’ve never felt so hot!

Suddenly, Draco shifted, his body coming up to rest against Harry’s, their faces mere inches apart. A groan of negation left Harry before he could stop himself and a low, breathless chuckle caressed his face in answer. Draco reached down then, seizing his leaking prick and pumping it furiously towards completion. His fingers gripped those strong arms again in search of an anchor, his body writhing like a snake’s under a charmer’s song.

Never letting the pace of his hand over Harry’s desperate organ slow, Draco pressed so close that their chests were touching. His hands were resting either side of Harry’s shoulders, bearing the brunt of his weight and his expression was tinged with unnameable emotion as his nose brushed against Harry’s, nudging him into a kiss.

Every hair on Harry’s body pricked to stand on end. Static-electricity seemed to shock him from every point where his skin touched Draco’s. His breath came out in shallow pants, disturbing Draco’s hair and his flushed cheek pressed determinedly into Draco’s as he gripped the blond, impatiently rolling his hips up to gain more friction. His body wanted to twist and shake. He needed more, faster and harder. He was so close!

Harry gasped for breath, the pressure of Draco’s weight on him suffocating, yet deliciously so. The fingers of the hand not coaxing the most embarrassing sounds from him slid back. Nails grazed his tensed backside teasingly, and he nodded frantically, unable to form coherent thoughts much less words to ask for more. He swore he heard Draco chuckle in his ear, before that demanding hand cupped his arse firmly. A groan tore from Harry’s lips when Draco kneaded his flesh, bringing his hips up into those intensifying thrusts.

“You should see yourself right now, Harry,” Draco whispered against his lips, his fangs back now and scraping that kiss-bruised mouth teasingly. “You look like you’re ready to burst.”

With a growl of passion, Harry sank his fingers hard into Draco’s arms as an unbearable blaze of heat swept through his body, right down to his curling toes.

“Come for me, Harry,” Draco urged, flicking his smooth thumb over the sensitive head of Harry’s
cock as he moved back between Harry’s thighs. The only warning was a flare of blinding ecstasy behind his eyes as Draco’s fingers clenched around his pulsing cock and Harry’s body stiffened, his need and passion splashing over Draco’s, in unison with those fangs sliding into the artery at the top of his thigh.

“Fuck!” Harry screamed, his body arching harshly, unnaturally in a sharp arc. His cock jerked, spitting the last of his climax over his stomach and Draco’s hand, all while the vampire sucked greedily at him. He was panting for breath as the pleasure from his climax mingled seamlessly with the bliss from Draco’s bite, spinning his senses until he felt drunk with it. His fingers clenched maddeningly in Draco’s hair again, electric, blistering delight set him ablaze and he flew in nothingness as he waited for it to burn out.

Only he was sure that it wouldn’t, not completely.

The next coherent thing he knew, Harry found himself still laying down on the bench, only now cleaned of his spendings and filled with a kind of hazy contentment, a sense of ease he had never felt before in his life. Focusing hard on the world around him, Harry wondered briefly if he’d blacked out, but Draco was only just crawling back up from between his thighs, so too much time couldn’t have passed.

When Draco’s face was level with his again, Harry could not help but nervously, awkwardly mimic the small smile that was on the vampire’s face. There wasn’t a trace of blood on those lips or those teeth, which were human looking again, and that was his only thought before he leant up, straining his neck to bring their lips back together. A hand came up to support his neck and he groaned in sated delight at the feel of those fingers on him – his body felt oversensitive all over.

Drawing back from the lazy, slow kiss, however, Harry could not help but notice that the gaping hole in Draco’s shoulder had healed partially. A lot, actually, it was still obviously a wound, still obviously red and sore but it was closed now and could’ve passed for a perfectly ordinary muggle lesion.

“I didn’t do you,” Harry blurted hazily. He had meant to say I healed you, but his sex-addled brain had conjured another sentence and spat it out before he could veto it.

Above him, Draco smirked again. “Not many men can make me climax in my trousers from the mere taste of them and a few quick strokes from my own hand, consider yourself a very special man, Harry Potter,” Draco replied his meaning impossible to misinterpret. He’d been so turned on he’d come just from rubbing himself through his clothes.
Well, the blood probably pushed him over the edge, Harry thought, a little embarrassed now that he was coming back to himself. But not regretful, not angry or embittered as he usually was. And a little less afraid of their closeness than before, if only a little.

While he’d been in a state of unaware, Draco seemed to have pulled his trousers back up as well, which helped with the autumn chill that was now assaulting his sweat-dampened body. Slowly, he drew his hands down Draco’s chest as he had earlier, watching where they came to rest over the vampire’s leisurely thudding heart.

“I meant to say, about earlier, thank you for saving me from my own magic. I’ve been so lost as to what to do about that and I was so rubbish when Snape tried to teach me and…” He realised he was rambling and trailed off quietly before he embarrassed himself. But Draco wouldn’t let it lie.

“And?” the man prompted.

Harry tilted his head into Draco’s shoulder, closing his eyes and trying to concentrate on his words instead of the overwhelmingly pleasant sensation of calmness that was rippling through him. He inhaled deeply, trying to balance himself. “Would you be a complete gloating arsehole if I asked you to sit in on my next lesson with Snape and help me get…me under control enough to learn the bloody technique by myself?”

Those eyes were a shining, vibrant silver again watching him with unwavering concentration as always. “I suppose any decent man would put their lover first before all else,” Draco mused.

“I’m not your—” Harry stopped himself before he could finish that proclamation, turning his head to stare the stone wall beside him. “I haven’t decided anything yet. Don’t be a presumptuous prick,” he mumbled, without any real malice.

“I did try to convince Minerva that removing the ability to dock house points from the eighth year students would be a mistake,” came a terrifyingly familiar drawl from nearby. Harry winced and did not even have to look to know that Snape was standing before them, glaring down his large nose at them.

Above him, Draco tensed for a moment. Most likely battling with his instinct to protect me and his desire to hurriedly make himself look respectable before his favourite teacher, Harry thought.

The pride won out quickly, however and Draco crawled off Harry, straightening his mussed hair
whilst Harry scrambled to wrap his travelling cloak tightly around him. He would never, ever be able to look Snape in the eye again by the time this year was done, of that he was sure.

“That would have been ten points from Gryffindor for language, fifty each for causing a ruckus in the halls, an extra twenty each for indecent exposure and a letter home,” Snape said in an irritated tone. Harry snorted with amusement, imagining just how purple Uncle Vernon’s face would’ve gone if he’d gotten a letter from McGonagall saying Harry had been caught having sex with a boy in the corridors after hours. Then he remembered that Privet Drive had not been his home for a while, that it would be in fact either Remus or worse, Tonks who got the letter, and it was not so amusing anymore.

“For two young men who wish to keep many secrets you are very cavalier about exposing them out in the middle of the halls – what if it had been someone other than me that heard your adolescent cries of passion?” Snape demanded. Harry's face darkened with a flush and he diverted his gaze to the floor.

“Draco was hurt by Greyback – he needed to feed, Sir,” Harry only partially lied, “we just got a bit carried away.”

Snape’s head snapped to Draco so quickly Harry thought he heard it crack. “What were you doing confronting that creature after what he did to you? You know first hand what he is capable of, how could you be so–?”

“We didn’t confront him. He chased us up to the castle like prey,” Draco interrupted, cutting across Snape’s concerned scolding. “And from there Zabini attacked us from behind like a snotty little coward to finish the job where Greyback couldn’t.” With a quick glance to Harry, Draco added, “I’ll tell you everything, but we should discuss it elsewhere – Harry is about to drop from exhaustion.”

Harry startled at that. He didn’t feel tired really, or at least his brain didn’t. He hadn’t slept last night, however and he had nearly drowned and been chased by a werewolf and just had his first blow job – from a vampire no less…

As if on queue, his yawned widely. Maybe he was a little tired, if only a little.

A lot actually now he thought about it. How was it that Draco had known his own body’s limits before he had. Getting to his feet then, he felt the world spin worryingly. Oh yeah, he thought, and a vampire drank my blood, his mind supplied, adding to the least of ordeals for the day. And quite a lot of my blood, if the way the world is whirling is any indication. Just as he saw the ground
flying up to meet him, however, he found himself face-first in Draco’s chest, the blond steadying him on his feet.

“And you fed without giving him the Temporentia Sensium first, I assume?” Snape accused, the sneer evident in his voice. “You little fools, both of you. You could’ve drained him dry without realising – especially if your body was in need due to your injuries. Were you so intoxicated by the prospect of getting into the Golden Boy’s trousers that you completely forgot all sense and decorum?”

“You know I’ve had quite enough of the disgusting alludes to my virginity and my intimate behaviour for one night,” Harry complained, shoving slightly from Draco’s overprotective embrace and stumbling away from them. He winced. A small headache was brewing behind his eyes. He could handle exhausting activities on top of lack of sleep usually, but he felt really groggy now that Draco had drunk from him.

“Bloody hell, how much did you take?” Harry hissed, clasping his head. It was all coming back to him now.

“Lead the way, Harry,” Draco said, suddenly at his side again, his words a wise choice as opposed to any offering of help. He knows me frighteningly well, Harry thought, not arguing after Draco said something about having a headache draught and a blood-loss potion in his bedside cabinet. They both sounded pretty good right now.

The journey back to the dormitory was a bit of a blur, all he knew what that they made it in silence that wasn’t broken until they reached the garish portrait of Morded that guarded the entrance to the eighth year common room. He snapped sharply at them for waking him, but swung open all the same.

Harry paused in the entranceway, turning slightly to face Draco. He’d only just remembered that the vampire couldn’t come in with him, and he didn’t like that. He could only hope that Mawndwiliis would be true to her word and get them the ingredients as soon as possible. As dopey as he felt, he wasn’t dazed enough to have forgotten that werewolves and cursed ex-slytherin’s aside, it had been the best evening he’d had in a long time.

“Was I a rubbish date then?” Harry asked awkwardly, wanting to break the uneasiness that had fallen between them. Harry couldn’t be sure but he had a suspicion that Snape’s words had made Draco feel guilty about biting Harry. Not that Harry exactly minded, however, although he couldn’t quite swallow his pride enough to say so.
Draco smirked broadly, seemingly relieved that Harry wasn’t blaming him for how awful he felt. *Or accusing him of messing with my head in some way and then fleeing for the hills as I usually do,* Harry thought. Stalking towards him so that they were practically touching again, Draco breathed in Harry's ear, “You got your goodnight kiss, didn’t you?” the vampire replied

Exhausted as they were, Harry's limbs still shuddered feebly in reaction to that rich voice, though the tone of it was slightly different this time. The lust had been replaced with more docile tenderness. Harry wasn’t sure what to make of that, amongst other things. Raising his chin a little, he stared confidently up into those glistening silver eyes.

“I thought a goodnight kiss came at the very end of the date?”

“And I thought it wasn’t a date?” Draco replied flippantly, his words tinged with amusement. All the same he leant in, his arms resting either side of Harry on the archway of the open portrait hole as he pressed his unyielding lips to Harry's. Their mouths slid together softly, still hard and hungry but a layer of a subtler, softer emotion that Harry couldn’t name was overwhelming the act this time. He swiped his tongue out gently, touching the very tip of Draco’s and his slightly parted lips were sealed with a gentler, butterfly kiss before Draco drew back.

“It’s a good job I’m already dead, Potter,” Draco chuckled as Harry shakily released a breath he hadn’t realised he was holding. “Or else you’d be the death of me.” He surveyed Harry again for a moment, as if debating on saying something else, before he took another step back, thinking better of it, obviously. “Goodnight.” And with that, he was gone, leaving Harry to stumble the last few steps into the common room, a ridiculous smile on his flushed lips.

No sooner had the portrait closed behind him, however than he was greeted by the sight of his two best friends sitting by the fire in the empty common room. They leapt up when they saw him. Ron came flying towards him. “Mate, *Harry,* I’m going to be a… a… *Blimey,* it’s been a whole day and I can’t even say it.” He glanced back to where Hermione stood, then to Harry again. “Sorry we didn’t come find you until now – we just needed to sort things out, you know? I still can’t even really believe it’s happened.”

Harry smiled at the mix of shock, fear and happiness on his friend’s face and moved to take a seat in the closest armchair to Hermione. Thankfully, the room stopped that nauseating lurching once he was sitting. “Don’t worry about it, you needed your time to yourself, of course you did – it’s about you two – *three,*” he corrected himself, “not anyone else.”

They shared a glance over his head, and Harry immediately realised they had expected him to feel more put out. Harry didn’t know what to make of that. He supposed, if he hadn’t been so wrapped up in Draco, his own unstable magic, Alaric and the cloaked wolf masters then he may have been a little. As it was, he was merely concerned for them both.
“But you’re alright, aren’t you?” Harry asked them both, his gaze lingering particularly on Hermione, who had taken a seat on the settee next to his chair with her hands on her stomach lightly. She was out of the Hospital Wing at least, but she still seemed a little frail and uncertain of what lay ahead. “What did you decide together?”

It was reassuring that after a moment, Ron crossed the room and sat on the settee, his hand on Hermione’s, sincere however unsure he may have been. “It’s not the perfect timing, of course it’s not – we both need to finish Hogwarts, especially with the wizarding world the way it is now,” Ron began, sounding more like the man Harry had known during the horcrux hunt instead of the brat who had been jealous of Draco speaking to Harry. He had changed so much since they were eleven year olds sharing a compartment on the journey to Hogwarts.

“But we can’t sacrifice a life, the life of our child just for the sake of convenience,” Hermione concluded, leaning towards Harry then. “It’s what you said, Harry. We made a mistake, but it was a beautiful one, it was obviously meant to happen, as everything is for some reason or another.”

Harry nodded. He more than anyone knew by now that everything happened for a reason, even the truly awful things. His friends looked scared, out of their depth but happy despite of that. It was always in their life’s plan to have a family and get married, Harry knew that, it was just the timing that had frightened them. Deep down he knew, especially when seeing them like this, that they would be alright. They always would.

“You’re meant to be together,” he said aloud, looking at them both carefully. Would he ever belong to someone, fit with someone as perfectly as his two best friends did together? Would that someone be Draco? “It’s a baby, no timing would ever be perfect, I suppose. There’s always something going on, especially in our lives,” he laughed. “I know it’s not really my area of expertise, I’m sort of useless to you both in this but I am here if you need me.”

Hermione's hand squeezed his harder, while Ron offered him a grateful smile. Whether his two best friends were prepared for what was to come or not, this blessing would completely change their lives. And yet, it seemed to have drawn them all closer together, back to the way they had been before Harry had been forced to take a life. If not stronger. We'll deal with whatever comes together, Harry thought, listening to them as they explained how they wanted to keep it a secret for a little while longer and only wishing he could share his most precious secrets with them. It felt wrong, them not knowing where his mind was drifting to, even now. Even if a small part him secretly liked the fact that for the first time ever, there was something in the world that was just his.

“Harry!” Hermione suddenly gasped, interrupting the flow of their conversation and his thoughts. He jumped at the sound of the horror in her voice, glancing around hastily to see what the matter
was. They were still alone, however, and it was him that both of them were staring at with wide eyes. Or more specifically, his neck. Harry's hand flew to the opposite side of his throat to the scar and winced. It felt tender, he was sure there must be some violent bruising there as a result of Draco’s fervent desires. Colour flushed his cheeks.

“Blimey, Harry, it looks like a vampire's had you!” Ron exclaimed, “is that why you were out so late? Were you with a girl or something?”

Harry ducked his head a little to avoid their gazes, but not before Hermione caught the obvious glimmer in his expression.

“You were with Malfoy,” Hermione said softly, her words punctuated with a retching sound from Ron before she added, “I take it you spoke with him about…what we discussed?”

Harry shot Ron a look out of the corner of his eye, knowing the red-head would dislike what he was about to hear, but he supposed this was an aspect of his relationship with Draco he could share. He’d already divulged a little to Hermione anyway.

“I thought that prat – I mean that he was away from school for a family emergency or something?” Ron asked. Harry was glad to hear Snape’s cover story had circulated so well. It would help protect Draco’s secret.

“He err…he met me in Hogsmeade,” Harry only partly lied, “we sort of…went out…together.” To his dismay, Hermione leant in even closer, her eyes wide and as hungry for knowledge as ever.

“A date? Malfoy took you out on a date?” she whispered, as if Harry were a rare animal she was afraid of startling. “Where did you go? Was it nice? Did you...you know?”

“Make it sound really disgusting and girly why don't you, Hermione?” Ron snorted, “let the man answer one question at a time.”

“You might've thought the same thing earlier when you were bombarding me with questions regarding this situation,” she retorted stiffly, gesturing to her flat belly. Ron's ears went pink and he looked away, slightly ruffled. It was nice that they were still having their usual tiffs, Harry thought, it reassured him that although everything was changing, the way that his two best friends felt about one another had not so much as wavered. They were his rock, his consistent anchor in this ever-changing world that he could always trust to be there and whole and stable, for each other as well
With a deep breath, he exhaled his reply quickly. “He sort of…apparated us to this fancy restaurant—”

“And you let him? Do the apparrating I mean?” Hermione asked, surprised. She knew as well as Ron that their friend had a hard time trusting anyone enough to take control like that. No matter how trivial the situation.

“-only he cast glamours so we didn't look like ourselves, so we could relax, you know?” Harry continued, ignoring her question. He couldn’t answer that even for himself right now. “I suppose he wanted my attention on him instead of on the next person bombarding me for a comment on the latest rubbish The Daily Prophet’s been running. But…yeah, the food was nice, I s'pose. He had a go at me for choosing the cheapest things—”

Ron interrupted with a snort at that. “More fool you, mate, I'd have ordered the most expensive thing on the bloody menu if one of the richest wizards in England was willingly spoiling me rotten. Malfoy probably would've preferred it if you had, blokes like him like to lavish their interests with fancy gifts and stuff.”

Harry wrinkled his nose. “I don't want him to buy me, or spoil me like a little princess,” he groused. “We may be both men but I'm not 'the girl'.”

Clucking her tongue impatiently, Hermione snapped, “of course you're not. There is no 'girl', Harry. We've discussed this, there’s a top and a bottom but neither is liken to a girl. I'd wager Malfoy would be quite amicable to switching roles in any case if you asked.” Again, Ron grimaced at the direction of the conversation but Harry only nodded slightly.

“Yeah, he...he sort of insinuated he would earlier tonight,” Harry murmured, his cheeks burning with mortification as he remembered the situation he'd been in at the time. Oh Merlin, his mind gasped. Draco Malfoy sucked my cock. And it felt fantastic!

“And it's not about buying you,” Ron said then, leaning back onto the settee and staring into the fireplace thoughtfully. “I... Look, I don't like the bloke but I can understand him wanting to get you stuff. I'm not exactly...in a position to always pamper Hermione with gifts, but if I had Malfoy's money I'd spoil her rotten. It just...it feels nice, to give the person you want gifts and nice food and nice evenings out, whether they want that or not. You know?”
Harry stared at Ron blankly. Apart from being shocked to silence that he had just stuck up for Malfoy, he was surprised how comparatively easy it had been for Ron to mention a subject as sensitive as money. His best friend really had grown a lot during the war. He felt incredibly proud of the man he'd become, whatever faults he still had. He was a good man, a good friend and he would be a perfect father, Harry had no doubt about that.

“I suppose you're right,” Harry grumbled then, remembering the contentment he had felt in presenting Draco with the Solaris Sphere. He had been so embarrassed his blush had continued all the way down to his chest when Draco had confronted him about it earlier, but it had felt good to give him something nonetheless. “I don't think I'll ever be completely comfortable with people showering me with needless gifts though. I'm hardly accustomed to it, am I? The best present I ever got from the Dursleys was a pair of Dudley's broken army men with the heads glued back on – quite poorly too, if you want to know.”

He shared a laugh with Ron at that, but Hermione gave them both a reproachful glare and said, “There are a lot of things you're not used to, Harry. You were very neglected at Privet Drive, but that doesn’t mean you should miss out on the little things that make life worth living. You shouldn’t lose out just because finally having them is a little discomfitting or even frightening.”

She stared at him then, tilting her head slightly as she surveyed him, as if gauging by his appearance just how much Draco was giving him. An awful lot – more than I’m comfortable with, even, Harry directed at her through his thoughts, afraid that that showed all too clearly on his face.

Ron hadn’t been able to meet his eyes since the subject had arisen. He was just as awkward and embarrassed as Harry at discussing such a subject - intimacy between not only two men, but him and Draco to boot. They were both uncomfortable discussing it, and yet Hermione, she had no shame.

“I for one think a bit of pampering after all you've suffered and sacrificed is just what you need, and if Malfoy is desperate to give it to you I say enjoy it. Judging by the vigour in which he marks you I'd say he wants you quite passionately,” Hermione lectured him.

“That or he just might like to mark his territory,” Ron murmured, receiving a glare and a sharp thump on the arm that silenced him on the matter. “Blimey, you'll teach the baby violence before it's even born!” Ron declared, rubbing his bicep gingerly. “Spiteful, its mother is.”

“Better than callous, like its father,” Hermione replied hotly, “If you say things like that, Harry will never come to us again to talk about such delicate matters.”
Ron looked as if he secretly wanted to say he’d prefer it that way and Harry smiled. He could understand how peculiar it must be to discuss his best friend's sex life, particularly when it was as complicated as Harry's. *I didn't even think about men in this way before now, and suddenly I'm having... 'dates' with a pureblood snob who used to loathe me.* Yes, things had definitely changed. *Besides, the thought of him and Hermione having sex to make the baby wasn’t exactly my idea of fun either.*

“You should tell me more about what you’ve planned for the baby,” Harry said then, both him and Ron eager for a change of subject. “It’s far more important and interesting than my mediocre bloody sex life. How are you going to handle school? Tell me how Pomfrey reacted.”

“Of course,” Hermione said, leaning back slightly into Ron with an oddly devious glint in her eyes. She laid her hand back on her belly, touching it softly, apprehensively, as if she hadn't gotten used to the knowledge of something living inside there. “As soon as you tell me what happened after the meal on your date with Malfoy.”

Ron let out a groan of dread and gave Harry an apologetic look, shaking his head. He wanted to discuss this even less than Ron did. He didn't know what was more embarrassing, the fact that he'd danced with Malfoy or the fact that he'd had his first blowjob from Malfoy in the middle of the courtyard. But then, suddenly, his eyes widened as he remembered a far more important event of the evening. One he couldn't believe he'd forgotten!

*Draco would be unbearable if he knew I’d forgotten nearly being murdered twice in one evening in light of his sexual skills,* Harry thought with a wince.

“I forgot to tell you, but on the way back from Hogsmeade, we met Greyback,” Harry began, hastily relaying to them the night's events with Zabini and Greyback, taking care to edit out any *'vampiric'* parts of the story. Thankfully, the horror of this news successfully distracted his best friends from what else had happened with Draco. He didn’t think he was ready to share just yet, not when he was still processing the very precious, very pleasurable intimacies himself.

* * *

“You endured this and you did not think to tell me?” Severus murmured darkly. Draco kept his eyes on the fire he was seated beside. This was now his favourite comfy chair in Severus's quarters, the one he took up each time he came here. There was an edge of discontent in Severus's voice, as if the man felt betrayed by Draco's secrecy.

“I didn't want to involve you, you would do something drastic in revenge. I'm only telling you now because he involved Zabini in this mess and the little snake must be punished since Harry
Severus’s glare weighed heavy on the back of Draco's head as the man breathed, “and you think that this situation did not call for drastic measures? You stupid boy, nothing but a child. Do not fool yourself, it was your own pride that stopped you from seeking my aid, not any sense or reason.”

Draco sighed, the heat of the flames warming him deliciously. Almost as well as Harry's body heat. “It matters little, surely? The point is that for some reason he loathes me and now has resorted to sending deranged werewolves and classmates after me. Not to mention the fact that according to Zabini there is ‘something else’ out there with its sights on Harry. And I cannot smell Alaric nearby either. He’s gone missing. He could be anywhere–”

“Right outside this door, yes, he could be. This castle is insurmountable. There has been a search for him since I alerted McGonagall of his involvement in Miss Granger's mysterious collapse but he was not found, and nor shall he be, I expect until he wishes to be.”

Draco snorted, immediately disgusted with the action - one of Potter's bad habits. He only hoped he picked up no more. “I don't know what to anticipate, or what to plan for,” Draco admitted. “He might be spreading what I am across the school for all I know, or setting some fatal trap…”

He felt as well as heard Severus move towards him. He was certain his senses were increasing by the day. He could sense the way Severus's cloak disturbed the air as he moved. Feel the gap between them decrease as if the man were batting aside a wall of cloth to reach him. It wasn't until his favourite teacher was standing beside him that he looked up into that face, twisted with irritation and concern simultaneously.

“Now my opinion, my advice is not good enough for you?” The potions master sneered. “Foolish, arrogant boy. Potter's infuriating desire to martyr himself is rubbing off on you. You should have come to me from the first! Have I not always done everything in my power to aid you?!”

Draco winced at the disappointment emanating from Severus now. It was almost worst than disappointment from his own father. “I can run faster than a bloody firebolt! I'll soon be able to crush stone with my bare hands. I shouldn't need you to rescue me anymore–”

“Vampire or human or squib, I will always save you, you self-deprecating little idiot. Even the strongest man on earth needs assistance at times,” Severus lectured him, angry now.

“You're always saving me as it is–”

“And will continue to, until one of us is dust on the wind,” the man vowed darkly, his black eyes shining with intensity now. “Draco, I appreciate that you are trying to be independent out of a
misguided desire to find yourself again, to win your parents back, but it is nothing but arrogance to think you must deal with everything alone. How do you expect to convince your pet Potter of letting others in when you will not do the same?"

That stumped Draco then, killed any retort that had been poised on his tongue. Resting back in the chair, he closed his eyes. With his senses and abilities rapidly growing, they had the tendency to get on top of him once and a while, to overwhelm him until he needed to pause, just for a moment to adjust to it all. He wondered just when his abilities would stop growing. He could already feel power coursing through his dead veins like a sharp, constant wave of adrenaline. Even when he was calm, in his peaceful 'un-death' that he experienced when he 'slept'.

“You are both so exasperatingly alike,” Severus said then, his low droll slicing through the silence. “Vampire or not, you were made for each other.” There was a derisive sneer in Severus's words and Draco grinned both at and in spite of them.

“Don't tell him that,” Draco mused with an edge of bitterness. “He wouldn't like it.”

“That's because he is a stubborn brat in denial. Give him time–”

“Time is the only weapon I have,” Draco murmured. A prickle of awareness rippled through his cool skin and he inhaled deeply. He could smell him, even from here. He was content tonight, more so than he usually was, at least. And I am at least partly responsible for that, he thought smugly.

“Tonight seemed to have gone quite well, however, by the smell of him,” he told Severus. The man frowned.

“Your senses are increasing at a rapid rate indeed,” the man murmured, mostly to himself. “I had suspected that your abilities would be exponential, given who your donor is. We will truly never be able to guess the extent of your power if his blood is powering them.” He surveyed Draco thoughtfully then. “You have been contemplating it already, I can see it in your eyes. You shared thoughts with him, albeit by accident, that is only the beginning.”

Draco felt full of possibility at the thought. He had felt it already before now, but now he was certain that he and Harry could do immeasurable things. He would have to research that aspect of the relationship between the First and their vampire. Except…

He sighed. “I cannot lie to him, and if I begin to use some of my powers for uses he sees as wrong he wouldn't give me as much as another drop. And more than that, he would never trust me again. His trust is hard-won as it is.”

Severus gave a flicker of a smirk. “Yes, but you could allow him the choice of where you exercised your abilities if that would content him.”
Draco frowned. ‘Content him’? “Nothing would content him, but he might find a use for our powers that would satisfy his need to help people, yes.” He paused then, an unnerving tingle pricking his skin. “The sun is coming up, have you blackened out the magical windows ready for it?”

Severus sneered. “Please do give me some credit, Draco. I had in fact had these rooms sun-proof for hours now. Though I suppose if Mawndwilis’s reputation is anything to go by, she will have those ingredients here within the day. She is a talented brewer but she could do with Potter’s fame to accelerate her career.”

Draco smirked, flying from the chair with inhuman speed and bolting for the side door. He fancied a shower to wash the smell of werewolf from him and to give him some privacy as he remembered every sound, every inch of Harry’s expression as he’d sucked him dry tonight – in every sense of the word.

There were so many things to concern himself with currently, so many dangers. He needed to empty his mind for a little while before he could process them all, and how best to face each one. He had both Severus and Harry to help him figure it out, at least. That was a comfort he had long forgotten until now, the knowledge that he was no longer alone.

Then, just as his hand touched the ornate door handle, he stopped dead in his tracks. Something had just struck him with all the suddenness and unpredictability of a lightning bolt.

“You called Harry my pet,” Draco said thoughtfully. He didn't have to turn to know that the potions master had raised a brow.

“Surely you are not going to defend his honour over such a petty—”

“No,” Draco cut across him. “No, but…that's what the cloaked things called Alaric. They said he was someone's pet.” He paused then, turning to face his teacher. “Whatever they are, do you think that Professor Alaric is the pet human to one of them?”

~To Be Continued...
It was an unexpectedly quiet weekend that followed after that. Despite the fact that Alaric had vanished, which naturally was the biggest scandal of the school at that moment, it followed without event. That didn't stop Harry from glancing over his shoulder at every turn, however. Zabini had vanished too, but he had a feeling that that was down to Snape, not anything overly suspicious. He had a feeling the potions master would not allow anyone to get away with bringing harm to Draco.

Happily, Harry had spent much of what remained of the weekend with Ron and Hermione. They'd made a spread of books across the rug near the fireplace and focused on getting all of their homework done for the week ahead – even Hermione had nearly fallen behind what with everything that had been happening lately. It was an oddly nice experience, just worrying about school work with his friends, he felt almost normal.

Even if he couldn't get Draco out of his head.

He'd awoken the morning after their 'date' and found humiliation as thick as stone blocks raining down on him. The sounds he had made, the things he had done and said, he cringed at the memory, although unlike before, the mortification did not eradicate the warmth glowing subtly in his chest.

Malfoy had been on his mind the entire weekend, and while Ron was sensible enough to ignore Harry's occasional silences, Hermione had looked at him knowingly. Each time, Harry had carried on scribbling out his essays frantically, trying to avoid betraying anything just from meeting her eyes.

A few times, he had even found himself contemplating a visit to the dungeons, but he could not think of a valid excuse he could use. He'd already given Draco blood, he had no reason to seek out the blond and he didn't want to seem desperate by just turning up. He could just imagine the look the potions master would throw him if he turned up just to see Draco.

So when he awoke Monday morning with a burgeoning erection, he was not surprised that thoughts of a certain vampire whispered into his mind as he hastily and silently dealt with his morning glory. The look Ron gave him as they all headed down from the boys' dormitory into the common room, however, told him that he hadn't been as silent as he might've liked. The calmness of the last day or so quickly dissipated, however, when a shrill, irritatingly familiar shriek burst through the common room.

“Potter!” Daphne Greengrass cried, shoving past the dazed looking Patil twins that had been on their way down the stairs from the girls' dormitory. Harry turned to face her casually, not flinching even when he felt her wand pressed sharply into his throat.
“Good morning,” he replied casually, raising a brow at her. He felt far too relaxed after the other evening with Draco, more calm and content than he had felt in an age. He couldn't manage to feel anything more than amused at this fool before him. She was livid, her eyes flashing with hatred and fury but Harry didn't budge, even as the pressure of her wand tip against his throat began to ache a little.

Maybe all I needed all along was to release some unresolved sexual tension, Harry thought distantly, as the shrieking commenced.

“Blaise is gone! He's had his ‘privilege’ of completing his education here revoked, according to McGonagall. I saw her and Snape carting Blaise out of here like a fugitive yesterday!” Greengrass screamed all in one breath, spitting with rage like a furious feline.

Harry schooled his expression into a mask of indifference, the kind he had learned from watching Draco deal with the things that most bothered him, and swatted her hand away to relieve his throat of the pressure of her wand. Behind him, he felt Ron and Hermione, who he had seen join the growing crowd a few seconds ago, standing firmly. As they had been all along. Even if he didn't have Draco and hell, even Snape, he wasn't alone. He had bigger problems than this infantile little girl, but he wouldn't have to face them in solitude.

“All of this is because of you, Potter. I just know it. Blaise skipped our date Saturday night and when I finally found him he was wandering the halls and all he could say was that he wouldn't get away with hurting you. Blaise, Professor Alaric, all of this is your fault, I'm certain of it!”

“And your deduction skills are the stuff of legends, I'm sure,” Harry snorted derisively, unable to not notice the edge of Draco in his voice. He supposed the blond's influence was benefitting in some ways, such as this. He was angry, apprehensive that those around him might be suspicious of Greengrass's claims. Luckily Greengrass being as she was, did not seem to have much loyalty or respect among the other eighth years. They were all staring at her with mixed looks of disbelief and irritation. That made the unstable emotions rumbling in his gut easier to ignore.

“You heard, along with the rest of us when we came back here; it took a lot for McGonagall and the other teachers to get permission for us to return here among the underage students. They had to personally vouch for every one of us to get us in here. We're adults among children and it was made perfectly clear to us all from the start how we'd be dealt with if we abused the privilege we’d been given,” Harry lectured her, his voice thin and tight.

“Zabini is big enough to have gotten into trouble all by himself. Don't go throwing your assumptions around at me. It’s not my fault that your boyfriend getting punished accordingly leaves you alone with classmates you've done nothing but mock and alienate for years.”

Greengrass was seething. “Don't think that I don't know that both Professor Alaric and Blaise were both in the bad books of you and your ‘boyfriend’ either. Convenient, isn't it? Blaise saw you together a few times; I suppose you used your influence with your two pet teachers to have him removed before he could tell anyone? And then Professor Alaric because he didn't care for your pretty little boyfriend? Yes, very convenient.” Her voice was as sharp and bitter as a viper's and Harry took a step towards her challengingly.

“Your childishness shows in your idiotic theories. Just listen to the rubbish coming out of your mouth. You think I care that everyone knows? Tell the whole bloody world of your ridiculous assumptions, but don't be surprised if no one believes you – you have done a good job of limiting your social circle to blood purists and Death Eaters after all.” Harry sneered, shifted his satchel.
higher up his shoulder and shoved past the irrational ex-slytherin, Ron and Hermione close behind. He felt a tight grip on his arm yank him back hard, however and he whirled around, wrenching his limb out of Greengrass's offensive grasp.

“I always thought it was peculiar that a nondescript, sentimental fool such as you could bring down You Know Who. There's something not right about you, Potter, and you should know by now, that there are no secrets that can be kept for long in the wizarding world,” Greengrass hissed, “your dirty little secrets will all come out in the end.”

“Don't touch me,” Harry spat back sharply. “You and everyone else can believe what you like. I've finally started living for myself instead of everyone else. I couldn't give a rat's arse what rubbish you spread about me. But I think you know that the number of people who will believe someone like you are limited.” Proud of himself for doing so well in keeping his temper, considering the situation, Harry continued through the common room. He felt his two best friends at his heel as the portrait hole opened and raised his chin in satisfaction.

Yes, all the tension Draco had released from him the other day had certainly made him feel a lot different. He still felt quite carefree and calm, despite being accosted with such foulness first thing Monday morning. He smiled to himself, and his head was so far into the clouds that Hermione and Ron's cries of, “Harry, look where you're going!” were his only warning before he slammed straight into a hard, unyielding chest.

The bag he'd been carrying tumbled to the floor, his books sprawling out around their feet. Ricocheting back off of the person a few steps, Harry straightened his glasses and opened his mouth to apologise, only to stop short as he stared at the person he'd walked into.

A burning flush set his cheeks aflame and he stooped immediately to shove his books and writing equipment back into his bag. This was his first time facing Draco since Saturday. He felt quite embarrassed looking at that face and remembering everything that had happened when they were last together.

“What are you doing here?” Harry asked hastily, tugging the collar of his school uniform up around his neck to hide the dark, purple bruise there that he was suddenly very conscious of.

Unfortunately, Draco dropped to his level, those long, pale hands helping to push the fallen contents of the bag back into their place. When they both moved to belt the satchel back up, their fingers touched briefly and Harry bolted back upright again, fidgeting uncomfortably. The smirk he saw twisting the blond's lips out of the corner of his eye told him that Draco was far from worried about his skittishness, however. On the contrary, he seemed quite amused by it.

“The ingredients arrived yesterday evening,” Draco said, purposefully vague for the benefit of the presence of Hermione and Ron. “If you'd spared me a moment since Saturday, you'd have known I planned on returning to classes as normal today.” He sounded slightly peeved with the fact that Harry hadn't been to see him, and Harry wanted to say that since Draco had fed, he didn't have valid reason to, but he couldn't say such a thing in front of Ron and Hermione, so he merely cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Oh, I…I'm glad you're back, I s'pose. I know you didn't want to miss much school,” Harry mumbled. He had to be careful of what he said with his two best friends watching. He knew for a fact, after all, that Hermione would be analysing every word. He was struggling to find a safe way to phrase the reason he hadn't seen Draco since Saturday, but the vampire cut him off.
“You don't mind if I walk with you down to breakfast?” Draco asked, his bright silver eyes fixed, as ever on Harry.

“Err, yeah, why not?” Harry murmured in embarrassment, starting to walk clumsily onward in the direction of the Great Hall. As all four of them made their journey down there together, Hermione and Ron eventually overtook him, walking just a few paces ahead and leaving Draco to slide into stride beside Harry.

“You're afraid of what happened on Saturday between us, aren't you?” Draco whispered. Harry winced. He could see why Draco would think that. It really was nothing more than embarrassment that had him acting so stupidly however. He was a little afraid of how vulnerable he had been when they'd been together, but the mortification was screaming the loudest in his ears currently.

“I'm not afraid of anything,” Harry retorted under his breath. “Embarrassed, but who wouldn’t be after making…sounds like that. I…I made a prat of myself. But besides that, I just didn't know what reason I had to visit you—”

“You need a reason to meet with the man whose mouth you happily had your cock in?” Draco snapped. Harry stopped on the spot, glaring up at him.

“Don't make it sound like I used you, or that I pissed off the second I was satisfied. You initiated what happened Saturday evening. And I… Look, I'm not saying I needed a reason, I just didn’t feel right sniffing around after you like a desperate little puppy. I have some pride, you know,” Harry replied hotly, although his ire was still not as easily roused. He was peeved, naturally, but he was not as furious as he would have been a few days ago.

“But you wanted to see me, didn’t you?” Draco murmured, his voice a tad softer than before.

“Harry?” Hermione called suddenly, unwittingly giving Harry an escape from having to answer. He glanced over to her and Ron, who were waiting outside the doors of the Great Hall. “Are you coming?” she asked questioningly with a raised brow.

Harry looked up to Draco thoughtfully for a moment, before walking towards his friends. He kept his footsteps deliberately slow, however, to let Draco know that he was still welcome to walk with him. As he and his friends moved through the doors, Draco fell into stride beside him once more, his cool, soft fingers brushing over Harry's knuckles subtly as they walked side by side.

The dark haired boy ducked his head slightly; it was embarrassing having someone so casually invading his personal space. Having someone so close to his side in a more than friendly way, with their eyes focused solely on him. Harry couldn't raise his eyes as the four of them walked through the aisle between the two middle-most tables towards the eighth year seats. It was a daunting, foreign sensation, this closeness, but it was also unbelievably good. His skin felt tingly all over.

Hermione gave him a knowing look as she and Ron took the seats opposite him and Draco took the one at his side. He offered her a warning glare in response and piled toast, eggs, bacon and sausages onto his plate.

“Worked up an appetite, have we?” Ron snorted.

“Shut up.” Harry replied, mortified, shoving a slither of bacon dipped in egg into his mouth. He determinedly ignored the way Draco chuckled under his breath beside him. After a moment or two of silence while everyone filled their plates, Ron began pleading with Hermione to give his
Transfiguration essay a once over. Evidently thinking their companion’s were otherwise occupied, Harry felt Draco lower his head a fraction under pretence of eating carefully.

“So, you're embarrassed about Saturday evening, are you?” Draco murmured, for Harry's ears only. “Before you fly off the handle as you usually do and retreat away from me, it might behove you to know that everyone feels a bit awkward afterwards when they're as innocent as you.” There was an edge of teasing in that voice that made Harry's cheeks redden as he hastily guzzled down some pumpkin juice.

“I wish you'd stop harping on about my bloody innocence, it won't make me anymore inclined to lose it fully to you, you know,” Harry grumbled, “I don't appreciate being ridiculed.”

“I was trying to reassure you, you realise,” Draco mumbled, making a show of eating a perfectly cut corner of fried bread, “But I must admit your temper is much better after you've gotten off. Perhaps I'll have to sneak into your bed after lights out to keep your mood sweet.”

Harry’s flush darkened and he tried to think of something, anything to say to such a thing. He wanted to sound affronted, but a very warm knot coiled in his belly at the thought of a repeat of Saturday night's intimacy. The apprehension he felt on feeling vulnerable to someone again was slowly being stifled by excitement. The brief touch of those fingers against his on the way to their seat had been enough to remind him how good it had felt.

Was this too good to be true? That he might feel the same things that any normal person did? That he might have someone, as he hadn't dared to hope for since he realised he didn't love Ginny the way that he should have. He didn't know if he was capable of love, in all honesty. He had felt numb to all emotion except the negative since the end of the war. But if someone as unlikely as Draco could inspire sensations as strong as the pleasure he had felt with him, then maybe, just maybe…

“Looks like you're back to your normal, cocky self with those ingredients in you,” Harry said at last, their conversation still hushed so that only Draco could hear. “Snape has enough to make a few batches of your potion?”

“He stayed up all night to ensure my first batch would be ready for me to return today,” Draco replied quietly, his gratitude and platonic feelings for Snape rich in his voice. Snape was like a second father to Draco, Harry thought. And a better one than Lucius Malfoy, most likely, his mind supplied.

“Luckily Severus’s first class of the day is later on so that he can catch some sleep” Draco continued. “He says that Mawndwilis delivered enough ingredients to last until Severus's next supply arrives. I won't have to worry about that again, it seems.” Draco turned slightly then, the minute movement demanding Harry's attention.

The chosen one glanced shyly up from under his fringe into Draco's eyes as the blond whispered, “I have you to thank for that, Harry.”

Harry fidgeted uncomfortably. “I…It's nothing, honest. Considering you saved my life a fair few times this weekend, I'd say we're even.”

“Don't underestimate the importance of this to me,” Draco said lowly, “you may be surrounded by loved ones eager to do such selfless things for you, but I am not. This is infinitely more important to me than you seem to realise.”
Harry studied him carefully for a moment, his mouth opening to reply, but his words were stalled by Hermione's sudden exclamation.

“Those absolute swines!” She cried, slamming the *Daily Prophet* hard down on the table. The front page was largely dominated by a moving picture of Fenrir Greyback, his dirty mane tangled over his shoulders and his jagged teeth all visible thanks to the broad, malicious grin that was twisting his face. Harry tried not to shiver in pleasure as Draco leant closer to him to get a better look at the article below the image.

Hermione was practically steaming with outrage. “They've all-but said that Greyback was in Hogsmeade specifically for you, Harry.”

Harry winced. The paranoid would assume he was rousing an army to be the next dark lord or some such nonsense, while the rest would still blame him for any damage done. “Was anyone hurt?” he asked, dreading the answer.

Hermione deflated a bit, though her expression was still tense. “No, thankfully. But more to the point, how dare they use your name in this way without the facts.”

“The fact is Greyback was after Harry,” Draco said then, without raising his eyes from the article.

“They don’t know that for sure, only we do,” Hermione retorted.

Draco did look at Hermione then, his face pensive. “What if they had a tip off from a certain source?”

“Alaric?” Harry asked, wondering. The man had vanished almost directly after that last time he had seen him in the Defence classroom, but it was obvious that he was nowhere near done. He was biding his time, plotting, waiting. *And doing some damage in the process*, Harry's mind supplied, thinking of what could have happened on Saturday – on his orders.

“It sounds like something he would do. If he dirties my name subtly but surely, he might just convince the public. Suppose he didn't count on the fact that I couldn't give a shit what the public think.”

“Indeed,” Draco echoed softly, “there is no such thing as bad press.”

“You can talk,” Ron snorted, “it's not you they're writing muck about.”

Draco's smirked. “Oh, but if it is Alaric behind this, I have no doubt that he'll suggest that Harry and I are involved, in which case, the ‘death eater seducing the chosen one with darkness’ stories will begin to circulate before too long.”

Harry glared at him, his face beet red. He couldn't believe he'd just said something like that out loud! “Don't make bloody assumptions,” he snapped, “what exactly are you implying by involved? I told you, I've decided sod all.”

“Oh, Harry,” Hermione sighed. “Do stop being such a prude. You should know that the more rattled it gets you, the more he'll do it. Honestly. Boys.” She was studying the paper again now, her eyes flashing from edge to edge as she read through it quickly. “If you’ve enough confidence to wear his love bites all over your neck, you’re confident enough to hear him talking about you in
such a straightforward manner. Really, I’d be more offended if he didn’t treat you as special.”

Harry’s hand flew to the scarred side of his throat, eyes wide with horror. Had they guessed Draco’s secret? But Ron’s smile was too full of amusement for that to be accurate. “Other side mate,” his friend chuckled, before helping himself to another slice of toast. A little relieved, Harry touched his bruised neck gingerly. Draco had definitely marked his territory alright.

“People are going to think I’m a leper,” he grumbled, “people keep taking chunks out of me…” He fidgeted uncomfortably, squeezing his thighs together. Now that he thought about it, there was a distinct ache at the apex of his thigh where Draco had bitten him on Saturday. The only problem was, it wasn’t an entirely bad ache.

“Can we not talk about you doing the dirty while I’m eating mate?” Ron asked, “no offense but…” he glanced pointedly at Draco and lowered his voice to a whisper so that no eavesdroppers could hear. “It’s you, my best mate and…Malfoy. I don’t really want to think of either of you doing…anything.”

“No taste,” Draco taunted, reaching forwards now that he had finished ‘eating’ his breakfast and reaching for a shiny red apple, biting into it. Harry watched Draco for a prolonged moment, concentrating far too hard for his own liking at the way Draco’s mouth looked with the sinful juice of the apple coating it, before he glanced away quickly. He was glad that the subject seemed to die there. It was mortifying having Draco mention the intimacies between them in front of Ron and Hermione.

When finally they stood up from the table, Harry could not help but smile at the way Ron subtly took Hermione’s book bag onto his own shoulder whilst a silently glaring Hermione dared not protest. She was independent and headstrong but in this, she knew her other half was right and permitted him the small victory. All relationships had a way of evening themselves out, Harry realised. Even his and Draco’s was one of equal sacrifice and gain.

“To Defence?” Draco suggested as he stood fluidly at Harry’s side, finishing his last bite of apple before tossing it onto the table. Harry stared at him for a moment, inciting a smile to flutter across those moist lips. It was strange to see the vampire act so normal after everything that had happened over the last few days. “Do you want to be my apple, Potter?” he mused when he caught Harry staring, shaking Harry from his reverie.

“Bollocks, Malfoy,” Harry snorted, snatching up his bag and walking with Draco, Ron and Hermione back through the aisle hall. Hundreds of eyes followed them as they did so, right up until the great doors closed behind them.

It didn’t feel as odd as Harry might’ve liked, walking up towards Defence Against the Dark Arts together. Some students who knew who they were turned to look at them as they passed. Yet despite feeling his skin warm slightly, Harry carried on walking. It wasn’t like they were holding hands or snogging each other frantically. There wasn’t anything suspicious about walking to lesson together.

Are you trying to convince them or yourself? Harry’s mind supplied. He glanced at Draco out of the corner of his eye. While he, Harry was unnerved by the attention, Draco was thrilled with it, holding his head high and glaring at anyone who gave them a less than polite glance.

He’s in his element, Harry realised. The only way that the blond could be enjoying this more was if there were cameras flashing.
“Will you be able to use half the spells and potions now?” Harry murmured under his breath to Hermione. She nodded slowly.

“Madame Pomfrey gave me a few potions for my…my condition, she's told Professor Snape that I have to avoid certain potions but otherwise…back to normal. And my magic should settle out after the end of the first trimester.”

“Of course, no one else knows yet,” Ron interjected, despite the fact that he had told Harry already last night. Harry beamed. Mr and Mrs Weasley were certain to be thrilled, but Ron would definitely be in for a clout round the ears for recklessness.

“Yeah, yeah of course,” Harry agreed. Before he could say anything else, however, Hermione had stopped and whirled to face both him and Draco.

“I feel like I should thank you again, Malfoy,” Hermione said. “Both you and Professor Snape saved my life, I can't thank you enough.”

Beside Harry, the blond shrugged. “It’s no secret that I helped you for Harry rather than for you. Still, I am glad you are better for his sake.”

“Well,” Hermione replied, a little taken aback. “You're honest at least. Harry appreciates honesty more than anything else; you just might be good enough.”

Harry saw Draco's mouth open and then curl in a way that hinted his next words would be far from civil. He leapt in to douse the fire before it could burst into an inferno.

“Defence?” He suggested, turning and leading them the last few feet to the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. That little ‘semi-peace’ lasted all of half an hour, he thought. If he did choose to go out with Draco, he would have a tough time getting them all to be civil. And I'll find it even tougher when they find out Draco is a vampire and I'm basically his staple food. With a sigh, he pushed open the door to the classroom. He only hoped that whatever he decided, whatever he chose, it would be worth it in the end.

Walking into the classroom with Draco, Hermione and Ron on his heels, Harry found himself stopped still in the doorway. He swore his mouth was hanging open. His eyes wide. There, standing before him was…

“Remus?” he gasped. He was clogging up the door behind him, blocking everyone's entry, but he did not care. Not when he thought his eyes just might pop right out of the sockets. “Remus, how…? What are you doing here?”

The man's worn, gentle face offered him a smile then. “My first question was going to be ‘how are you?’ since I didn’t receive a reply to my letter. Although, being back here does remind me how hectic the final years can be.”

Harry flushed, the letter in his robe pocket weighed heavily now. He couldn't believe he'd forgotten it! Remus must think Harry just couldn't be arsed now!

“Yeah…it's been mental here, I got the letter but I just sort of forgot, what with everything and…” He scratched awkwardly at the back of his neck. “Sorry.”
“Not at all,” Remus replied, as gentle as ever. “The first few weeks back after everything you have been through were bound to be difficult.”

Harry tried to ignore the feeling of the dozens of eyes staring into the back of his head, among them Draco's, who was no doubt studying his every move.

“Yes, really, Harry,” Remus assured him. “Don’t worry yourself. My last letter wouldn’t have revealed to you why I am here in any case as it was a spur of the moment request. It was mostly asking how you were.”

Harry swallowed hard, feeling like a complete selfish fool. “How are you? And how are Tonks and Teddy?” The answering smile that remained on his old friend's face, was a knowing expression filled almost fatherly with affection. It made Harry a little uncomfortable yet happy at the same time.

“All of us are fine, Harry. Teddy misses you, of course,” Remus said softly, glancing to the crowd now waiting to come in. “Perhaps you should all take your seats. Your lesson is about to start.”

Harry started moving, but only because Remus had done so as well, turning and heading towards the front of the class. He followed after him. “But…why are you here?” Harry asked while his classmates started to take their seats. “Where’s Professor Alaric?” Had the teachers gotten some insight to where the bastard had vanished to if they had employed Remus as a replacement?

“Professor McGonagall has asked me to teach Defence, just for the remainder of the term until she can find a full time replacement for Professor Alaric.”

Harry's eyes darted to the desk that Malfoy was seated at. The vampire had no doubt heard that. A full replacement for Alaric?

“I know you don’t like your fame, Harry,” Remus continued, as if not noticing Harry's distraction. “But being known as your friend, your…your family, it has allowed me some more prestige in the wizarding world than others like me. It was absolutely no trouble at all for the board of governors to approve my place here. I must thank you for that, Harry.”

“It was probably more what you did to help in the war, really Remus; I doubt it was much to do with me.”

Hesitantly, Remus reached out, setting a hand on Harry's shoulder and squeezing firmly. “You're a good man, Harry, and you're coping with everything remarkably well.”

“Not really,” Harry grumbled, just for Remus's ears. “But I'm glad it’s easier for you to work now. I wish you could stay on here as teacher. You're the best we ever had here, you know.”

Remus frowned in confusion then. “Are you certain? I think you must be a tad biased, Harry. I've heard from students and staff alike how good a teacher Alaric was.”

With another glance Draco's way, Harry fidgeted nervously. This time, however, he saw Remus notice his eyes flickering to the blond. The older man's frown deepened and his mouth opened on the verge of speech. But Harry headed him off.

“What happened to Professor Alaric?” he asked quickly.
“Nobody knows,” Remus said simply. “He simply vanished a few days ago; his possessions were gone from his office, as was he. Vanished without a trace, and for no reason any of the staff can garner.”

Harry thought he could find a reason though, many in fact. And now, on one hand, Draco was physically safe from Alaric. On the other, what if Alaric told everyone what Draco was? And worse, what if he was still here somewhere? Lurking?

“Harry, are you alright?” Remus asked then, looking from between him and Draco. “Is there something wrong?”

“Yeah, yeah fine,” he replied hastily. “Sorry, I'm just still so happy to see you. Will you be flooing home to Tonks every night or staying here?”

Unfortunately, Remus still looked suspicious. “I will stay here during the week and floo home on weekends. It’s only a temporary measure. But if you really are alright, Harry then you should probably take your seat. We can talk later when the rest of the class aren't watching.”

Harry whirled around to see everyone in their seats and staring at him, as if desperate to hear what was being said. “Oh,” Harry mumbled. “Yeah sorry, later then.” And with that, he scrambled to take the seat that had been assigned to him since his first absence – beside Draco. He tried not to look at the blond too much, for he was sure Remus kept one eye on them both for the entire lesson.

“Wait a moment please, Harry,” Remus said as the students began to pile out of the room. Harry glanced to his friends and Draco, before turning back to Remus. It wasn't until the door closed behind the last student that the man spoke. “You seemed distracted in class, Harry,” he noted.

Harry shrugged. “I didn't mean to be. I suppose I've got a lot on my mind, is all. I… It’s difficult, trying to...you know, find a place in the world again. But I’m doing better. I’m fine most of the time. Really.”

“I’m glad of that Harry, truly I am.” Remus stared at him for a moment, his eyes glistening with thought. “And your distraction today, did it have anything to do with your seating arrangements?”

With a frown, Harry answered, “No, I mean... Malfoy and I were seated together by Flitwick too so... I'm not eleven anymore. I can endure it.”

Remus sighed, moving about Harry to collect the papers the students had left. Remus had gone with Alaric’s scheduled revision test and though Harry was confident he had done well, he was very conscious of wanting to impress Remus with his scores. Remus was more important to him than ever now.

“Harry, you have always been very accepting of my condition,” Remus said then. Harry's brow furrowed again.

“Err...yeah well you're a good man. Werewolf or not. Why should I persecute you for what you are? What you can't control? That'd be just as barmy as Voldemort going after all the Muggleborns.”

“Indeed,” Remus agreed distantly, as if his true thoughts were elsewhere. “That is why I hope you do not find what I am about to say too… vulgar, but you must be aware that amongst other
heightened senses, I have a very acute sense of smell. Being a werewolf.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah I guessed as much. You always shift away when I put garlic in my omelettes of a morning.”

Remus smiled again, though again, the expression betrayed his caution. “Harry, I know that this may alarm you, and I am loathe to point fingers at someone suffering as I am. But you must know that Draco Malfoy is a vampire.”

There was a moment then, in which Harry was forced to make a decision that would certainly affect both his and Draco's lives. But when it came down to it, his decision was already made. He was a bloody awful liar regardless, but he could not look into the face of his father's last best friend, the eyes of the man who had taken him into his family, and lie to him. He just couldn't.

“You can't tell anyone, he doesn't want anyone to know until he's finished Hogwarts. New, uncontrollable vampires wouldn't be allowed near children. He'd be kicked out and then he'd never—”

“Harry,” Remus interrupted, silencing Harry's ramblings. “I will tell no one. I of all people would not. But… You knew? He told you?”

Harry glanced away, reaching up with a half-hearted hand to pull his tie and collar away from his throat on one side, revealing the pinkish scar that would never fade as long as Draco lived. His first bite mark. His brand of 'ownership'. Harry grimaced at the thought.

“In the dungeon, a vampire turned him. It tried to make him kill me. He nearly did but he… I don't know, somehow he managed to pull back. He killed the vampire and helped me to kill Voldemort.”

Remus just stared at the mark at his throat. “You never said—”

“I thought if I said anything more detailed than we were both prisoners there, it would betray too much about what he is. I couldn't do that. I know how awfully people treated you.”

“Vampires are a little different,” Remus said softly, his voice distracted as if he were thinking of something else. “They are considered more human. It is as you say, the younglings are often too uncontrollable but that's what their covens are for, to teach them, to rear them until they can control themselves. He is wise to want to hide himself until his time at Hogwarts is done. Although vampires aren't frowned upon like werewolves are once they reach that ‘balanced’ state.”

Harry frowned then. “But… Draco never had anyone to teach or…control him. He was never really ‘uncontrollable’, not like the books described. Not like you're saying. I…I thought the books were exaggerating but… If they weren't, why is Draco so stable?”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth and he already knew the answer. He remembered those cool, haunting tones of the cloaked demons in red. Whatever they were, they knew about him and Draco. His eyes widened as he recalled the words.

“The boy must be his First, otherwise such a young one would not be able to endure the proximity of so many ripe young bodies. He is…almost human. He would not have been able to resist when we called to him unless his allegiance was already indebted to the boy. Yes, he most definitely has a First.”
“Do you believe the First is likely to take advantage of his devotion? Perhaps use him as a weapon against us? And a formidable one at that.”

Yes. They were right. He kept Draco under control, kept him bound to humanity. His will, his feelings kept Draco much the man he once was because of the bond that they shared. Harry winced. “I'm his...his bloody leash!” Harry growled, disgusted with the thought. Was Draco aware of that? Of Harry inadvertently controlling him? He felt sick.

Suddenly, a warm, gentle hand was running through his hair. Glancing up quickly, Harry saw Remus’s worried smile. “Is this what has been distracting you since you've returned, Harry?” His face was grave then. “He hasn't been hurting you, has he?”

Harry stepped back slightly, despite how comforting the hand on him felt. He needed to see Draco. “Not like you're thinking,” he said.

“Then how, Harry?” Remus persisted. “I know that I can never replace James or Sirius. I know that I am many years too late to be your father, but I am here now and you don't have to suffer in silence.”

Harry felt a lump rise in his throat at that and swallowed determinedly against it. “I know, but it’s complicated. He wants this less than I do—”

“By the way his scent clings to you, I doubt it,” Remus murmured darkly. “He's covered you with it.”

Harry flushed, mortified. “What, like dogs scenting their bitch?” he snarled. Remus frowned at that, and immediately Harry recalled his words. “I didn't mean that. Look it’s just... I feed him, I have to or he’ll die. Only my blood will satisfy the hunger.”

He watched realisation dawn on Remus's face. “You're his First.” Of course he would know the term; he was the best Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher they had ever had, after all. “Harry, it doesn't have to—”

“It does. Remus. I tried to escape it but there is no other way. He nearly died this summer from starvation. I won't do that to him. He was a knob when we were younger but he’s different now and he doesn't deserve that. He never wanted to be a vampire, just like you never wanted to be a werewolf!”

Remus's expression softened. “Harry, please, do not make this about saving me or Sirius or anyone else. What happened happened; none of it was your responsibility.”

Harry snorted at that. “No, I'm slowly realising that, really I am. But Draco is my responsibility. Whether I asked for it or not.” Sort of like Hermione, he thought. She never asked for her baby but it's her responsibility. It's a living being and she couldn't and wouldn't get rid of it just to make her life easier. Granted the situation was a tad different, he didn't have a familial love for Draco, but he had something...

“Things are hard, Remus, but I was fooling myself if I ever thought it'd be easy just because the war ended.” He worried his lower lip then, staring into those concerned eyes. “I am trying to ask for help when I need it, really. And I will... I think I'll need to come to you and Tonks one day soon, but I can't come to you about Draco. You don't understand—”
“I understand more than you think, but there are ways you can keep him alive and not lose any more of your life,” Remus explained. “You deserve life, Harry. Don't bind yourself to someone who only cares about you because of what you can give him.”

That felt like a slap in the face. Harry winced. He didn't want to distrust Draco just because it was sensible, not when he’d only just learnt to trust him. He'd been good about everything hadn't he? Even despite the thrall. *Which, turns out I might be sort of doing to him too anyway,* he thought. He needed to speak to Draco. *I don't want to control him. I don't want to be a leash.*

“Well if you find one then direct me to it, but right now I need to go.” He turned to leave but Remus caught his arm carefully.

“Don't forget your powers, how unstable they are. The slightest push from him and you could lose it, Harry.”

_and with the slightest push, he can and has dragged me straight back._

“I'll be back to see you, Remus. Give my love to Tonks and Teddy,” Harry said, wishing he'd been able to spend more time with him without it being plagued with ill feelings. But he needed to see Draco, and now. And with that, he flew out of the door before Remus could call him back again.

* * *

Harry didn’t speak with Draco as such after all. He’d bolted straight for his next class, during which his conversations with the blond in question and his two best friends remained forcibly upbeat and as far from what was truly bothering him as possible. *I can’t talk to him about something like this in the middle of lesson,* he’d told himself. But as the day wore on, the suppressive thoughts were all-but suffocating him.

After lessons had ended, he’d skipped dinner and sped off for the dormitory straight after, thankfully, no one had followed him. After speedily changing into his quidditch gear he’d set off for the pitch in an attempt to let the firebolt blast away some of the infuriating thoughts that had been eating at him all day.

The feather-light bliss that had gripped him all morning had vanished with that…_conversation_ with Remus. Though he didn’t blame the man and knew he only had his best interests at heart, that didn’t stop him feeling the need to bolt into the dying sun in search of peace of mind.

The wind had rushed through his hair; swept him clean for a few moments, but after the carelessness peace he had felt this morning, it had been nothing. Not to surrender easily, he’d flattened himself to the broom, looped the pitch, upside down, through the goal hoops, desperately seeking a release.

Now the evening found him, staring at his hazy reflection in the mirrored wall of the changing rooms. His messy hair stood in all directions from the abuse it had taken from the wind, his glasses were fogged up with the steam from the running shower and his naked, exposed body still looked a tad too skinny – if only they were his greatest concerns. Turning his head to the side, he fingered the scar Malfoy had left at the side of his throat thoughtfully.

It tingled not entirely unpleasantly under his fingers, like an echo of the way his skin sang under Draco Malfoy's touch. He felt heat brew suspiciously low down at the memory of the pleasure Draco had made him feel, the near-peace. He knew now that those feelings were all his own,
Saturday night had been the first time he’d trusted that and let go. But before then, I had a go at him about the thrall – isn’t this leash I have over him basically the same thing?

Growling with frustration, Harry set his wand and glasses down on the ledge where the soap usually sat and stepped into the hard downpour of the shower. The water thundered down against his skin, over his tense muscles and he tilted his head up towards the stream, welcoming the way it beat against him. Hundreds of thick droplets cascaded over his flesh; the rivulets washing away the grime that hours on the quidditch pitch had imbued him with. But the usual relaxation from the soothing flow of the hot water did not come.

With a sigh, Harry snatched up the soap bar, lathering it up in his hands before smoothing the foamy suds across his skin. He didn't regret what had happened this weekend by any means, nor would he undo any of it, there were no second thoughts, only concerns. If he was Draco's leash, what if he was unwittingly controlling him? Unknowingly coercing Draco to do what he secretly desired? It sounded preposterous. But what if it were true? What if the light burning brightly in Draco's eyes when he looked on him was largely down to the control Harry had over him?

What if none of this is real?

Suddenly, a pulsing wave of tingles rippled through the scarred side of his throat. He reached up to caress the mar again whilst setting the soap beside his glasses and wand with the other hand. Slowly, he turned to face the creature watching him.

“You've been with me all day and yet you haven't really been there, have you?” Draco asked from where he stood; leaning against the far wall, out of reach of the shower's spray. He was still wearing his school uniform, although without the robe, allowing Harry to see those tense muscles as the vampire folded his arms across his chest. Those eyes were all-but glowing, fixed on him thoughtfully.

Harry shivered under that gaze despite the hot water caressing him. It was devouring him like a starved beast after a slab of meat. He tried to remember that Draco had seen him practically naked many times before and that this made little difference. Except it did. It made him completely vulnerable and defenceless to anything Draco might throw at him, emotionally and physically – something he had never allowed before, with anyone.

“Doesn’t it bother you that I have such power over you?” Harry asked abruptly without giving the words permission to leave his lips. They simply escaped his mouth, like a breath he’d tried to hold in for too long. But at least there was no beating about the bush now. The terrible thoughts he had held in all day were unleashed. “That I’m like a…bloody leash?”

Draco raised a brow as if Harry were talking another language. “What the devil are you on about?”

Harry grit his teeth. If Draco was going to play ignorance in an attempt to shield him from anything, he would be seriously pissed off. Especially since one of Draco’s redeeming qualities was that he didn’t do that. Didn’t lie to him, or keep secrets, even if they were for his own good. Draco said it as it was, that was what had enabled Harry to even to contemplate trusting him.

“What those things in the forest said – I’m the only reason you didn’t answer that weird summons the other night. The only reason you’re not being driven mad by your vampire powers. I’m controlling you, I’m…I’m–”
“Bloody hell, we have gotten ourselves into a tizzy, haven’t we, Potter?” Draco cut across him, stepping forwards, close enough to reach out and touch Harry, but still just out of range of the still pouring water. “You really are too ruled by needless morals.” His hand moved to slide down Harry’s throat to caress the scar that lingered there, but Harry took a step back from him into the downpour. He didn’t know how Draco could be so blasé about something like this! Freedom and pride was as important to the blond – to any pureblood as life itself!

As if sensing his thoughts (or smelling his unease, more likely) Draco just looked at him levelly. “It’s not a ‘leash’ and it is certainly not control like you think. Nothing like the Imperius curse and nothing like my influence. It’s simple. When a vampire is made he is ruled by one chief instinct – hunger. Hunger for blood, for sex, hunger to feel. They know nothing else but greed for each of those things and have been known to go mad for it, which is why making new vampires is prohibited unless done through the proper ministry channels.”

Harry frowned. That sounded positively ridiculous, but then, it explained why there weren’t vampires crossing the paths of everyday people all the time. They were being kept under control, which probably suited the older vampires as much as it did the human world, as it meant more ‘breathing room’ (so to speak) for them. Most of the vampires he’d researched over the summer were regal and proud, and would most likely be humiliated by such embarrassments as sex and blood crazed new vampires. They only drank from lawful donors too, from what he’d heard, although he had his doubts…

“Exactly,” Harry replied, “And you’re not, because I–”

“Because,” Draco interrupted him again, less patiently this time. “However it came about, you are my First. That kind of bond means that I devoted my soul to you. That is why I can only drink from you. You gift me with your blood, with your body and I return it with my own, with my fidelity and protection. I know that you don’t exactly want or need either but that is why these bonds were made.” He sighed then, however unnecessary his breath and gazed hungrily at the length of Harry’s body.

“The same instincts are still within me, as with any new vampire, but they are dominated by the greater instinct to preserve your life – this bond. I hunger for blood, but only yours so I am not running mad at the sight of every student that passes with hot blood coursing through their veins. I crave sex and life but because I have a constant blood source, because I am not distracted by the desire for the blood of every living being around me, I am able to stay in the right frame of mind to remind myself that sex with anyone else, revealing who I am to anyone else would be imprudent.”

Harry glared. “Oh, but I’ll do, will I? I give you blood, I already know you’re a vampire so you may as well sate your other urges with me?!”

It was Draco that clenched his teeth this time, his fangs suddenly visible and grinding into his gums. “Your temper and oversensitivity are a lethal combination,” he snapped. “I could fuck someone else – many a someone, in fact, if I so desired. Particularly as I can enthral anyone to become pliant beneath me. But I chose you.”

“Due to convenience,” Harry retorted, disgusted by Draco’s talk of using his influence to coerce people into being intimate with him. And it wasn’t entirely due to the use of the thrall either. He was irritattingly aware of the prickly, hot anger in his chest when the blond mentioned ‘others’.

“Thanks for clearing up any delusions I may have had about you.”

“Perhaps it would have been better that you weren’t a virgin,” Draco snarled, “so that then you
could not wilfully misunderstand me. You should’ve seen yourself, Potter, grinding into me, coming in my hand. *Moaning* for me. I touched you and you responded so… I would have been attracted to that, to you whether I was a vampire or not. You fool. What imbecile could resist it? Could resist someone that moved with them so perfectly.”

Harry's face was flushed again, his skin inflamed with embarrassment at Draco’s words. He turned his head away, trying to escape the situation but Draco growled quietly in his chest, forcing Harry to meet his eyes. *Most likely to ensure that I can see he isn’t lying*, Harry realised, swallowing hard. He could see it as clear as the lust glistening in those silver eyes. His words were the truth. Harry blinked, his mouth moving soundlessly, stupidly for a few moments until he snatched his voice back from the flood of mortification.

“You…you’re attracted to me.” It was more a statement than a question, it made him uneasy to realise it, to say it aloud despite how glaringly obvious it had been. In fact, he felt just a tiny bit sick. Although he wasn’t sure whether it was in a good way or a bad way. He despaired at that. Before Draco things were glaringly simple in regards to his love life. He’d had none, nothing as intense, passionate, bewildering or mortifying as this at any rate. No difference between the types of sick he felt churning in his belly. Before Draco, there was no ‘good’ kind of sick…

“Oh, very much. Could you not tell?” Draco drawled, staring into his face meaningfully. “And you are no leash to me. You cannot control me or give me orders that I will follow unless I wish to. Simply consider it that our bond allows me to channel all of my hunger, my instincts into you, thus enabling me to be more…*myself* instead of being consumed by them.”

Harry nodded slowly, his mind still fixated on the horrifying and yet simultaneously relieving fact. Draco was attracted to him. Was that good, or bad? He only wished he could separate the two right now.

“And this bond we share, you once said it would deepen, *manifest* in other ways,” Harry began, feeling the need to get this all out before his pride and everything else stopped him. But once more, Draco headed him off.

“Sharing thoughts during moments of passion or danger. An increase in each other’s powers. You are probably the most powerful wizard alive, Harry; there is no telling what might manifest itself in our…*bond.* Anything could happen,” Draco explained. Whilst it comforted Harry that the blond was in the same boat as he, just as clueless, the thought of the unknown limits of what could happen, what they could do was daunting. Especially with his own magic so out of control.

“Perhaps next time it would behove you to come and ask me rather than get yourself worked up,” Draco suggested with an unmistakable undertone to his words. “You seemed both surprised and glad to see me this morning. Did you miss me, by any chance?”

Harry glared. His glasses were still on the shelf in the shower so he could only see the fuzzy shape that was Draco's outline, but he was determined to make a convincing angry expression nonetheless. “Piss off,” he snarled in embarrassment, glad for the protection of the still running water that the shower offered. Draco couldn't press him to the wall or pounce. *He wouldn't want to get his prissy clothes wet*, Harry thought, with no little amount of peculiar fondness. As far as bad points go, that was one of the ones that amused him most about Draco.

Warmth was spreading through his limbs, one part in particular and Harry cursed his body as he felt his traitorous cock rise at the suggestive sound of that voice. At the memory of what he had felt the last time he had heard it lowered so. He swore his body was having a very late sexual outburst,
he'd had inconvenient erections but they were never as hard to control as this.

It's because you've tasted it now, his mind whispered darkly. You've glimpsed the heights of ecstasy he can take you to and you're poised on the edge now, waiting for more. You know that there is more to come. Whenever he gets near you, you hope that this will be the time it's taken all the way.

No, I don't, he argued. I don't want to give anyone that kind of power over me. Not yet.

“Looks as if you missed me plenty,” Draco drawled. “Tell me, Potter, did you wank in your bed thinking of me this morning? You smelt delicious.”

 Those words were the ones that broke Harry's resolve. With a snarl of part anger, part desire he seized Draco's tie and tugged him sharply forward by it into the spray of the shower, smashing their lips together hard. Instantly, Draco was soaked through to the skin but rather than protest as Harry had imagined, the blond groaned against his closed mouth, shoving him hard against the mirrored wall.

Harry clawed at him with frantic fingers, while Draco's swept through his wet hair and jerked his head back roughly by it so that the sudden movement parted Harry’s lips with a gasp. The sound was all he had time for, before that mouth was devouring his, fangs teasing the sensitive flesh whilst miraculously avoiding breaking the skin. Somehow, Draco had it down to a fine art, just enough tongue and lips and fangs all driving him to the brink of explosion at break-neck speed.

“You’ve certainly gotten yourself worked up,” Draco breathed, the water sluicing down their bodies as they pressed into each other. His words ghosted over Harry’s eager lips as he added, “unleash it all on me.”

Needing no more encouragement than that, Harry pressed himself wholly into Draco’s still clothed form, his head spinning as that tongue pierced his open mouth, assaulting his own with wicked precision. He gripped Draco tightly, like a lifeline in a swelling tide and kissed back with everything he had. He had been terrified when that whisper of doubt had entered his mind earlier. Terrified that as soon as he had decided to trust his feelings and Draco, that it would all be torn from him, just as he had suspected.

He makes me feel things I’ve never felt. A completion I never knew existed. I don’t know what the hell he is to me, but I can’t lose him before we’ve even given it a chance. His head was swirling with need now, with desperation and he all-but growled into that attacking mouth as he stood there, naked against him.

“You don’t need to be so greedy with me,” Draco teased between kisses, “Relax…”

The kisses slowed then, Draco’s other hand splaying down the side of Harry’s throat in a possessive yet oddly comforting gesture. The soft pad of his thumb brushed the side of Harry’s jaw tenderly, and a low, guttural sound vibrated in Harry’s chest as his lashes fluttered. Water still beat mercilessly down on them, intensifying every sensation, as if hundreds of fingertips were caressing him just right, all over.

His body was on fire against Draco’s coolness, and he remained still under the slow, sensuous passes of that tongue over his, of the hands on his neck and in his hair. He shuddered, but not from the cold as he melted against that cold comfort. He had never felt this good, or as desired (for the right reasons) before.
But he had also never been more vulnerable than he was right now. Defenceless and bare, with every inch of his mind and body for Draco to see and it scared him enough that he turned his head to escape the kiss.

When he did so, what he saw there made his heart stop. There, outside the boundaries of the shower, staring at them with mouths agape, was a small cluster of third year boys. \textit{Why does being with Draco always make me prone to wanton acts in the middle of nowhere? It's like one kiss and all sense of dignity flies out the window!} Harry shoved Draco back hard, but it was more than likely his expression that made the vampire back off rather than anything Harry had done.

Draco turned to face the audience and Harry hurriedly shut off the faucet. Drying himself with a hasty spell from his wand, he scrambled back into his quidditch robes. Without waiting to see if Draco was following him then, he bolted out the door at a run, shoving his quidditch pads and broomstick (which he had quickly shrunk) into the inside pocket of his robes.

\textbf{We were seen!} His mind gasped at the thought. He was flying across the neatly mown, dewy lawn with no sense of where he was going. He couldn’t believe they’d been so careless – again. Since Voldemort, he had always been especially cautious, had always maintained a sense of awareness at all times. Always on edge, prepared for something to strike.

\textbf{But it’s not like that with Draco,} he thought, his heart still racing as his feet carried him at side-splitting speed through Hogwarts grounds. The moon was shining down on him from a relatively clear sky, illuminating the damp grass. His body was aching with exertion now, but he couldn’t stop, couldn’t pause and allow his thoughts to catch up with him.

\textbf{Being with Draco like that, it spins my head, distracts me from everything else. It takes me away from everything – like flying. I forget myself,} he thought, recalling each time he had felt those sensations stifling his bitterly sharp awareness of the world around him. He had never been able to shut off before, never been able to escape the need to be on edge and prepared for any attack. But a few times now, he had and it was terrifying, yet brilliant.

Being with Draco was one big paradox, Harry had decided, his steps slowing steadily until he came to a complete stop. Staring at the grass below his feet, Harry listened to the light evening wind rush through the trees of the forest’s edge nearby and thought about that for a moment.

Draco was possessive, demanding, selfish and arrogant by his very nature, but he was also insecure, generous (with Harry) and had recently been more selfless than Harry had been for certain. When Harry was with him, he felt mind-shattering bliss and peace but also vulnerability and fear of that comfort, that control.

\textit{That openness,} his mind supplied. He feared opening himself to anyone and yet, he couldn’t let this go either. No, in fact it had terrified him earlier, when he had thought he might lose…\textit{this,} whatever it was.

\textit{Everything about this, about Draco and I is one large paradox,} he realised then with a sigh. The question was, would they both be able to find a middle ground eventually to stabilise on? The answer was, he didn’t think he could bear it if they didn’t. \textit{I’m falling deeper and deeper with every second,} he thought, inwardly concerned. \textit{If this ends up going pear-shaped, I don’t know how I’ll be able to recover from this.}

A familiar prickle over his scarred throat made him straighten up and turn. The action brought him
face to face with Draco, who was now standing behind him, dried and watching him patiently.

“How long have you been there?” Harry asked quietly.

Draco’s face remained vacant. “About as long as you have, I was right behind you the whole time,” he replied carefully. “Did you flee because you panicked at the brats seeing you in such a compromising position or because you were frightened by our intimacy?”

Harry winced at the bluntness in those words, but Draco knew that he preferred forthright honesty. And he deserves the same, he thought. “Both,” Harry answered, watching him from beneath his fringe.

Taking a step closer, Draco inhaled him subtly, his eyes bright and shining with reflections of the moon and stars above. “I thought as much, I could smell the confusion and panic in you,” he said, glancing down to where Harry’s hand rested limply at his side. Tentatively, he reached forward and wrapped his long fingers around Harry’s softly.

It was such a simple gesture and yet Harry shifted awkwardly at how pleasant it felt. “Can you smell my emotions all the time?” Harry asked quietly.

“Oh yes,” Draco replied huskily, his thumb brushing across Harry’s knuckles carefully, as if testing if he would like how it felt under his touch. “I can sense many people’s of course, but yours are like a second language to me.”

Harry ducked his head slightly. There really was no hiding from Draco then. His tongue darted out to moisten his dry lips. “What am I feeling now?” he asked, his fingers clenching around Draco’s slightly.

Those eyes stared directly into his now, with that familiar intensity he was certain he would never get used to. “You’re…comforted, by this,” Draco said, gesturing to the closeness between them. “But also apprehensive, for some reason. And confused, always confused.”

Harry snorted at that last bit but did not move away when Draco tugged him closer to his body by the hand he still held tenderly. “That confusion will fade after a time,” Draco promised, “As will the apprehensiveness, once you see there is nothing to fear. This is all new, after all. For us both.”

Nodding dumbly, Harry found himself lost for what to say. He felt a royal prat, here Draco was reassuring him, all because some adolescents had seen them getting a bit steamy in the showers. I should be more mature about things like this, Harry scolded himself, brow furrowing. No sooner had his expression twisted, however, than Draco rested his own forehead against Harry’s.

The crinkles in the Chosen One’s brow smoothed out and he stood still, silently enjoying the closeness for once, without tensing. Draco inhaled him again, and Harry wondered how good he must smell to the vampire, if he kept breathing him in like a man appreciating the first scent of spring.

That final mention of scent reminded him then of something. Something very important that Draco needed to know. Something that had nearly been forgotten in the rush of lust, trepidation and excitement. “You know that Remus is a werewolf, right?” Harry asked suddenly, feeling Draco’s brow wrinkle with confusion this time. “I mean, I think we all knew before, thanks to Snape letting it slip in third year but… You know, right?”
Draco gave a slow nod.

Cautiously, Harry continued. “He has abilities sort of like yours and...he can smell things. He's met more creatures than you I suppose, having worked for the order but...”

Harry inhaled sharply. Things between him and Draco were so intense, to the point where he seriously doubted any touch could be casual, and yet those fingers were still caressing his own, as if determined to prove him wrong. Meanwhile, the thoughts were rushing through his head in a garbled mess and it was with a sharp rush of breath that he forced the next words out before he lost himself in it all.

“He could smell that you were a vampire. He said that your scent was all over me, like a claim and then my bite mark, he... He knows that I'm your first. He knows, Draco.”

Draco's face contorted with anger and consternation, his fangs gone now as he grinded his teeth together, hard. And before Harry's very eyes, the battle of panic and the need to keep calm ravaged Draco's body. He released Harry's hand and retreated a few steps, but Harry followed, commanding his attention. He had to say it all now or he'd never be able to.

“Remus didn't especially like the idea that I'm your donor,” he said hesitantly, watching Draco's eyes flare dangerously. That made Harry wonder why that particular part made him angrier. Surely he'd be more concerned that Remus knew at all? Suspicious now, Harry added slowly, “he told me that there are ways you could have my blood regularly without there being anything...more.”

Suddenly, Draco snarled venomously, seizing the front of Harry's robes. “If you believe that, you'll believe anything. There can be no other way,” he sneered. Harry tore himself away, stepping back out of Draco's reach. He didn't like the way the blond presumed to manhandle him a lot of the time.

“He has more knowledge of vampires in the modern day than we do,” Harry reasoned. “If he can offer either of us another option, one that might give us both our freedom back, freedom to choose...”

Those silver eyes glowed dangerously then, those fangs peeking from behind those lips as Draco surged forward with vampire speed, trapping Harry spitefully between his own hard, lukewarm body and the unforgiving bark of the tree behind. He hadn't realised he'd been so close to the forest’s edge.

Harry hissed in pain as the wood dug into the small of his back, and Draco pinned his wrists above his head. He was glad no one was about to witness this currently, not only because this was a degrading position, but also because Draco's fangs were bared for the world to see now, scant centimetres from his face. He wasn't afraid but he was confused and angry and worried for Draco exposing himself in a moment of bad temper.

“Draco, stop--”

“Do you have someone else in mind that you would rather choose then, Potter?” The vampire bit out scathingly, punctuating his words by squeezing Harry's wrists so tight that Harry swore he felt the bones grinding together. “Someone you wish to be free to run to? Have you been fucking us both then?”

Harry sneered, struggling to wrench himself free. But Draco was more powerful in brute strength and he dared not resort to magic. “That's bollocks and you know it, you prat,” Harry spat, “not only
because you follow me around like a second shadow but also because you'd smell it on me. Remus said it himself. I reek of you, so much that it petrifies him!”

With a dark chuckle, Draco lowered his head to allow his cool breath to trickle over Harry's ear. Harry shuddered at the delicious sensation, but that only intensified his struggles. He wouldn't be subdued with sex by Draco Malfoy; he wasn't so easily controlled or placated.

“It petrifies you that you're covered in me, far more than it does your werewolf,” Draco assessed. He pressed himself so tight to Harry then that the man swore he felt the breath being squeezed from his lungs. Draco's nose nuzzled into his hair and that mouth teased the delicate shell of his ear with feather-light touches of that unnecessary breath.

“You're terrified that you're enamoured with me, so you're struggling to find any way to put distance between us.” His voice was low but at the same time volatile, like the ominous yet soft ticking of a bomb about to detonate.

“Not that rubbish again,” Harry grunted, trying to shift Draco's weight of him. But the vampire was as unmoveable as stone. “Maybe I am a bit unnerved by it all. But that's not what this is. I’m not purposefully trying to escape. This is about us both deserving the ability to choose how we spend the rest of our lives.”

“Then the whole thing is redundant,” Draco said smoothly, “because we have both already chosen.”

Harry squirmed, turning his head to disturb Draco's worship of his ear. “Circumstance chose. I don't want a man that wants me purely because he thinks I'm his only option.”

Draco laughed again, although this time, bitterness was ruling the sound. “I am not a man, and I said before, I could fuck all of Hogwarts if I wanted to. I chose you because you are my perfect fit, in every way shape or form. You’re everything I'm not and yet there are undeniable similarities.”

Harry grinded his teeth then, glaring straight into Draco's eyes. Deep down, He wasn't necessarily displeased about giving Draco his blood, or about being intimate with him. That part of the whole situation was the only thing that was crystal clear to him. He liked it, a little too much perhaps, and the thought of losing it worried him. But that didn't mean he didn't want the freedom to choose, to choose Draco for himself or someone else, if he wanted. And the fact that Draco thought he had a right to refuse on his behalf, to assume Harry felt the same way was infuriating.

Harry ran his hand through his hair in frustration. “I don't like the way you talk about using your influence to get sex,” he stated bluntly. Though he was certain Draco would never do it, and was just saying it to piss him off, Harry didn't like the sound of it. “And in case you didn't realise, I'm not even sure if I… If I even like blokes yet.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “You don't need to be sure, your cock decided for you,” he sneered.

“It’s not as simple as that, you prick,” Harry snapped. “This is new for me, feeling any sort of attraction to men at all. I’ve never felt like this for men—”

“You've never felt like this at all,” Draco corrected him. “I'm special, aren't I? I'm not only the first man you've been so intimate with; I'm the first person ever. Don't grasp at excuses. You're locked in this virgin state of mind, Harry. Stop trying to rationalise everything just because you're afraid. We haven't done anything you didn't want to do, and will not until you're ready. I won't be your
'villain' chasing after your chastity just so you have someone to blame besides yourself.”

He rolled his hips against Harry's then, hard, dragging a groan of pained pleasure from the Chosen One’s lips. When Harry glanced up at Draco, he saw an infuriatingly smug look on that face. “You want me,” Draco stated, “why do you need to complicate that? Why do you need to find reasons to escape it? I make you feel good. You like me, most of the time, on top of that. What else matters?”

Those final words were a guttural, raspy growl that made goosebumps rise across Harry’s skin. That voice just did something to him. He hated it. With a cry mixed between denial and pleasure, he shoved Draco with all his strength. When the blond didn't move, he had no choice.

Seizing his wand out of his pocket, he pressed it up against Draco’s throat. That grin still lingered, telling Harry that the blond knew the presence of his wand was merely for show. But regardless, the vampire moved back, allowing Harry his personal space.

“I don't expect someone like you to understand this,” Harry said, his wand still between them, keeping Draco at bay. “But regardless of whether I want you, or like you or not, I still want the option to choose for myself. I don't want to spend the rest of my life wondering if the things you say you feel are only because we were forced together. It doesn't mean anything that way.”

Draco scoffed at that. “I've trusted you as I have never even trusted my own parents,” he growled. “That means something. The way we move together as if in sync, it means something. And don't try to blame it on my vampire condition. We've gone over that enough times for you to be aware that that cannot affect your feelings. No more than regular teenage hormones can at any rate.”

Harry sighed, pressing his hand to his head now. He pushed the heel of his palm hard against his forehead, not because of the scar but because of the stressed headache brewing there. “I know. I know that now. I admit that I didn’t want to accept that before but I do know now. This isn’t about that, this is about giving us the freedom to choose our own paths in life. To not have it dictated by fate or circumstance.”

Draco looked genuinely confused now, and seemed to be becoming increasingly frustrated with that confusion. Harry wondered how it was that he had ever come to tolerate, even like someone so self-centred, but that was the way of the human heart, he supposed. You cared about someone in spite of and because of their flaws.

“What difference does having freedom make if you're going to choose me anyway?” Draco demanded at last. Harry raised a brow.

“Like I said, I don't expect you to understand the need I have for choice, but I expect you to endure with it honourably. Especially as you don't really get to have the final decision either way. This is my life as well, and I will listen to what Remus has to say before I write it off as impossible.”

Suddenly Draco surged forward again, swiping Harry's wand from his hand. It dropped to the floor uselessly but Draco did not strike any further, seeming to withhold himself. “Do not constantly throw my own lack of control in my face! I am quite aware that you could decide to let me die in favour of pursuing your own life, or leave me to starve for the sake of it. I have no choice here, I know that!”

“I'm trying to give you that control, that ability to choose back,” Harry said imploringly.

“And I told you, you erred fool,” Draco hissed. “I have already chosen. It is you that is uncertain,
terrified of letting anyone remotely near you, lest they hurt you. Do not use me as a means to justify your fear. My mind is clear.”

The vampire turned then, moving with human speed to escape Harry's company. But at the last moment, he paused. “Tell that werewolf to keep his mouth shut about me. I don't want the whole school knowing that I am a vampire stuck under Harry Potter's fickle thumb,” he growled out, without turning to face Harry.

Harry rubbed his abused wrists, cursing his inarticulateness once again. In trying to find his own freedom, in trying to give Draco his, he had been doing exactly what he had been so disgusted about earlier. He was tugging Draco back and forth, messing him around. *Yanking him along by the very leash I didn't want to have,* Harry thought, lowering himself to pick up his wand.

“I didn’t mean it like I…like I had my eye on someone else,” Harry murmured quietly, forgoing his pride for the sake of keeping hold of the ground they had gained. He didn’t want to take any more fumbling steps backward. “I just wanted to know that you chose me for no other reason than you wanted me.” His face was flaming again at the words stumbling over his lips, but at least Draco had turned to face him again.

Except that face was twisted with such horror that it made Harry's stomach plummet.

“Harry, come here,” he demanded immediately. Harry instinctively reached for his wand at the warning tone of his voice, but Draco was staring rigidly at something just to his left, behind him in the trees as he repeated, “here, now Harry!”

Biting back irritation at the demeaning call in light of the desperation in Draco’s voice, Harry darted to the vampire’s side. When he whirled around to face the spot that his vampire was watching with such apprehension, however, he finally understood. Drawing his wand, he held it before him, aiming it at the cluster of dark figures, cloaked in red that stood on the edge of the trees. Their eyes glinted ominously in the moonlight and a warning growl rumbled in Draco’s throat as the creatures took a step forward.

~To Be Continued…
“Stay back,” Draco snarled menacingly, despite the fear he felt roiling in his dead stomach. He would have to do something about this; Harry just seemed to attract danger somehow. Except if Harry had been right about these cloaked creatures, it was him, _Draco_ they were after. Draco inhaled subtly, testing their scent. It was familiar, though he knew not where from and he bared his fangs warningly when they drew closer.

He knew that scent somehow, he was sure he did.

“How are you?” Harry demanded from Draco’s side, his voice strong and unwavering. _Foolish Gryffindor, Draco thought, don’t draw attention to yourself now, for goodness’ sake!_ He wondered how Harry had managed to survive as many tight situations as he had with such recklessness.

“Be still,” he hissed at Harry, ignoring the scowl he received in answer, keeping his eyes focused on the cloaked beings that had now stopped a few feet away. _How did they even get on school grounds?!! They didn’t seem like they were able to before_, he thought, remembering how they had called the hounds back to them the last time they had seen them. But their slavering servants were nowhere to be seen and they were standing before them, perfectly still aside from their long, pallid fingers, which reached up to sweep their crimson hoods back from their faces.

Draco didn’t know why, but the moment their faces were revealed, the moment he realised what they were, he felt a fiery surge of possessiveness rush through him. The growl that had been rumbling in his chest got louder, now an inhuman sound. He fought against the urge to reach back and cover Harry completely with his body.

The only thoughts that allowed him to disobey this instinct were that firstly, Harry would not allow it and secondly, that their tryst in the shower had covered Harry so completely with his scent that it was filling his nostrils satisfactorily. There was no misinterpreting who Harry belonged to, even if Harry tried to deny it.
“You need not fear us,” said a deep, rich voice and the middlemost creature stepped forward.

Yes, there was no mistaking it now, Draco's senses had advanced enough that he realised where he recognised that scent from. It was similar to his own, as well as the creature that had turned him. They were vampires. Their eyes were glowing unnaturally in the darkness and their fangs were visible in their mouths. The one that had stepped closer, the leader Draco presumed, had his thin lips quirked up in a suspiciously welcoming smile.

“The hell we don't,” Harry barked from Draco's side. “We don't know how you got onto Hogwarts' grounds but the last time we saw you, you let your wolves chase us down like rats.”

The head vampire chuckled ominously. “My my, you are a feisty one, are you not, Harry Potter?” he mused, his vibrant, amber eyes roving Harry thoughtfully for a moment before he turned them on Draco. “You chose well, youngling. The Chosen One and destroyer of Voldemort? An admirable choice indeed, if one had to restrict themselves to one donor, a First. You have opened up a broad horizon of possibilities.”

“You speak as if you know me, sir,” Draco snarled with false calm, interspersed with venom. “State your business with me and my First. I grow tired of you stalking me from afar.” Draco was confident that his voice did not betray his uneasiness, thanks to years of training to be a Malfoy. There were only three vampires this time, but they were older than him and their very presence emanated power so rich that he could taste it in the thick atmosphere. He would not be able to protect himself or Harry from all three on his own.

“Of course, forgive us, we didn't mean to alarm you before,” the head vampire said then, bowing his head slightly. “A vampire has not taken a First in nearly six decades; we wished to observe your behaviours. You must understand, it is most unusual for a youngling so new to be…so in control of himself, even with a First.” He glanced to Harry again then, who Draco saw raise his chin defiantly out of the corner of his eye. “Your First must have power even more extraordinary than is rumoured, to give you such control.”

Draco glared warningly when the leader's eyes misted over with infuriating interest as he stared at Harry. Amusement touched that face. Draco’s stomach clenched.

“You must be terribly confused, and I must admit, we did not start off on the right foot,” the head vampire continued, reaching out a long, pale hand towards Draco. “Let us begin again, youngling. My name is Claude Stanton; my…companions here are Merritt and Osborne. It is…a pleasure to meet you at last.”
The oddly placed pauses made Draco suspicious of the vampire's choice of words. He considered those vivid amber eyes again, framed by a neatly groomed, almost black mane. The two creatures a few feet behind Claude were of a similar build, tall and powerful looking without being muscled. Merritt bore a head of thick, dark blond curls and rich, unnaturally bright hazel eyes, whilst Osborne was slightly darker, with short, brown hair and electric blue orbs.

They could not be trusted by any means, Draco knew this and yet he also knew that he had to play this game carefully if he and Harry had a hope of getting back up to the castle alive. They had been patient so far, but Draco had no doubt that they could easily subdue him and Harry if they stood together against them.

Slowly, he reached out to shake Claude's hand, but before their fingers could even touch, Draco felt Harry's hand seize his arm roughly, stopping the action. Draco's head whipped to the side, spying Harry, glaring warningly at the vampire, Claude.

"Why are you here?" Harry demanded. "Don't try to tell me you're here just to watch Draco. Claude Stanton, I read a lot about vampires this summer and I remember your name. You are a head of the businesses that distribute legal blood donors and donations to vampires – you're as high as it can get. So why is someone as senior as you faffing around a wizarding boarding school?"

Draco widened his eyes at Harry warningly, but the man was not looking at him, his eyes were focused on Claude daringly. He too wanted to know the answers to the questions Harry was asking, but there were different ways to ask these sorts of 'people' questions. Offending them would be more detrimental than Harry seemed to realise.

Again, Claude only chuckled at Harry's bluntness. "A fiery temper indeed, how endearing. I do admire you doing your background reading, however, Mr Potter. It is…interesting that you are so dedicated to your position at the youngling's side."

"His name is Draco Malfoy," Harry sniped, "and answer the bloody question, would you? I've had enough of cryptic shadows following me wherever we go."

"Harry," Draco cut across him sharply, with warning and authority thick in his voice. "Enough." He was worried that Harry might challenge him, now in front of the other vampires, something he knew instinctively would be very, very bad, but, thankfully, Harry actually fell silent. The mutinous glare that remained on the man's face was an acceptable compromise, Draco decided, turning back to Claude and the others again.
“Draco Malfoy,” he said after a moment of awkward silence, shaking Claude’s long-fingered hand briefly before retracting his own. In a bid to reassure Harry he knew what he was doing, he reached up to Harry's hand, which was still clasp[ing his forearm tightly, and laid his own palm over it, squeezing softly. “As Harry says, I presume that whatever business you have with me must be highly important if you, of all people come here personally to find me.”

“You are as calm and calculated as a hundred-year-old being,” Claude said thoughtfully, “it is so very startling. And to be cautious and controlled enough to be able to attend a school and not arouse suspicion? You must forgive me, but this is a feat indeed.” He was staring at Draco with awestruck pensiveness now, and Draco felt Harry’s hand squeeze his arm even harder.

Claude continued. “I am not sure how familiar you are with vampire customs and tradition, Draco, but a youngling should only be made with the approval of the sire’s coven. Each new vampire must be approved before their turning and you, Draco Malfoy, were of course not.”

Draco gave the slightest of nods. “The Dark Lord employed a vampire in his ranks and asked him to turn me in punishment so that he could use me to kill Harry,” he said, inwardly wincing at the memory of that night in the dungeon. “I had wondered how the vampire community would’ve thought of any of their own bowing to a wizard.”

Behind Claude, the dark vampire named Osborne sneered. “That Vesper, disgusting creature. Filthy little traitor. He was one of the best of us until he turned tailcoat and began serving no greater power than his own. He'd been exiled from the coven for years before he threw in his lot with that Dark Lord of yours.”

Draco’s eyes widened then as he realised, as he came to the sudden realisation of where he had heard the name Lucan Vesper before now. He had known it instinctually from that horrid moment in the dungeon, when those fangs had pierced his own throat and cursed him. As he had felt himself die, felt himself turned, he had seen the briefest of flashes of his sire’s life, flashes he had locked away along with the rest of the awful memories of that night. Now, however, he remembered one thing with a bitter clarity. He knew that name without a doubt.

“Lucan Vesper is the vampire that sired me,” Draco murmured, his words devoid of emotion. But Harry tensed beside him and those fingers squeezed him reassuringly this time.

“That's why Alaric is after you, is torturing you so viciously,” Harry breathed, a shudder caressing his body in a way that told Draco he was recalling the way Draco had ended Vesper all too clearly. “Last time you were here,” Harry began again, this time directing his words at Claude. “We heard you say that Caius Alaric was the pet of Lucan Vesper, did you mean that they were lovers? Is that why he has it in for Draco? Revenge for his dead lover?”
Claude's unfathomable eyes roved Harry's forehead thoughtfully for a moment, and then the scar from Draco's first bite that was barely visible over the top of Harry's quidditch jumper. Draco watched the path of that gaze rigidly, his insides knotting with violent overprotective urges. His, Harry was his, the mark and his scent screamed it, and yet this vampire – the competition was looking at him. *How dare he?*

Draco's hands curled into tight fists as he fought back the voice and struggled to hold onto his good sense. Harry's warmth on his arm, his proximity helped with this exponentially. He breathed him in deeply, watching Claude.

"Your courage is as it has been told, Harry Potter," Claude said softly. "You are surrounded by vampires and yet you do not so much as quake."

Perhaps it was only Draco that could hear the foreboding in Claude Stanton's calm tone, for Harry took a step forward and lifted his chin even higher, his smooth jaw set.

"I've faced bigger and uglier evils than you," Harry sneered. "Will you answer my question or not?"

Draco tensed for Claude's response. This vampire seemed to have an eerie calmness about him that he could not help but distrust.

"The answer is both yes and no. Vesper was not merely a lover to Alaric; their relationship was one of clear inequality from the very start. Caius Alaric was his pet, a human that he kept for a good many years." There was a pause, during which Draco saw Harry's brow furrow with a frown. Claude had seen it too and laughed softly before continuing. "You are truly innocent in body and mind, are you not? You cannot fathom my meaning, can you? I mean of course, that theirs was the typical relationship of any vampire and mortal donor. But with an edge of particular cruelty to suit Vesper's nature."

"But Alaric must have loved Vesper to want to avenge him so–"

"You ask a question and then interrupt before it is answered!" Osborne snarled, cutting across Harry, his mouth drawn up in a sneer. "You arrogant, offensive little bottom-feeder. Have you no sense of manners, of decorum, or even self-preservation? You know not to whom you speak!"
Draco instinctively bared his fangs again, his body on edge as the darker vampire aimed such voracity at Harry. His First. Claude, however, continued as if he had not heard the second interruption.

“The way you speak of love and its certainty only screams your innocence even louder,” he smirked. Everything seemed amusing to this creature, so unimportant to him that it was simply unworthy of a serious reaction. “Very idealistic. I will elaborate for the benefit of your…delicate idealisms. As a youth, Caius Alaric was raised in a family of esteemed vampire hunters. From early childhood he could identify our kind, trained to kill us. By the time he was an adolescent, he was already showing signs of being the greatest of his time. In brief, he stumbled across an incredibly bored Lucan Vesper, who set his sights on the boy, seeing the challenge in him that he had been starved of for so long.”

Claude paused again, wrinkling his nose in evident disgust at the mention of Lucan Vesper's behaviour. Draco supposed his research had proved correct then. Vampires in general were far too regal and proud to stoop to low tactics such as stalking prey so openly.

“Lucan pursued the boy, hunted him into the ground in his school days and once the child left this school, he took him. At the risk of offending your pet's delicate sensibilities, Draco Malfoy, I will tell you only that Vesper took pleasure in breaking that pitiable creature's budding strength and talent, his spirit. It took Vesper years but he enjoyed every moment of it, relished in turning the boy into a man that lived and breathed solely to please him, to feed his most carnal urges for blood and sex and dominance. After all those years under Vesper's power, the poor fool probably did fancy himself in love with his master, but they were never lovers. A term your pet would understand is Stockholm syndrome, I believe?”

Draco hid his wince, but his Harry hissed loudly in disgust.

“That's revolting,” Harry snarled through clenched teeth. “That’s…that's unforgiveable. No wonder Alaric is such a thoroughly fucked up—”

“It matters little why he is what he is, or why he did what he did,” Draco cut across him sharply. He would not allow Harry to sympathise and justify what Alaric had put him through. He supposed there was such a thing as being too good and too pure of heart and Harry was it. “I want him exterminated for what he has made me suffer; I thought that you were the 'others' that Alaric spoke of. His back up. The ones that wanted Harry?” He was speaking directly to Claude now with a stoic, polite yet serious air.

“That is what we lead him to believe. We are here on a mission to put down Vesper's rogue pet as well as to see you, Draco Malfoy,” Claude replied, “He came across us as we watched you and proposed a union. Feeding the lunatic a few lies allowed us to stay close, ready to capture him at
the right moment, and also permitted us to make sure he caused as little harm to you as possible. It seemed like the best course of action, given that both he and you had taken up impenetrable lodgings in the school.”

“That makes no sense,” Harry said then, his voice offensively full of suspicion. “Why didn't you just kill Alaric when you met with him? And why do you give a shit if he hurt Draco? Why are you here to see Draco at all? What business is he of yours?”

Harry, Draco whispered, directing his thoughts at Harry with all his might. *Curb your tongue, for once in your life, would you? We do not have the upper hand here. We must be cautious. You cannot defeat the cobra by lashing at it headlong, you must charm it, bait it until the right moment to strike arises. Calm yourself.*

To Draco's great relief, Harry visibly stilled. His teeth gritted tightly, as if struggling to hold in a torrent of accusations he longed to hurl at the vampires before them. *A little fear will do the idiot some good,* Draco thought to himself.

“The truth of it is, that as Vesper's pet, Alaric was privy to some very secret information that was harmless when he was under Vesper's control – papers and plans that he most likely has kept in a safe place. Information we need to retrieve before we reel him in. That is why we are biding our time, little human. But your actions within have driven him into hiding somewhere,” Merritt explained this time, a kind of amusement in his face as well. “It pays to think before you act sometimes, Chosen One.”

“And as to the latter, Draco Malfoy, you are very much my business,” Claude then said, speaking to Draco as if he had asked the question instead of Harry. “It took me some time to track you down, the protection charms around your family home and school confuse the senses somewhat, but it was necessary to find you. Despite how illegally you were made, your life is mine and my coven’s responsibility. I was Lucan Vesper's sire, many years ago, you see.”

Draco could not help it, his eyes widened. This all-powerful being was connected to him. “You sired him?” he repeated.

“He was a favourite of mine for many centuries,” Claude replied with a slow nod, “As such, I allowed the rebellious creature far too much freedom. I had…hoped rather than believed he would meet an end that justified his volatile existence, his blatant flouting of our long-established rules and once I sensed your birth and his demise…”

Ethereal amber eyes were staring into Draco now as if he were searching his soul. It took
everything in Draco not to fidget uncomfortably under the weight of that gaze and it was a relief when Claude Stanton continued. “I will not make as great a mistake with you as with him. Every youngling needs guidance and tutoring in their new life and powers after all.” He surveyed Draco carefully then with an almost proud smirk. “And you seem to be coming into your powers admirably quick indeed.”

Draco eyed the man cautiously now, unsure where this was going. “So you're going to kill me for killing your favourite?” he asked. He felt Harry's apprehension rolling off of him in thick waves now. He's ready to die for me at the drop of a hat and yet he fears admitting his feelings for me? Draco inwardly shook his head at that. Harry Potter certainly was a complicated man.

“By Merlin, no, youngling,” Claude all-but cooed. “His shameless betrayal of our kind would have resulted in nothing short of death regardless. No, I am here to take responsibility as your grand-sire. As a new one, you require educating in our ways and I, along with our coven are the only ones who can teach you such things.”

Suddenly, regardless of his warning, Harry's eyes flashed with unrivalled venom and fury, as he shot forwards, placing himself not only between Draco and the elder vampire, but also perilously within reach of the creature's long fingers. Either not seeing or simply not bothered by the danger, and filled with fiery possessiveness for Draco, Harry glared up at Claude.

“You can't take him,” the man declared rigidly. “He wants to finish school. He wants to make something of himself and besides, how do we know you actually are who you say you are? Your mangy wolves chased us down like cattle, why should we trust you with his life?”

Five pairs of smouldering, unnatural eyes glittered in the darkness behind the three vampires then, the only warning before five slavering beasts they recognised all too stalked out of the shadows to join their masters. One lightly growling wolf came to stop directly beside Claude – right beside Harry. But to his credit, Draco noted, the man did not so much as glance down at the creature. He kept staring up at Claude challengingly, with a stubbornness that made Draco uneasy for his safety. He edged closer, poised to rip Harry back away from their grasp if they went for him.

Again, however, the vampire Claude only chuckled deep in his chest, tipping his head to survey Harry's throat in a way that Draco instinctively knew was natural for a vampire confronted with a human. It didn't prevent that rush of protectiveness from shuddering with rage, however. Mine. Mine, his mind hissed.

“Your First is a brave one,” the elder said, “brave and stubborn. He must be hard to control?”
“I am no one’s to control!” Harry roared. Warning bells rang in Draco’s ears.

“No, even the vampire you belong to? The one you defend so fiercely and burn with such possessiveness for? It is dangerous to insist that you are unclaimed in the company of vampires, you realise?” Claude questioned, his voice light and airy, as if he were unsure Harry were capable of understanding him. Draco couldn’t help the growl that rumbled in his throat when the other vampire sniffed the air around his Harry. “You reek of it. Of his sex and your…your feelings for him.”

Harry took a daring step closer, clearly riled and not thinking with his head. “I wouldn’t feel anything for him if he was the type if man to control me,” Harry retorted.

Draco saw Claude raise a brow. “He isn’t a man at all,” the elder vampire purred. Draco tensed. “That’s your opinion,” Harry bit out and it was then that Draco acted. Just as Claude’s hand flew out to Harry’s throat, Draco seized Harry by his quidditch robes and tore him back into his chest, just out of the other’s reach. He kept his arms locked around Harry this time, worrying about the look in those tense, amber eyes.

“You would do well to teach your First respect for his superiors,” Claude said dismissively. “With your desire for social standing and his bond to you, it is inadvisable that he continue to act like a common mortal pet.”

“He has a tempestuous temperament that I foolishly admire,” Draco said imperiously. “He is tactless but what he says is true. I can sense that what you say you are is true; I can smell it in your blood now. But how do I know that I can trust you?”

“You were a born wizard before you were turned, weren’t you, youngling?” Claude asked, holding out his hand again. Draco nodded and the elder vampire continued. “Then we will make an unbreakable vow that we, your coven will bring no harm to you, and teach you in our ways as we have promised.”

Draco eyed the hand offered to him hesitantly, feeling Harry tense in his arms. He licked his lips carefully, relishing the taste of Harry on them. “As much as your offer is appreciated, Sir, I cannot leave the school right now, and besides which,” he gestured to Harry, who was still standing against his chest. “I cannot leave Harry for any length of time, at present.”
And would not wish to, Draco thought.

“Will you force him to go with you then?” Harry asked, his tone more calm this time now that Draco had a hold of him. Though the loathing was evident in his voice. “I’ve read about covens recently, they have certain power over their charges. But I’m here to tell you, you’re taking him nowhere, do you understand me? You have no power here.”

“Feisty indeed,” Merritt laughed this time, eyeing Harry with an admiration Draco did not care for. His grip on the Chosen One tightened and to his surprise, Harry pushed back into the embrace.

“No, youngling, I can understand the instinctual desire to not leave your First for any length of time,” Claude pressed on, again, as if the interruption had not occurred. “I must admit, I had assumed you would have more control over the matter than your…Source, but no matter. Perhaps we could arrange your tutorage in these matters in the village nearby so that you may finish your…’education’ here.” He glanced up at the castle dubiously. Draco was watching him with equal uncertainty.

“I would like to know the answer to the question Harry asked,” Draco replied carefully. “Will you force the issue if I refuse?”

“The right to claim that your First spoke of is only applicable to sires and their younglings. You are not mine, so while I have the responsibility of you, I have no rights,” Claude explained, sounding slightly displeased about divulging such information. So why had he? Draco wondered.

“We cannot force you,” Merritt interjected then lightly. “But there are some things not found in books, things only your own can teach you.”

At that moment, Harry’s thoughts screamed louder in his ears than his earthly voice could ever sound. And there are things that only I will give him. I’ll never let you go with him. He’ll never choose you over me! He’s mine! Those words, they were so powerful, so ripe with passion and desperation – more emotion than Harry Potter had ever shown in all his eighteen years, that Draco’s dead insides roared to life with bliss.

Even amidst the darkness and danger of the situation, it took everything he had not to throw the man down and ravage his lips for that unspoken proclamation.

He knew however, that back in reality, he could not afford to let these vampires, this ‘coven’
vanish back into the darkness, whether they were telling the truth about their aims or not. Both seemed as likely as the other at the moment. He thought for a minute, wondering what course of action Severus would have chosen. If these creatures were indeed foes, they were too great to let loose without caution and if they were true...he could use their assistance if he hoped to reach greatness as quickly as possible.

“Without intending to waste your time, I would like to meet again and experience one of your...lessons before making any decision,” Draco said at last in a tone that he hoped was amicable enough. He felt...threatened with them around Harry, and he didn’t like it.

At Draco’s request, Merritt and Osborne looked at the elder curiously, as if unable to guess what his answer might be. Harry turned his head to stare at him incredulously, but it was Claude Stanton that Draco kept his eyes on. He seemed to be considering his words with odd care.

Then, finally, he replied, “I have matters that I must attend to over the next few months... I will not be able to dedicate as much...time to you until after the festive season has passed, but perhaps... Yes, perhaps we could arrange for a meeting on November the fifth?”

“Guy Fawkes night?” Harry asked with suspicion. Draco frowned at him, making a note to ask him what on earth that meant later.

“That will be adequate enough time for me to find an excuse to leave the castle without being noticed,” Draco agreed with a short nod. “You may send an owl to the castle and advise me of a time and place nearer to the time?” he asked, with only a slight air of a question in his sentence. He was being just enough aloof, just enough polite. His father would have been proud.

“And I trust that you can prevent Alaric and Greyback from making further attempts on our lives until then?” He added.

“That werewolf is no one’s to control, Caius Alaric is a deluded fool for thinking so,” Osborne sneered at that, his arms folded over his chest. “The only way to stop that deranged mongrel is to put him down. And we cannot, in good sense, tell Alaric to leave you be without exposing our true aims here-”

“No, we can dissuade him, however,” Claude interjected then, silencing his companion with a flash of his eyes. The other vampire turned his head away submissively. Claude Stanton was a force to be reckoned with indeed if he could command respect with a mere glance, Draco realised, straightening up a little more.
“Any efforts you can make to help in the mean time would be much appreciated,” Draco said with a small bow of his head, taking a step back, urging Harry with his arm to follow. For once, Harry obeyed silently, his green gaze wandering to the hound closest to Claude, that had not torn its eyes from them since they had emerged from the trees. Had they come to flaunt their power? To intimidate? Draco wasn’t certain what their purpose was here. Or what they were, for that matter.

“Out of curiosity, sir,” Draco began, “how is it that you are able to stand in Hogwarts’ grounds?”

“The wards around the grounds themselves are easily accessible to magical creatures and beings,” Claude replied, his tone slightly distant, as if his mind were truly elsewhere. “The castle, however. Now that is impenetrable to anyone who does not belong…”

So the castle was a great deal safer than the grounds, he would have to make sure Severus informed McGonagall that the students were vulnerable outside the castle walls. It was evidence of how much Harry had influenced him that a thought like that even entered his head.

“I see, thank you. We really must get back to the castle before our absence is noticed,” he said, counting his blessings that they were both escaping unscathed and urging Harry ahead of him up the path to the castle. He paused in following him, adding, “I look forward to your owl, Sir,” to end their meeting as amicably as possible, before walking after Harry back up to the school.

His back remained tensed the entire way there, all the way through the wooden bridge and right into the main foyer. It was only when they were making their way up the moving staircase to the eighth year common room that his body relaxed.

They had both remained silent until now, both seeming to realise that Claude and the other two might still be able to hear them whilst outside. Not to mention that they now knew the grounds weren’t as safe as they had thought. Just then, however, Harry spoke.

“You’re a fool if you trust them, Draco Malfoy,” he growled under his breath. “All they said about only fooling Alaric could be bollocks for all you know. And now you’ve arranged a meet with them? You’re—”

“Planning for every eventuality,” Draco cut across him, wondering why on earth Harry was avoiding his eyes now. That emerald gaze was focused determinedly on their feet as they arrived at the landing and continued through the corridor towards their portrait hole. “We couldn’t let them just vanish, whether they were being honest or not. And unlike some, I do not intend to rush
headlong into this without help. I will of course, not be going alone. I intend to ask for Severus’s aid in this, I am not as reckless as you.”

Harry snorted at that, his mouth opening to bite out some retort. Whatever it was, however, died on his tongue. He whirled to face Draco, his face gaunt. “Snape! I…I had a ‘lesson’ with him for tonight. I need those lessons – I missed it while we were down at the forest, I… I need to go now—”

Draco reached out, catching Harry’s arm and halting him in his steps. “I did seek you out in the quidditch changing rooms for a reason other than to ogle you, you know.” He smirked at the flushed look that overcame Harry’s face. “I had intended to permit you some private time, however Severus asked me to inform you that after staying up all night to prepare my potion, he would be requiring tonight to recover, hence rescheduling your ‘lesson’ for Wednesday.”

The look that crossed Harry's face then was one caught between relief and unease. Uneasy because he wants to control this magic, relieved because he isn't up to it tonight, Draco realised, without even reading his First's thoughts. Ah, yes, that reminded him. “I heard your thoughts again tonight, and you mine,” he said. Harry gave a short nod. “Our emotions were not as raised as the last time we shared thoughts – the bond is growing stronger.”

Harry inhaled shakily, reaching up to cup his neck where Draco's scar was carved into it. “It sort of tingles all the time now. When you use magic I…I get this feeling, this awareness rush through me, and when you feel a particularly strong feeling, I'm aware of that as well, it's almost an echo. It's like we're connected all the time now, not just when you bite me.”

Draco's insides heated as Harry's mild arousal flickered around him. He's thinking about the bite again, he thought, glancing down to Harry's crotch, where he had bitten the man last. He wondered if that area was tingling as the one at his throat did. That would be interesting. “The connection is at its strongest when we are physically joined but yet, we are connected more or less constantly now. I didn't anticipate that, but then, your powers are accelerating the bond's strength as well as mine. As I said before, there is no guessing what we may be able to do. No vampire has ever had a first as strong as you before.” His voice was filled with an admiration, a desire that Harry could not possibly misinterpret and he watched with satisfaction as the man lifted his head a little to stare directly into his eyes.

Green emeralds glistened in the warm light of the torches on the wall and Draco was forcibly reminded of the possessiveness he had felt earlier, the desire to snatch Harry into his protective embrace and never let him loose. “I didn't like those other vampires looking at you,” he admitted before he even realised what he was saying. Harry gave a flicker of a smile then, the expression almost purposefully alluring. Draco leant in, intending to take advantage of Harry's peculiarly open desire. No sooner had Harry's breath dusted his lips, however than the portrait swung open behind them.
“Oh, there's no point in leaping apart with expressions of innocence on your faces,” spat Greengrass from where she now stood in the archway of the portrait hole. “Would you care to see the preview of the front cover of tomorrow’s *Daily Prophet*?” It was then that Draco noticed she had an armful of parchment in her hand, as she tossed the topmost sheet at Harry, who caught it easily. “These are merely prototypes; the editor was kind enough to send a dozen at my request. I can't wait for the whole school to see the real thing,” she cackled, flouncing away and out of sight.

Turning his gaze on Harry, Draco knew without even looking at the article that it was not good news. Leaning over Harry's shoulder, Draco spotted two pictures dominating the page, one of him, one of Harry merged into a deformed heart shape and the broad, unmistakeable letters above that read, 'Chosen One seduced by Death Eater.'

“I told you as much,” he said dismissively. He'd hoped he would have been able to inform his parents himself, but that was the only inconvenience of it. He heartily believed what he had always been taught, that there was no such thing as bad press he could not take advantage of. He felt no need to hide Harry's relationship with him away with his darker secrets.

Harry, however, looked weary, tired of it all.

“It's the same as always, I wish they'd find someone else for front page news,” he hissed, curling up the page in his hand into a ball and tossing it away over his shoulder. “Looks as if Greengrass came across our shocked audience to our…'shower routine’ and wheedled what they had seen out of them.”

Taking a cursory sniff of the air to gauge Harry's feelings on the matter, Draco replied, “it bothers you that come tomorrow, everyone will know what happened in the changing room?”

Harry shrugged. “I was just... I was an idiot to assume that I could have something that was just mine and no one else's. For once I didn't want the school, the *Prophet* and half the wizarding world poking their noses into my personal life. Any time I have ever felt anything extraordinary, good or bad, it's been splashed across the world for everyone to see. I've never had any privacy, in anything.”

Draco cocked his head slightly as he looked on him. “It is difficult whilst we're both at school, but once we finish here, I assure you, I will give you the privacy you wish for. Very little we Malfoy's do not approve actually leaves our house's walls, you realise? It can be the same for us, once we leave Hogwarts.” He saw Harry’s eyes flicker with some unnamed emotion at that and added, “for now, however, I can still endure this with you. You won’t be alone in this as you were when everyone turned on you in fourth year, or--”
“But you don't believe in 'bad press' or anything like that, remember?” Harry interrupted.

“No, but you do. And whilst it's true that I am quite happy for some information to be spread across the media to assist in my making a name for myself, there is still some information I would keep private. My secret for one, and anything you do not wish to disclose, for another.”

Taking a risk, he stepped forward then, setting both palms flat on either side of Harry's throat and gazing into those sparkling green orbs. “I told you, I will never let anyone take anything from you, or hurt you. You're mine.”

Harry stiffened at the last two words and Draco dropped his hands, but smirked broadly at him. “You deny that you belong to me, but I heard your mind screaming that I was yours down there with Stanton and the others.”

At that, Harry's face was suffused with beet red colour and he turned on his heel, hurrying inside the portrait hole, vanishing from sight. They seemed to be crossing a lot of barriers recently, Draco realised, as he stepped into the common room and the door closed behind him. They had hurdled every obstacle and found themselves closer and closer each time. And Harry is pulling away less and less afterwards, Draco thought with no little amount of satisfaction as he took a seat near the fireplace and stared into the dancing flames. He would take pity on his First and let him scramble hastily into bed without him watching. Let him think about the passion we shared in the showers whilst he's alone in his bed, he mentally chuckled. Because tomorrow, he knew that Harry would be worrying himself frantic over the rest of their much more serious problems.

* * * *

The moonlight from the windows crept over the top of Draco's four-poster bed and painted ethereal, captivating patterns on the ceiling as he lay in bed later that night. The curtains were closed tightly around him as they always were now, making sure any of his roommates would not spy him in his suspiciously death-like 'sleep' should they awaken in the night. Lying on his back above the covers, he folded his hands on his naked chest, feeling the magical warmth of the room glide over his skin.

He always waited until he could sense that all of his roommates were asleep, before he surrendered his consciousness to the deathly state of meditation his mind fell into every night. No, he didn't need 'sleep' as such, but the state of mind he did practice nightly was as close as a vampire could come, refreshing his mind as it processed his thoughts of the day, allowing his body to heal any wounds he had attained. There was still someone awake, however and so he stared at the lights on the ceiling, making shapes of them in his mind as he pondered tomorrow.
I need to inform Severus of what occurred with that 'cov'en', he thought, not sure entirely what he would do on his own. This was a delicate matter that he could not afford to make a mess of. Being the ex-spy, Severus would know how best to calculate his next move. He would confront him with it when he accompanied Harry to that 'lesson'. A smirk touched his lips at that in the darkness. Harry had shown a great growth by asking him to assist him in such a matter.

And then his werewolf made him doubt himself, made him doubt me by suggesting stupid, irrelevant possibilities to him, he thought furiously, cursing the bastard for threatening all of the progress they’d made. He could only hope that Harry would find what they now had, and all that they could have, not so easy to throw away.

Suddenly, the air around him began to hum, vibrate unnaturally in a way that only a vampire could tell was some sort of privacy or silencing spell. With his brow furrowing in suspicion, he sat bolt upright, staring about him at the hangings that still remained drawn about his bed. Who had unwittingly disturbed the very air about him by laying down a privacy spell? His confusion ceased, however as at that moment, Harry slid in from behind the curtain and onto the edge of the bed, making sure that the hangings were still shut tight behind him.

Raising a brow at the man's very presence on his bed, Draco could not help but notice the way Harry's eyes roved his bare chest and arms, everything that was not covered by his underwear (which was all that he now wore). Those lips moved soundlessly for a moment, that pink tongue darting out to moisten them whilst the man no doubt searched for the right words. A light blush dusted those cheeks with colour. And as ever, it was with a sudden burst of courage and determination that Harry eventually rushed out the words he'd probably been agonising over for hours in his bed.

“I'm…still all riled up,” he whispered out, regardless of the privacy spell around the bed. Harry's hands fist ed in the bed sheets as if in release of this pent up irritation. “I still can't believe their…their nerve. I can't get over the…the thought that they might take you. The way they looked at you.” He shook his head from side to side, the very thoughts infuriating and terrifying him beyond words. “I don't know what's going on inside my head – or my chest right now, but I don't want you to leave me. I won't let you and the thought just drives me mental.”

With his expression emanating confusion and surprise and bliss, Draco surveyed his lover with a tilt of his head, smiling challengingly. “And how will you stop me, Potter? When you’re as likely as to kiss me one moment and then flee the next?” He leant closer, though just a fraction, just enough so that his cool breath disturbed Harry's fringe. He could sense the concern radiating from him in thick waves now, the tension. He's been over thinking every dreadful possibility for hours, Draco realised. Every way he might lose me until he couldn't stand it anymore.
Harry's chest was heaving with deep breaths now, hidden by his cringingly loose t-shirt and pyjama bottoms. Both plain and greyish, hiding the slender, delectable body beneath easily. Swamping him. Biting back the urge to slide his hand inside the overly large t-shirt and ravage that practically hairless chest he had been pressed against earlier, Draco simply stared at him with smouldering eyes, waiting, yearning for Harry to answer his challenge.

Eventually, the dark-haired boy exhaled, the heated gasp almost a groan. “I'll have to convince you then, won't I?” Harry growled out. He threw his arms around Draco's neck, dragged him sharply against his body and slammed his lips against Draco's for the second time that day. They tumbled backwards flat onto Draco's bed, Harry on top, both scrambling to get at more of each other, now and quick!

To Draco’s surprise it was Harry that seemed the more eager, the more forceful between them tonight. The man lay flat against him, his legs spread, knees gripping either side of his hips for better friction as he grinded into him. That mouth was pressing against his with (were he human) bruising force, and the moment his lips parted, a quick-learning tongue slipped in, caressing the length of his own with desperate fervour.

Harry’s movements were still hasty and frantic, but with the need to remind himself that Draco was still here more than passion this time. Arching up into the movements against his crotch, the vampire reached up, entangling his fingers in those dark locks and using them to drag the man to him as tightly as he could. That heaving chest was against his naked one again, those rapidly heating nether regions were sliding against his.

“Harry,” he panted out when the man in his arms broke their kiss to draw breath, skin flushed, eyes glistening from pleasure. And all of it clearly visible to Draco’s vampire eyes, despite the darkness. Yes, he could see him in all his glory as he paused only to yank his shirt off over his head before he pounced on Draco once more.

Blunt teeth scraped the sharp, pointed shape of his smooth jaw, hot breath ghosted over the shell of his ear and he tensed in anticipation of feeling those soft lips wrap around the lobe, but Harry's mouth trekked downwards instead. The white column of his throat was laved with a wet tongue and then those teeth returned, smoothing over his adam’s apple. He swallowed, hard. The delectable smell, the taste of Harry was thick on his tongue.

“Want you,” he found himself saying, growling into the air, his fingers digging into Harry's scalp as that mouth came back up to answer his words with another deep kiss. “Take your trousers off.” His hand reached down between them, rubbing his lover urgently through his pyjama bottoms.

Harry groaned hungrily into their wet kiss, wriggled deliciously against him like a snake. Then, suddenly, he shoved off of Draco until he was sitting back on his knees, panting for breath. “No…”
he breathed shakily, looking quite embarrassed and awkward again all of a sudden. “Y-You... you first, this time.”

Before Draco had time to blink away the mist of arousal clinging to his lashes, he felt warm, tentative hands gripping the waistband of his silken underwear. Looking into Harry's face, he saw that emerald gaze focused on the part of him about to be revealed, an expression of trepidation touching those features.

Reaching down, Draco laid his hands over Harry's. “Stop over thinking everything,” he commanded, his voice low and husky with desire. “I don’t want Casanova, understand? I want Harry bloody Potter.”

A small smirk suggested that he had reaffirmed his comparatively innocent lover’s confidence and he shuddered in anticipation, his toes curling as he felt the silk glide over his hips and down his legs. There was a pause in which Harry stared at him, completely unveiled for the first time. Draco grinned confidently down at the look on Harry's face.

“In awe of me, are you, Potter?” he mused.

“Cocky arse,” Harry replied quietly, shifting down the bed slightly and propping himself up on his elbows just over Draco’s hard organ. It was long and thick and a pale pink unlike his own shaft, which flushed a dark red in this state. It arched over a nest of dark blond curls and he could see a bead of moisture clinging to the slightly darker head, peaking out from the pale foreskin.

A low chuckle from Draco reminded Harry he was staring. He ducked his head, letting his warm breath drift over the tepid erection bobbing under his chin. Take your time, he told himself, remember how Draco did it to you. Tipping his head slightly, Harry ran his tongue along the length of Draco’s shaft. Draco hummed softly in appreciation.

Emboldened, he pressed the very tip of his wet muscle just under the swollen head before sliding his lips around it. Long fingers gripped his hair once more, caressing it almost lovingly until his lashes fluttered and his mouth descended lower around the thickness filling him.

Draco's inside of me, he thought with furious embarrassment, sucking softly, flicking his tongue along the underside as Draco had done to him. It felt strange, his sweltering heat warming Draco’s most private place as he worshipped it with his clumsy yet determined mouth. His jaw ached and he struggled to breathe when he went too deep, but his heart was pounding and Draco was groaning.
under his touch. His own cock throbbed insistently in his trousers with how good it felt.

Establishing a rhythm, he cupped Draco's full bollocks, massaging them teasingly with his fingers as his head moved up and down over his prize, his movements slicked by a sticky mixture of his own saliva and Draco's pre-emission. His cheeks hollowed as he sucked harder, the rapidly heating, throbbing length felt heavy and right on his tongue. A groan vibrated through him at the feel of it, the musky taste. Above him, Draco gave an answering moan.

“Fast learner, Potter,” he murmured, his hips bucking up slightly as the vibrations carried through his pulsing cock. His fingers caressed his hair again, encouraging Harry onward. This felt just as good as receiving. He wanted to make Draco incoherent and dizzy with bliss as he had made him. Wanted to show him exactly why he couldn't leave. His throat constricted in reflex as the head of Draco's organ hit the back of it and he nearly gagged.

“Relax your throat and go slowly,” Draco urged, lying perfectly still now except for his hands, which were still carding through dark locks. Harry's lashes fluttered, eyes shining with lust and he looked up, holding Draco's gaze as he lowered himself over the last few inches of Draco's erection. His nose brushed the curls at the base and then he was moving in a slow rhythm, experimentally pressing his tongue just under the crown with every upward motion. He was drawing sharp, delirious hisses from the vampire's lips.

Those fangs were visible now, clawing at that mouth, almost breaking the skin as pleasure rushed through the vampire's body. He felt his skin warmed now, felt the balls in his hand tighten the same way his did. Funny, he’d never even contemplated that Draco’s body might be different to a normal man’s. But whatever Draco was, he felt just like every other human under Harry now, except better. Because it is him, and not just anyone else, Harry's mind supplied just as the hands in his hair gripped him tighter. His jaw was aching now, but the peculiar determination to feel Draco's climax kept him going and his eyes riveted on the vampire's face.

_I want you to come completely undone beneath me_, he thought. Just then, those shining silver eyes flashed to his, telling Harry those thoughts had been heard. He sucked harder, bobbed his head faster and the body under his power tightened. The beginning of a deep, guttural growl was his only warning, before those hips arched up into his face. The organ in his hot mouth pulsed as Draco came to his peak inside of him. In his mouth.

As if he were the one that had just had an orgasm, his mind was fuzzy with ecstasy when Harry sat back on his knees. But he could still not miss Draco's gaze fixed on him as he wiped the trail of semen that trickled out of the corner of his mouth, the minute amount that had escaped him. Dimly, he wondered how embarrassed he would be in the morning that he had swallowed Draco's come without so much as a thought.
Abruptly, Draco was on his knees before him, his face scant inches from Harry's own. A hand was cupping the scarred side of Harry’s throat, with a thumb caressing his adam's apple lightly. “Hmmm, fast learner indeed,” Draco breathed, his thumb dancing up to tug that mouth open before he sealed it with his own.

Harry felt a pang of disgust at that, but it didn't last long as his tongue was dominated with languid, slick strokes, his mouth ravaged until he was bowing into Draco’s body, mind spinning hazily once more.

*I could kiss him forever.*

A hand was sliding down his taut stomach now, nails grazing his abdomen until it quivered at the tickling sensations. He gasped into the kiss, tilting his head to accept Draco’s mouth better just as soft fingertips caressed the thin line of hair down into his trousers. His cock throbbed, twitching in eagerness to reach up into Draco's hand.

“You swallowed me,” Draco murmured lustfully, breaking away from the kiss with a wet sheen of spittle on his lips. Harry stared into his eyes, mesmerised by his voice, his subtle warmth - warmth that he had put there. Draco watched him back with equal desire, his eyes unnaturally bright in the dimness. “After a bloody brilliant blowjob, I might add. If I didn't know any better, I'd be jealous of your past lovers.” He leant in then, laying a gentler, promising kiss on those lips before sliding around Harry, so that they were kneeling on the duvet with Harry's back pressed against his chest.

The hand in Harry’s trousers remained, sliding across his stomach and over his hip bone teasingly before gripping the top of his trousers. He jerked his hips forward impatiently, anticipating. A low chuckle brushed across his ear, making him twist his head to the side in reflex, emitting a sound that was part whimper, part groan.

A warm mouth touched his exposed neck then, words tumbling softly against his skin as Draco whispered, “Look at you, squirming for me so perfectly. I am just as good as any ordinary man, better in fact, because no man could ever want you as much as I do. I can feel all of the same flawed emotions, jealousy, possessiveness, desire…” He let his husky tones trail off for a moment, dragging Harry's bottoms and briefs both down to Harry's knees, freeing his desperate, leaking cock.

Harry's fingers clawed at the arm that had (at some point) wrapped around his chest, while the other swept through the air just around his penis. He was aching now, all over, his skin humming in need of Draco's touch.
“I want to be the one to chase your demons away,” Draco continued, punctuating his words with a fangless bite at the place where his neck met his shoulder. “I want you to be as mad for me as I am for you. Drunk with it.”

A low growl whisked through his lips then and the next thing Harry knew, he was thrown from Draco's body, face first into the sheets. He scrambled for purchase but Draco was on him with vampire speed, that mouth worshipping the globes of his arse as Draco positioned him up on his knees, his shoulders on the bed and arse in the air. Exposed to everything and anything Draco might do to him. Harry tensed not sure he was in the frame of mind to resist. Even if his mind wasn't ready for it, his body disagreed.

Those fangs grazed the tender, sensitive skin of his backside, Draco's hands caressing his entire body from chest to hips before sliding down to part Harry's cheeks.

“I won’t do ‘that’ yet,” Draco breathed when Harry tensed again, “You'll love this, just relax.”

To his slight surprise, Harry found that voice easier and easier to believe, to trust, and that action easier to carry out with Draco's unnaturally subtle warmth on his skin. He panted into the pillows, his face beet red again and he slammed his eyes shut when the vampire's breath dusted his untouched opening.

“You spoke out of turn down there by the forest,” Draco panted against his twitching hole, making Harry's thighs tense and his fingers tighten in the pillow he was desperately pressing his red face into. He felt Draco chuckle against the crease of his arse, one hand stealing down to torment the sensitive place between his hole and his distended balls.

“Even though I told you to be quiet. You should be punished,” Draco continued, pausing only to lave his tight nuts. They were aching for release now, pulsing with pent up need to feel Draco more, harder – all over.

“I think you’ll even enjoy it,” Draco added, and Harry was sure by the sheer tone of his silky voice that he would indeed. He was unwittingly humping the air now, squirming under Draco’s touch. The hand on his balls slid round to caress the tip of his leaking prick and he barely had time to gasp in pleasure, before that devious tongue began to trace his tight, quivering pucker.

“Fuck!” Harry cried out, tossing his head, gritting his teeth as stars exploded behind his clenched eyelids. His blood felt like acid licking at his veins. He was so hot. It was so good!
“I told you that you would enjoy it,” Draco murmured against his entrance as it shook with spasms. The hand holding his cock was moving again, jerking it with tender, firm strokes, tugging his foreskin in just the right way to make his arse clench. There had never been any kind of touching there before and now Draco’s tongue was tickling the tender ring, coercing him into throes of ecstasy.

“B-Blimey that’s so – so good!” Harry panted into the pillow, torn now between humping Draco’s hand and pushing back into that wicked mouth. The vampire’s tongue was pressing in now, wriggling deliciously against his clenching, virgin muscles. Once again he had gone against the grain of his personality and laid himself open to Draco – and it had felt better than anything he had felt before. The closeness, the intimacy, the personal pleasure – he was delirious with it all.

His insides felt like little bursts of electricity were prickling his skin, making him feel hot, mind-dizzying pleasures in parts of him that he hadn’t known existed. It’s like I didn’t even live at all before he opened my eyes, Harry thought, his inner muscles clamping down around Draco’s invading tongue.

But then, that tongue withdrew. Harry growled out in frustration, his hips rocking mindlessly as if to find that delicious sensation again. The hand around his cock moved faster, pacifying him. His arse was tingling now, it felt empty and…hungry still.

“More,” he whispered urgently into the pillow. The hand that had been resting on his arse vanished at that, and he was left with only the dizzying, hastening caresses over his cock. There was pressure at his entrance again, still slick but stiffer and slightly thicker than Draco’s tongue. He gasped. Draco’s fingertip circled his damp ring a few times, until it instinctively relaxed, and the digit slipped in a little way.

It felt odd at first, unnerving as it wriggled deeper and he fidgeted on his numb knees. That was, until it curved slightly. That lukewarm fingertip massaged a spot inside of him that made his legs turn to jelly.

“You’re so hot inside,” Draco breathed heavily, fingerling him with tender, maddening strokes, fisting his cock simultaneously, sending Harry’s sensitive, virgin body hurtling towards the edge of a pure white abyss. “So tight. You’re going to melt me.”

Harry pressed his head hard into the bed now, his glasses fogged up and digging awkwardly into his face, his body moving back and forwards, thrusting to and fro between Draco’s hands. That mouth returned, fangs and lips grazing the small of his back. “Shit!” Harry cursed, rapidly feeling his end near. It was all too much. His eyes were watering with the intensity.
“F-Fuck me…please!” Harry pleaded with everything he had, “S-So… I want…you….in me.”

“I am inside of you,” Draco murmured thickly, his fanged kisses trailing smoothly up over Harry’s spine. He wiggled his finger more firmly against the lightning spot in Harry’s hot, sweltering channel as if to prove the fact. Harry groaned through clenched teeth, his cock jerking in Draco’s grasp, foreshadowing his rapidly oncoming completion.

“N-No, your–”

“Not tonight,” Draco cut across him, his voice heavy with lust and implications of things to come, of how it would be when they were joined much more intimately. The devilish digit within him curled in rhythmic ‘come hither’ motions against his sensitive place. “I want to feel you tighten as you come for me,” the vampire whispered. He leant over Harry’s back just as the spasms of orgasm wracked his human body, covering him completely, possessing and protecting and… worshipping him until Harry’s mind clouded over. He felt his consciousness fog up with steam rising from his flaming passions and he was suffocating under the intensity of it all as he spiralled down into the foray of ecstasy.

Swamped by sensation, Harry’s insides tightened and a long groan shuddered through his lips as his climax splashed over Draco’s hand. He collapsed into the sheets with his cock still oozing come, Draco milking his prostate, wringing out everything he had left to give.

When his body was wrung dry, he felt Draco’s body rest slightly on top of his and a cleaning spell ripple over his still quivering skin. He was breathing heavily, lost still in the dazzling abyss of post-orgasmic delight, but he still managed enough coherency to lean into the gentle touch of Draco’s fingers brushing his hair from his sweat-dampened face.

*It’s strange how someone so concerned with appearances can still be so tender and passionate all at once,* Harry thought, his every limb relaxing limply into the sheets, as sated and near peace as he had been earlier that morning. Draco had such power over his moods, his emotions, and that was bothering him a little less after tonight, after he’d seen how he had exactly the same amount of power over Draco.

The reservations he had about giving himself to someone, letting someone in that close were dwindling like a dying fire in winter.

“That was bloody fantastic,” Harry exhaled, his tired eyes fluttering shut. Only to fly open again as a strong, pale arm wrapped around him and Draco pressed his nose into the nape of his neck. “Err, are you…? Do you want to again already?” he asked, unsure of what to say or do with Draco
spooning against his back, both of them naked in the private enclosure of the drawn drapes.

Draco laughed softly against his ear. “You really are innocent,” he mused, his voice low and sated. He inhaled Harry deeply. “No, as tempting as it is, we have lessons tomorrow and you are obviously in need of educating of post-coital bliss as well as the carnal kind.”

Harry fidgeted. Out of awkwardness at the intimacy of the moment and uncertainty of what to do rather than in need to escape. On the contrary, the thought of moving right then was…unbearable. The hand resting over his calming heart pressed him back into Draco’s chest, keeping them close. Thankfully.

“In English?” Harry asked, not exactly sure what he meant. Another answering, oddly good-natured laugh danced across his neck and he felt himself sinking into the cooling man behind him.

“This is the time when two lovers lie together and simply bask in the afterglow – some say it’s the best part,” Draco explained.

Harry’s mouth opened in an intention of declaring that they weren’t lovers, but thinking better of it, instead he said, “Are you among them? Those that think it’s the best part?” he asked cautiously. He knew Draco had had lovers before, but he wasn’t clear who they were or how Draco felt about them – or where he, Harry stood on the list of them. He didn’t like to think about the vampire with anyone else, as immature as that sounded and he certainly didn’t want to spoil the ‘afterglow’ by pondering it now.

After a short pause, Draco’s lips moved over his shoulder in what he was sure was a kiss. “It depends on the company,” he replied huskily, as ever, making sure to leave no room for misinterpretation.

*He knows he has to say it bluntly,* Harry thought, yawning widely as sleep tugged at his senses.

“What about you?” Draco asked, staggering Harry’s fall into slumber. Having forgotten his concerns and worries thanks to that mind-blowing encounter, it took a lot of effort for him not to simply give into the tide of sleep, but Harry managed it long enough to answer.

“I’ll let you know in the morning.” With that, he allowed the comfort of Draco’s arms to lull him silently to sleep. The best he had ever slept in all of his eighteen years.
~To Be Continued...
It turned out he agreed with Draco about the afterglow. When Harry awoke the next morning, he did not open his eyes straight away. The orange-hued light creeping over the top of the curtains and shining irritatingly on his eyelids told him it was unnaturally early, even for a Tuesday. And yet he felt more calm and refreshed than he had felt in an age. Without truly realising where he was, he squirmed in the warm sheets, sighing heavily as he basked in the comforting, warm limbs wrapped around him. Then it all came back to him and he opened his eyes, a blush dusting his cheeks.

He tried not to be unnerved by the sight of Draco lying there beside him. He was completely still, not breathing, not even twitching as Harry rolled fully over onto his stomach to stare at him. That strong arm remained draped over him and he couldn't help but enjoy the subtle weight against his skin.

The gentle light illuminated the blond's peaceful face, making him look almost angelic as opposed to vampiric. A hot, unnameable emotion spread through his chest at the sight of him, at the memory of the night before and Harry lay there for a while just like that, unwilling to tear himself away from the warm embrace and return to the world beyond those golden bed-hangings, to his pressing worldly concerns.

Eventually, however, he realised he would have to get up, and he didn't want to see their dorm-mates seeing him stumble out of Draco's bed half naked. He knew that they would have to face the Prophet's slanderous behaviour, but he wanted to do it with a bit more dignity than that. With a quiet sigh and a final glance at the man draped over him, he slid carefully out of the bed, trying to disturb the hangings around it as little as possible as he escaped them. He shivered, plucking up his clothes that he found discarded on the floor from the night before. The air of the dormitory was chilly on his exposed skin.

Quietly, so as not to wake the others, he rummaged in his trunk for some fresh clothes and began to tug them on. He could hardly walk down to the bathroom half-naked after all. After tugging on a fresh pair of briefs, however, he felt the unnerving weight of someone's gaze on his body. His head
whirled round, straight to Draco’s bed and sure enough, the hangings were not open and Draco was sitting there, wide awake and watching Harry intently. Without realising, Harry shimmied quickly into his clean pair of trousers at a speed that made the vampire raise a brow.

“Incredibly rude of you to deny me the pleasure of waking up and finding you in my bed,” Draco murmured, his voice hoarse from ‘sleep’ and his eyes tracked on Harry as he slid into his own trousers. Determinedly keeping his gaze away from Malfoy, Harry fought back the heat that flooded his cheeks. He’d dressed at near lightning speed and Draco knew exactly why. He swallowed uneasily.

“I didn’t mean do it to spite you, and I’m not running away,” Harry added the last bit quickly, because Draco was looking on him with apprehension for a moment there. The vampire visibly calmed at that addition. “I didn’t want our first counter to the slander the Prophet is going to unleash in this morning’s issue, to be me being found naked in your bed. I would’ve thought you of all people could understand the need to fight slander with dignity.” He saw Draco cock his head then.

“Fight?” the vampire repeated questioningly.

Harry raised his chin from where he knelt on the floor, about to tie up his laces and irritated at the disbelief in that word. “Of course. We have a lot to do if we hope to counter it effectively,” he raised a brow at Draco then. “You like to flaunt yourself for the media, don’t you?”

Though he still looked confused, Draco stepped towards him, standing directly in front of him, putting Harry’s eye-level at a very compromising position. He leapt to his feet quickly. That was a dirty trick, getting him to look at the very prominent bulge in his trousers. “What is your plan?”

“…Harry moistened his suddenly dry lips, unable to keep his face impassive. “I want us to make a declaration to the Daily Prophet. I…that is…Hermione and I know someone who’d be more than happy to write the article for us at short notice. We’re going to denounce the spiteful slander with as much truth as we can afford.”

Draco suddenly dropped down to his level, those inhumanly silver eyes searching his own green ones before he said, “You surely don’t mean that prudish Potter is going to admit to being in a relationship with me? It’s a bit soon for you to be making such a bold act, isn’t it? It’s taken you long enough to stop running from me, much less stop running from everyone else.”

“I’m not a coward,” Harry snapped, throwing him a scornful look and shooting to his feet. “It
wasn’t cowardliness that kept me from committing myself to this…relationship we have. It was uncertainty, I’d thank you for not ruining the progress we made last night by confusing the two.” He snatched up his wand from his own beside cabinet, along with his bag and moved passed Draco towards the door. He only just made it out onto the landing that would take him down to the common room, however, when the door shut quietly but firmly behind him and Draco caught his wrist.

“Last night,” Draco said, his voice thick with want as he pinned Harry into the stone balustrade. Those eyes flashed. “Is that all it was? Progress? What does that even mean, Potter?”

Harry could feel Draco’s hard body pressing into him forcefully. His heart was hammering in his chest as cool hands trapped his against the balustrade, his body aching all over in a pleasurable way from the night before. It was practically buzzing with desire to feel it again.

“It means something changed last night between us,” Harry breathed his hands going numb now with the pressure Draco was exerting on them. “It took being faced with the possibility of those vampires taking you to make me see it but I…I want you here, for whatever reason. Whether you’ve chosen me just because I’m your first or not, I have to at least try, because I can’t walk away from you. I don’t…I don’t want to.”

“Yes,” Draco all-but purred, leaning in so that their lips were nearly touching. “I’m yours, you said so last night, although not aloud.”

Harry stared up at him, fighting the urge to look away. “This is…new, and different for me – intense,” he began.

A low, throaty sound rumbled in Draco’s throat, an animalistic, part purr part growl that incited the most illicit sensations from his body. He couldn’t help it, he gave a small, pant of a groan. “Oh, I can tell. I can smell it on you, sense it in your reactions. I like it.” The vampire leant into the hollow of his throat then, inhaling him shamelessly, allowing his instincts to rule him for a moment, as he only could when he was with Harry.

Harry unwittingly tipped his head back, welcoming the cooling mouth on his suddenly feverish skin. “I…I’m…” he swallowed, groaning hungrily when he felt that tongue chase the movement of his adam’s apple. “I might be unsure of certain things still. You may do, or say something to unnerve me, but I…I’m not running away. Not anymore.”

Harry’s bag fell to the floor with an audible clunk. He wrenched his arms free of Draco’s grasp and wrapped them around the blond’s neck, pulling him in for a heated kiss that sent the very hairs on
his body on end with electrical pleasure. *He makes my head spin!* Harry thought as those hands slid
down his back to squeeze his arse roughly. *I almost can’t bear it, it feels so good…*

With regret, after a few moments they parted in order to make their way down to the bathroom.
They couldn’t get carried away with themselves and be caught in the throes of passion on the
staircase. They’d invited enough trouble by forgetting their place in the showers yesterday.

Once they reached the deserted bathroom, the early morning sun was gleaming off of the perfectly
preserved, ancient tiles. Draco had opted for a shower, peculiarly, and had swiftly vanished into
one of the stalls, leaving Harry to stare after the direction he had gone dumbly. He had a feeling
that he knew *exactly* what was going on in that shower stall and he blushed red to the very roots of
his hair at the thought that Draco most likely wanted him to follow him in there.

He remained paused mid-step for some time, even when steam began to rise from one of the
cubicles. He imagined the water sluicing over those hard, taut muscles and found his skin heating
to feverish temperature again. In the end, however, he decided it really would be too desperate to
seek Draco out twice in the space of twenty-four hours. *Don’t be a needy twit,* he scolded himself,
deciding that a long soak in one of the baths was what he needed.

Opposite the showers in the large communal bathroom, were seven alcoves with privacy curtains
drawn over the entrances. He pulled open the nearest drape and dumped his bag just outside of it.
Stripping off hastily and being sure to hang his clean clothes on the hook just outside so that they
didn’t crease, he stepped (naked) inside the alcove, pulling the curtain closed behind him.

Steam rose from the roll top bath as a translucent, jade coloured water instantly began pouring
from the ornate, gold taps which Harry was sure were in the shape of unicorns. Foamy bubbles
spread across the surface and filled the alcove with a beautiful smell. Sandalwood, Harry thought,
though he couldn’t be sure. It was relaxing all the same, so much so that when he finally set his
glasses on the side and slid into the warm water, he sighed aloud, closing his eyes.

Combined with the blissful way he had awoken this morning, he felt like he could have easily
drifted off he was so…at peace. Wasn’t that what Snape had been speaking about the other day?
How could he possibly have gone through eighteen years of life without experiencing this? It felt
like, no matter his concerns, he could still face them all in turn, none of them were the end of the
world.

*Draco gave me this ‘peace’,* he thought, sliding deeper into the water, feeling the bubbles lolling
against his skin. He hadn’t ever had the time for baths, but since living with Remus, Tonks and
Teddy, where he’d had more privacy and felt like the house he resided in was as much his as theirs,
he’d been able to discover the simple pleasure of taking his time in the tub.
Sinking down until all that remained above the surface of the water were his head and the tops of his knees where they were drawn up slightly, he let his mind drift, eyes still closed. Yes they had many things to do today, but he would not be alone in doing them. Not anymore. *And if Draco can help me reach that calm state of mind like he did on Saturday, in Snape's lesson tonight, I might actually make some bloody progress in harnessing my magic...*

Suddenly, a telltale tingle crept through the mark at his throat, his only warning before cool fingers caressed his knee, which jutted above the water. It was eerie how the touch didn't startle him, he had somehow known it was Draco, felt he was there before he even touched him. Another benefit of the bond's growth, he supposed. Opening his eyes, he saw Draco sitting on the edge of the bath, only a towel around his waist to preserve his dignity. His hair was still damp from his shower, hanging limply into his eyes which were now shadowed with lust as he continued to stroke Harry’s knee.

Grateful for the bubbles that kept him well covered under the water, Harry met that lustful gaze with his own heated one.

“Bubble bath, Potter, really?” Draco chuckled with a grin, one Harry couldn't help but admire despite himself.

“Up yours, Malfoy,” Harry grunted, swatting the surface of the water so that it splashed over the blond in reprimand. “It automatically comes out when you run the taps. Besides, other blokes might take luxuries like this for granted, but I happen to appreciate them, having not always been permitted them, growing up.”

The hand caressing his knee dipped beneath the surface of the water then, stroking his calf muscle and then his foot with precision that made his toes tingle with pleasure when it was their turn. He fought to keep a straight face as he stared back at Draco, who looked oddly thoughtful, considering he was molesting him in the bath.

“They deserve to suffer for what they did to you,” Draco said with hatred in his words. “They’ve affected you deeply, even now, when you never have to see them again, their actions plague your life. You might try to pass it off as 'nothing' but they did significant damage to you, Harry.”

Harry blinked up at him, confused at the turn of conversation for a moment. He couldn't really focus on some distant problem of the past like the Dursleys when Draco's hand was sending maddening little zings of pleasure through his toes. The vampire had a habit of touching the most insignificant body part just right to make his limbs sing with ecstasy.
“They did hurt me, but that's in the past. We parted...as amicably as was possible, back on my seventeenth birthday, when the Order had to rescue me from the house before Voldemort got me. But that's it. We don't have to see each other again, and I...I forgave them, a long time ago. I...”

He paused, chewing the inside of his lip while he pondered for the right words. It was no good saying that the Dursleys didn't do anything severe or hurt him, because he'd long known that the neglect they had enforced on him, the imprisonment, bullying and starvation was its own kind of abuse. He wasn't stupid; he knew he had been wronged.

“I appreciate that you want to make everything better, but really, the best you can do when it comes to the Dursleys is accept that I've forgiven what they did to me and...and help me to recover the parts of my life that I lost because of them as much as possible.” Staring directly into Draco's eyes then, he decided to surrender to him the first battle of their relationship. One he had been pondering since that talk with Ron and Hermione.

“I suppose...we could start with...with me letting you pay for fancy dinners – sometimes,” he added the last bit hastily because Draco suddenly looked gleeful. “I don't want to be spoilt like a snotty princess, I mean it. But I s'pose part of moving on from what happened includes letting people do nice things for me – on occasion.”

The hand on his foot slid up over his knee again, before gliding down to massage his hot, inner thigh. He tensed, his body reacting in the most primal, sexual manner as Draco leant over him in the bath a little, his hand caressing his leg teasingly. “I don't think you have it in you to be spoilt, but believe me, I'm going to try my absolute best,” Draco mused. “I suppose that being allowed to take my lover on a few dates is enough consolation for having to forget torturing your bastard relatives.”

“Only on occasion,” Harry reminded him sternly. “I want to be able to pay as well. I'm not the girl, here.”

Draco raised a brow at that statement. “You are the most peculiar man, Harry. I don't recall ever accusing you of being a girl. The fact that you're the epitome of manhood in a lot of ways is what appeals to me about you, in fact. I've had both men and women in my bed and I assure you, I can tell the difference.” The devilish smirk that touched those lips then was the only thing that stopped Harry from exploding with jealousy. The hand on his thigh slid under him to caress his arse and he hissed in pleasure, while Draco's smirk broadened. “So, your plan for our counter-attack against the Daily Prophet?” Draco asked.

Still seething with jealousy at the mention of past lovers, Harry retorted stiffly, “I'll ask Hermione
He could not help but hear the loathing in his own voice. He didn’t think he could ever understand the people that clamoured to get more of him at every opportunity. He hated everything about the ‘fame’ card he had been dealt. *Except when I can use it to help those I care for,* he thought, remembering how it had save Draco only recently.

“What Blaise said when we saw him and Greengrass in the common room…even you said that…” Harry began in a mumble, looking down now as Draco's hand skimmed his stomach in an almost loving caress. Not that he could see it through the bubbles, but it was an excuse to not have to look Draco in the eye as he grumbled out, “Just how many lovers have you had?” He didn't know whether it was a good sign or a bad one that Draco's smirk faltered a little.

“A fair few,” Draco replied cautiously, moving to withdraw his hand. Harry caught it; sitting up slightly in the bath now to make sure he had the vampire's full attention.

“The full truth,” Harry demanded, keeping his grip on that wrist despite knowing that Draco could easily escape it in a second if he wanted to. “I need this to be a relationship of honesty, more than anything else. Don't disappoint me now.” At that, Draco did smirk, the hand in Harry's grasp squirming free to dance across his collarbone.

“Turn around,” Draco said suddenly, and Harry frowned at him, but at that imploring look in his eyes, could not help but comply. He turned in the water so his back was to Draco, grateful for the thick layer of suds that kept his dignity sufficiently hidden and after a few moments, he felt those sinuously long fingers lathering soap over his shoulders. He closed his eyes again, concentrating on the firm yet careful massaging motions as they smoothed across his back.

“I suppose you could say I was a bit of a flirt growing up, in fact I'm surprised you didn't know beforehand – this school is notorious for rumour-mongering.”

Harry didn’t know what to say to that. He'd seen Pansy Parkinson swooning over Draco of course, no one could miss that, but he had never especially seen or heard about Draco being…slutty. As if reading his thoughts, Draco continued, “I was discreet, of course, but I had just assumed the school knew. I came to the conclusion that I enjoyed both girls and boys fairly quickly. I think third year was my first real date, with Pansy Parkinson, naturally.”

“Was she your first then?” Harry asked before he realised the words had even left his mouth. He
cringed when he realised he had spoken them aloud, and with such an accusing tone. Why was he behaving so irrationally? He wasn't usually so…personal. Could it be that it was the jealousy, the possessiveness putting him so on edge? Those hands were washing the soap off leisurely now, though it felt like a skilled massage as opposed to a rinse. So which one of Draco's dozens of lovers had taught him this? He winced at the thought.

“Yes,” Draco said, his voice calm as he continued his ministrations. “And after her, there were two slytherin girls a year above us—”

“At the same time?” Harry snorted, resorting to bad humour to try and make light of the possessiveness churning in his empty belly. He blanched at the memory of the last thing to cross his lips last night, only just remembering how eagerly he'd swallowed it all. Oh Merlin, he thought, mortified. And yet at the same time, it was a good sort of embarrassed, the naughty kind, which he found secretly enjoyable. It was quite fun, being naughty. Is that why Draco had been such a 'flirt' as he'd put it?

“No at the same time,” Draco laughed. “I have a high opinion of myself but even I wouldn't flatter myself that much. No, one after the other, then Blaise—”

“Blaise Zabini?”

“You'll be turning into a prune in the water before I finish if you don't stop interrupting,” Draco scolded him, just as his hands slid round to begin washing Harry's chest. Harry was too concentrated on his irritation to even think to protest. “He was my 'friend' then, and I was…curious. He was the first boy I went with. It was only a fling; he was probably the shortest of my relationships – if you could even call it that. After him, there was one of the Durmstrang lot, a sixth year and a fifth year both boys from slytherin.

“I had an on-going thing for one of the Beauxbatons lot near the end of that year too. In our fifth year I took a fancy to a girl who was working part time in a cafe near our holiday home in France. And I think you know what happened before I returned here for our sixth year. After that my view on the world began to change, and frivolous sex with the most attractive or successful partners was not at the forefront of my mind. Nor did I care for such…shallow interactions any longer.”

Eight partners then, and Draco was only 18 years old. Harry tried not to think like a prude, the way everyone kept accusing him, but it was hard to process, for some reason – Draco with somebody else. Much less eight other someones. “Were you ever a…a ‘bottom’ for any of the blokes?” He murmured, wondering. Hermione had insinuated that they could ‘swap'.
Draco gave a slow nod in answer. “To the bloke from Durmstrang and Blaise.”

“Did you even love any of them?” he asked. Draco's hands had washed his legs in the time it had taken him to find his words again and thankfully, they stopped there rather than ventured to more personal places. Draco remained seated on the edge of the bath, however and Harry turned to face his blurry silhouette.

“I don't think the person that I was before the war… I'm not sure if I was capable of love back then, not the romantic kind, anyway. I don't think I'd grown up enough until our sixth year and at that point, I ceased seeing people so frivolously.”

Harry nodded slowly as he thought about what that meant.

“I liked them well enough, a few of them I think I thought I loved at the time,” Draco added thoughtfully. “Do you think less of me now then? I suppose I don't match up to your moral standards?”

Harry glared as best he could without his glasses. “I'm not as overly moral as… Well I may come across a bit prudish and ethically obsessed but that's only because…” He growled then as his words failed him, running his hands through his hair in irritation. “I suppose because there are just things I can't take for granted. Physical affection being one of them. I can't see how someone could ever sleep with someone they didn't love.”

On realising what he had just said, his eyes widened and he hurriedly added, “It’s different with you. You… When I'm with you nothing is black or white anymore. It's all confusing and I don't…” His words failed him again and he fell mute as suddenly, his glasses were slid onto his nose.

“I want you to see me clearly when I say this,” Draco murmured huskily, now kneeling on the floor outside the bath to bring his smouldering eyes to Harry's level. “You're different to all of them, in every possible way. Infinitely more important to me than anyone has ever been before. As much as smelling your jealousy amuses me, I want you to know that none of them hold a candle to you, in any way shape or form. Purely because you have a tendency to do something stupid when you're feeling threatened or inadequate. I didn't want them in the same way I want you – need you.”

Harry's face was burning now. What was it with Draco getting so close to his face all the time? There was nowhere to hide when they were this close, no way he could smother his feelings. It was exhilarating and daunting at the same time. But he still wasn't running away. “This is a very intense conversation to be having whilst I'm in the bath and you're wearing nothing but a towel,” he murmured awkwardly, wondering if there was a possible way for him to get out of the bath, dried
and back into his clothes without Draco staring at him. “You…you don't mind helping me with this article then?”

Draco grinned. “I never mind a publicity opportunity, especially if it will keep you sweet.”

Harry tried to scowl, but couldn't quite make it as fearsome as he might like. He was too...contented this morning. He could get used to not wanting to bite everyone's heads of each time they spoke to him. “I don't suppose you'd mind going and getting dressed so that I can do the same?” he asked, shifting slightly in the bath. Draco got to his feet, still smirking.

“Bashful of me seeing you as naked as I saw you last night?” Draco chuckled, though he was heading towards the curtain regardless of the teasing in his voice. “Make sure not to eat anything too suggestive at breakfast – it might remind me sinfully of your delicious performance last night.” He made a lewd gesture with his mouth then that made Harry flush scarlet, before he vanished through the curtain. Again, this kind of embarrassment was oddly...nice. Normal. He sank deeper into the bath, grabbing the shampoo and readying to wash his hair quickly before Draco returned. If the vampire caught him naked he was sure they would never get to breakfast on time, and he needed to speak to Hermione about contacting Rita Skeeter…

* * *

It was amazing how quickly members of the press responded when it was to their benefit. Despite the restrictions that Hermione had set down years ago about what she was allowed to write about, (when they had first discovered her secret) Rita Skeeter was still incredibly hot off the draw. Hermione had sent the request to her at breakfast and the moment Harry had sat down in the hall for lunch with her, Ron and Draco, a large grey owl had dropped down in front of him with her reply.

“Must be desperate,” Hermione noted, as Ron piled some extra food onto her plate, regardless of her protests that she was eating for two, not six. “My 'restrictions' haven't allowed her any decent stories lately. She must realise this is a great opportunity for her.”

“And you never give interviews mate,” Ron agreed with a nod. “Everyone's going to read this. She's going to want to do it good – and fast.”

“And whatever it is you're holding over her head will stop her from turning the story into utter rubbish, such as her other reports,” Draco interjected, sipping some soup regally. Harry couldn't help but notice the expressions on his two best friends' faces, the way they sat up a little straighter when Draco spoke.
They still aren’t comfortable with him, Harry realised, though he couldn’t blame them. At least they were making the effort for him. As was Draco. It also didn’t escape his notice that Remus was watching him and Draco carefully from where he sat at the staff table. Remus hadn’t approached him again, yet, but he knew that he would. He cares too much about me to let it lie, especially when he thinks I’m in trouble.

That was the trouble here, really. Nobody knew Draco like he did. That’s why they couldn’t understand.

“But are you sure this is a good idea, mate?” Ron asked, leaning across the table as if that might prevent Draco from hearing. “I mean…this is all happening awfully quick. You only admitted to us that you were seeing him like a week ago, and now you’re outing yourself as his lover? You don’t even know for sure if you are gay?!”

Harry hissed at his friend as the last part of that statement caused those nearest to them to look his way. “A bit quieter, alright?” he murmured, not missing how Draco had tensed at his side at Ron's words. “This hasn't seemed fast to me. It's felt like a long struggle to start finding myself again; finding out what I want and how I want to live now that Voldemort is gone. I've finally started realising what I want, who I am, and waiting a few more weeks or months or years won't change either of those things. All it will do is allow me to slip back into the slump I've been in since I… Since the war ended.”

Hermione nudged Ron with her elbow, a signal to shut up, Harry assumed and she herself gave Harry a warm smile. “I think it's good that you're finally not dancing in circles. We're all here for you through this. And as for outing yourself, well the Daily Prophet really gave you no choice there. I heartily believe the only way to stifle such vicious rumour is with the simple truth. And now that you have Malfoy, he can use his knowledge of publicity to mould this opportunity to both of your benefits.”

Draco gave her a small nod of recognition then and Harry knew that he was grateful to be included in that, to be acknowledged as Harry's partner for the first time by either of his friends.

Turning his attention back to the short, blunt letter in his hands from Skeeter, Harry perused the words once more. “She says to meet her just outside the gates of Hogwarts after our lessons let out,” he said to the others. “I can meet her, but I can't be late for Snape's lessons.”

“Or dinner – by the look of you, you can't afford to miss many more meals,” Draco added, with another sip of his soup. To Harry's annoyance, Hermione gave Draco an approving look at that.
“Sod the lot of you,” Harry griped, “I am not a child. I don't need to be told when to eat or sleep or study or–”

“Oh no?” Hermione questioned with a raised brow, her voice sounding irritatingly like McGonagall's. “So you have done the practice work for Dual Casting then?” she asked.

Harry's stomach dropped. Shit. He looked to Draco. Neither of them had had the chance to practice that. Harry had caught up with all the rest of his work over the weekend, and no doubt Draco had also, whilst he'd been siphoned off in Snape's rooms last week. This, however, they'd needed to practice together and they had both completely forgotten it.

Flitwick would turn them both into scones, of that he was sure. “Another detention then,” Harry groaned. Though at least this time Alaric would not be able to interfere with their punishment. At least he hoped. He cast another side glance at Draco. The blond would have to ask that coven of Claude Stanton's where that bastard was hiding. They couldn't keep looking over their shoulders forever. *Especially if I ever hope to pass Charms this year. I doubt McGonagall will create a Ninth Year just for me.*

With a sense of foreboding weighing heavily on him throughout his first lessons, he couldn't even manage to be pleased with himself when he successfully turned his raven into a quill perfectly during Transfiguration. The words of disappointment Flitwick was sure to utter were already ringing in his ears long before he even stepped through the door to Charms.

A sense of dread filled him when he finally dropped into his seat beside Draco in the Charms classroom. He tugged his relevant books and his wand out as slowly as possible while the other students found their seats, as if being slow would put off the inevitable. Tiny Professor Flitwick was already watching them from the front of the classroom with that usual warm look on his face. Flitwick was one of the professors who had spoken for him and the others to allow them to return this year. *And I'm throwing that back in his face,* Harry thought. Guilt felt thick in his throat and judging by the way Draco didn't so much as look at him as the lesson began, he was feeling the same. Flitwick tactfully avoided calling Hermione and Ron up by suggesting that only those who clearly didn't practice last time should have to demonstrate Dual Casting before the class. Harry swore he could taste vomit when the little professor finally called on him and Draco.

Offering a tentative glance to his partner, Harry griped his wand and got to his feet, barely concealing a groan of dread. This was going to be awful. He and Draco stood either side of the podium Flitwick had sat in the centre of the classroom, on which a feather sat. The very object the others had all used to demonstrate their combined *Wingardium Leviosa.*
Harry's eyes flicked to Draco's and he held his gaze as panic gnawed at him, even as he raised his wand, aiming it at the large grey feather. Moistening his lips anxiously, Harry stared into those silver eyes, concentrating with all his might in directing his thoughts toward Draco. We're fucked, he thought knowing that his magic would surge out of control the second that he called on it. It wouldn't explode after a spell as simple as the levitation charm, but it would awaken that burning, fiery beast of his magic within its cage and set it pounding on the bars of its cage again.

*Just relax,* Draco's voice whispered through his mind with all the magic of a calming breeze. *Look at my eyes, it's just like the other night, remember? There's only my voice. My breathing. Concentrate.*

*My magic will surge—*

*And I will call you back from it before anyone even notices it. Trust me.*

Harry inhaled deeply. Again, he found that notion easier than he ever would have thought a few weeks ago. He did trust Draco. *On three,* he thought, directing the words at Draco as he held his gaze. *One, Two...*

*“Wingardium Leviosa!”*

The feather leapt into the air above their heads as if under the force of an invisible gale, it was stronger than they had both intended, but the force on either side was even, at least. As soon as it had flown into the air, it stopped there, turning above them with gentle, steady motions. It was nothing short of a miracle. And yet Harry knew what had allowed them to perform a Dual Cast so precisely. Our bond, Harry thought, magic grumbling low in his chest, awoken from the darkness Draco had banished it to on Saturday. He felt hot, sweat had broken out across his brow and his limbs were shaky, but he was holding the magic in with a fraction more ease than before.

Flitwick, in the mean time was practically hopping on the spot with glee. “You've done it! Bravo! Bravo. I say, spectacular work, Potter and Malfoy. Fifty points to… Oh, I suppose house points aren't relevant to you now,” he chortled, rubbing his hands together excitedly as he stared at the feather, still suspended mid-air.

*“See class, the spells were a little too forceful but they both were of equal power and intention. And now, as you see, it has stabilised. A splendid effort indeed. Now, could you try bringing it gently back down onto the podium, please?”*
Harry’s eyes left Draco's for the briefest of moment's then, drifting up to the floating feather. Just then, however, the feather starting spiralling downwards wildly. Whatever balance and synchronisation they had achieved had faltered the moment he’d looked away. The connection was broken.

There were a few snickers from behind them, and Harry fidgeted sheepishly as the feather continued to spin manically until it touched down on the stand at last. It was harder to breathe now, but he had done it, committed to a Dual Cast that didn't explode or go as badly as he had imagined. For a moment there, he and Draco had done it! And his magic, however fiercely it was screaming in his ears, was still contained.

*It's because I know that I can control it with Draco's help, that stops me from panicking further.*

“Well, a good start at any rate. You certainly showed the most promise,” Flitwick praised them as Draco nudged Harry back to his seat. The long-fingered, cool hand that slid over Harry's thigh under the table was oddly quite calming to his frayed control. *Perhaps there is hope after all,* he thought, wondering if the lesson with Snape tonight would go half as well as this had. Draco had said that together, they would be able to do extraordinary things, that there would be no limits to what they could to. Only now was he starting to realise just how true that was. It was both terrifying and exhilarating.

* * *

The heavy drizzle that had plagued the morning had thankfully let off by the time they started making their way down towards the gates. Hermione had cast the ingenious Impervius charm to protect them from the rain and was now at the forefront of their group, her chin held high and her lips pursed as they approached the place they had agreed to meet Skeeter.

The old witch had chosen a peculiar location indeed, Harry thought, but then, she had every reason not to trust them all. And Draco had suggested that perhaps she didn’t want to be alone with a ‘known Death Eater’ as her colleague at the Daily Prophet had described him. It was a plausible explanation.

“Would you stop it Ron!” Hermione hissed as they crossed the grounds. Ron had been mumbling the entire way that Hermione shouldn’t wait so long to eat, that she had to keep her strength up. Harry had wondered which of his parents he might take after where family was concerned, to his surprise, it was Mrs Weasley’s voice that he could hear coming out of his friend’s mouth more and more since Hermione’s secret had been revealed.
“Not all of us believe that the next meal is the be all and end all of the world, Ronald Weasley!” Hermione snapped. “I will eat a normal sized portion of food when everyone else does! Stop nagging me like a tired old housewife!”

Ron’s ears went red and Harry was grateful that Draco was pretending not to hear his friends’ argument. Any comment from Draco wouldn’t be so graciously ignored by his best friend right now. Harry too kept silent as they rowed.

“Sorry for caring,” Ron grumbled, “there’s not much I can do for you but make sure you’re looking after yourself and…it. You complain that you have to do everything but you complain louder when I help! You nearly throttled me when I insisted I carry your books. I don’t bloody understand what you want from me!”

They had reached the gates now and they swung open slowly to permit their exit. Harry took up a seat on a nearby bench that had appeared from thin air the moment they lingered. It was wrought iron and shaped in the most exquisite of patterns that Harry had no trouble staring at carefully, so that it wouldn’t look like he was listening in on the argument. He’d noticed a few times now that if anyone paused by the gates long enough a bench or two would appear to seat them until they got their breath back. He loved magic.

Draco took up a seat next to him on the ornate bench, also opting to pretend he couldn’t hear the argument occurring beside them. Emotions were running high between the couple, what with the situation they had found themselves in. Harry wasn’t too worried about them. He had thought that Ron would have learnt over the years that no one told Hermione Granger what to do, however.

“At your age you should have realised that there are other ways of showing you care besides nagging!” Hermione snapped.

“That’s rich, coming from you!” Ron griped, whirling then to face Harry, “What do you reckon, mate, she’s mental isn’t she?”

Harry, who went gaunt at the prospect of having to choose a side in this madness, was saved from having to answer by Draco’s soft interruption. “I believe that you should be silent, unless you want that Skeeter woman to guess at your predicament,” the blond warned, tilting his head slightly towards the path. Rita Skeeter was hurrying towards them, her gauche handbag held aloft over her head to protect her garish perm from the rain.
He could not help but notice that Ron edged closer to stand directly beside him now, while Hermione took the seat on the side of him that Draco did not occupy. They were standing firmly together so that this woman could see there would be absolutely no messing around, just like the last story they had persuaded her to write, back in fifth year.

Still, when she reached them with that ridiculous, disingenuous smile plastered on her face, she cooed with forced sweetness, “Such lovely weather for a clandestine meeting, is it not?” She looked pointedly at Draco and Harry. The blond sneered and Harry guessed that they were thinking along the same lines; he was sure he could see the woman’s foul mind frantically counting the galleons their story could bring her.

_It doesn’t matter as long as everyone hears the truth._ He winced as he recalled some of the phrases from that article, insulting him by saying that killing Voldemort had awoken some darkness inside of him, that he wasn’t content for a quiet life now and was hungering for more pain. But they had torn into Draco too, dragging his name through the dirt of death eaters and insinuating he had taken advantage of their ‘tragic hero’ and that he must have seduced him under false pretences.

It had been a vile article that had touched a nerve in him, even if Draco didn’t seem too bothered about it. Draco really believed there was no such thing as publicity he could not twist to his own devices, but Harry could not help but wonder just what Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy thought about the article. And his ‘alleged’ attachment to me, his mind supplied.

A similar bench had appeared before them now, just on the edge of the rambling path and Rita Skeeter perched on the edge of it grandly. Setting her handbag beside her, she began to delve into her bag.

Hermione stiffened beside Harry. “This interview will have the same terms as our last,” she said warningly. Rita’s eyes flashed to Hermione with venom, despite the sweet smile on her painted lips.

“Of course, dear,” she chimed sickeningly, drawing out a regular quill and a long roll of parchment. Though Harry swore he saw a glimpse of the infamous Quick Quotes Quill before the crocodile handbag snapped shut. She’d be disappointed if she thought any of them were stupid enough to allow _that_ to manipulate their words again.

“Where shall we start then?” she asked, having absolutely no intentions of allowing them to answer before she added hastily, “When exactly did you make the transition from boyhood rivals on opposite sides of the war into lovers? Was it the tragedy on both sides that inevitably drew you together? How was that first kiss? Would you say that you have a voracious love life? Two such attractive young men, both in the public eye – both thrown together in such awful circumstances.
The public want to know it all.”

Slowly, Draco got to his feet. Harry sat up a little straighter, poised to seize him, to stop him if his temper got out of control. He was usually so cool and complacent, but he had been unreasonable the few times people had harmed or upset him, Harry in any way over the last few weeks. He couldn’t trust Draco's restraint when someone was so clearly threatening his highly desired privacy.

“Let's get one thing straight, Ms Skeeter,” Draco said, his voice low and rigid. “You will write exactly what we say in the exact context we say it in; you will not tarnish us any further with your gossip-mongering. Your purpose here is to put the record straight with this article. If you do not make good of this opportunity, not only will you not be permitted to do interviews for us in the future, but I will use every legitimate source the Malfoy family possess to make you suffer. The media have tarnished Harry's name for too long, made his life difficult and unnecessarily morose. I will allow it no longer. Even if he won’t take action. I will.”

Skeeter swallowed audibly, staring up at Draco, who did look the epitome of intimidation.

“You can't just threaten everyone,” Hermione hissed. Draco turned slightly to look at her levelly.

“I am merely doing what Harry should have done for himself years ago; I'm setting down the guidelines for his privacy. He isn't a sideshow act; he's a man, and one who deserves to live the rest of his life out in peace after everything he has done for you all.”

Harry felt his skin colour a dark pink and he lowered his gaze. It was…embarrassing having someone stand up for him so brazenly, and yet nice at the same time, especially in the case of the press, something he loathed having to deal with and had never taken ‘no’ for an answer from him. He understood what Draco had meant by being raised for acting in the public eye. Skeeter, for once, was speechless at Draco’s words.

“Let's get going then, yeah?” Ron said suddenly, eager to break the tension that had fallen. “It'll be dinner time in the hall soon.”

Hermione rolled her eyes.

Nervously, Skeeter brought her quill to her parchment again, keeping one eye on Draco as she murmured cautiously, “So…how do you want to start?”
At this, Harry found his voice. “At the beginning of all of this, since everyone seems to have forgotten my declaration at the end of the war. That it was Draco who helped me down in the dungeon. We’ll start with that, then I’ll tell you everything we believe you and the rest of the world need to know about us and settle all of these vicious rumours once and for all.”

A moment of silence fell in which Rita Skeeter’s eyes surveyed them all in turn carefully, before she risked speech again. “Your relationship, it started with Mr Malfoy helping you to defeat He Who Must Not Be Named, you say?”

“Satisfied, Potter?” Draco breathed, his words dusting over the back of Harry’s neck as they made their way back up the castle later that evening. Draco had been peculiarly quiet throughout the interview, leaving Harry to tell the story they wished to tell as he wished it. He’d only intervened when Skeeter had been too pushy about certain facts or questions that Harry would prefer to leave unanswered.

Harry had glanced back to him now and again and seen an odd thoughtfulness on his face, as if he were contemplating something completely unrelated to their current situation. They did have a lot on their plate. The missing Alaric, Claude and his coven, school, the media…

The tone of his voice however, was deep and husky and offered Harry no clue as to what had been the focus of his thoughts. The vampire was walking very close, so much that Harry glanced quickly up to where Hermione and Ron were walking ahead. Hermione had looked subdued during the interview, that had happened a lot lately. She would explode with impatience at Ron and then withdraw, upset afterwards, regretting her harshness.

“It’s the hormones making her act that way,” Draco said then, his voice still as soft and warm as ever as he gestured with his head to the couple just ahead of them. Evidently seeing Harry’s frown, the blond added, “The child, it’s addling her hormones and making her emotions as well as her magic a little unstable. Her body hasn’t adjusted; I wouldn’t worry about it too much if I were you. It’s completely natural, and as for Weasley, this period is a test as to how devoted a father he will be. She must endure feeling the wretched mood swings and he must endure being on the raw end of them. As I said, completely natural.”

Harry raised a brow at that, glancing to the side to meet those grey eyes as the blond fell into stride beside him. “And when did you become an expert?” he snorted, with a quick peek up at the weeping sky above. It was raining harder now. Autumn really was on them. There would be snow soon enough…
And then the Christmas holidays, he thought with dread swelling in his stomach. He didn’t know what to expect this year.

“It’s common knowledge,” Draco said simply.

“Maybe to those raised in a normal family home,” Harry grumbled, frowning then as he recalled what Draco had said before he’d felt the need to comfort him on the situation with Ron and Hermione. “What did you mean before? Am I satisfied with what?”

Draco smirked subtly, his pale face ripe with a handsomeness that made Harry’s skin tingle with heat, even in the downpour. “You have a good memory, as do I. There are a few things I have been meaning to consult you on. First, however, I did mean, are you satisfied with the article that will likely be published tomorrow at the latest? Do you fully understand that you have just completely outed yourself as my lover to the world?”

Harry scowled. “You doubt me? I told you, I’m not running anymore. I’d have thought this would be proof enough for you.”

“And I would hope that you didn’t do this just to prove a point to me,” Draco replied cautiously.

With a sigh, Harry stopped. Hermione and Ron had just vanished inside the door into the main foyer, while he and Draco had just reached the sheltered archways that formed the edge of the main courtyard. “I did it to silence the vicious rumours so that I could carry on with my life. Whatever I have with you, I don’t want it being speculated about like it’s some…some dark, disgusting curse or something. I… I suppose I also knew your public image is important to you, to whatever career you might pursue – I know you want to be great so…it only made sense to stop the speculation before it spiralled out of control. If we let it lie too long we’d never be able to stop it.”

Those eyes were smouldering with emotion again and Harry took a step back just as Draco took a step towards him. “So you did do it for me,” Draco breathed.

“I didn’t want Prophet hounds breathing down my neck every second, greedy for a snippet of a story, either,” Harry insisted. He didn’t want credit for doing something selfless when really, it had benefitted him as well.

“You’re very quick to dismiss the good deeds you do me, Harry Potter,” Draco murmured heatedly then, taking another step towards him, which Harry mimicked in the opposite direction.
“Tell me then, why is it that the last few times we have been intimate, you have begged be to fuck you?”

Harry’s face inflamed. He winced as the memories of his own voice, high with passion and broken with wanton pants ricocheted off the inside of his head. It was only when he felt the unyielding stone wall against his back that he realised he had been backing away still. “I don’t…I don’t know,” he murmured out. Draco closed in, his body a hairsbreadth from his own, his hands ghosting over Harry’s arms as if memorising his shape, appreciating him without actually touching him. Harry shivered all the same. It felt like the air around his skin was on fire.


Pressing his head back into the stone, Harry forced himself to hold that gaze, he didn’t like the way he easily surrendered to embarrassment whenever those eyes turned on him. Draco ruled his body too easily. As I do his, when I try. Just like last night…

“Y-You can just read my mind if you concentrate hard enough,” Harry protested.

Draco smirked wickedly. “Oh, indeed I can. But it was you that taught me the virtues of learning something directly from you rather than just plucking it out of your head.” His hand rose then, tracing the line of Harry’s collarbone through his robes and sliding down his front slowly. “But if you’re too shy, Harry, then tell me something else? What you said before Claude Stanton and the others arrived yesterday, that you wanted to be certain I chose you for no other reason than I wanted you; how would one go about proving that to you and eradicating your doubt once and for all?”

Harry squirmed as the hand slid round to taunt the small of his back. His own hands pressed on Draco’s shoulders trying to push him away half-heartedly. “If I knew the answer to that I would’ve asked you to do it, wouldn’t I?” he gasped out, trying to sound indignant and failing miserably. If only he could escape Draco’s proximity for a moment. His body was hyperaware of Draco’s every move recently, whether that was because of his unnameable feelings or their growing bond, he wasn’t sure.

“I suppose it escaped you that we were as intimate last night and I did not bite you,” Draco said, his words drifting over Harry’s lips in a cool, teasing breeze. “That today, in Charms, we were able to perform a Dual Cast without any preparation? If I were not filled to capacity with thoughts of you, that kind of connection could never be formed so quickly – vampire and first or not.”

Harry closed his eyes then, just feeling the hand on his back, the fingers splaying across the
scarred side of his throat and the breath on his lips that was not his own. The day had (over all) been so calm, so normal. He felt almost human. “I want to believe that–”

“So believe it,” Draco urged him.

“But it may take me some time–”

“I have time,” Draco retorted, just as quickly. “It’s yours. Take it. Just…keep your promise not to run and hide from me any longer. You can’t flee from closeness with me anymore. I’ve seen your innermost thoughts. Felt first hand what you feel for me. I won’t let you waste what we have out of fear.”

Cracking open his eyes, Harry whispered, “I’m not running. But neither can you. I won’t let those vampires take you, whether you want to go with them or not.” His fingers curled into Draco’s robes now instead of pushing him away. “Whatever doubts I have, whatever your coven or the media or Remus have to say, I won’t…I won’t let you go, not now. Got it?”

Draco made a delicious crooning sound then that was almost a purr of delight, and he caught Harry's chin, tilting it up slightly. He paused a moment, as if testing if Harry would resist or not. Harry's lashes dusted his cheeks and he tugged impatiently on Draco’s school robes, plain black as all of the eighth years wore, with only the Hogwarts crest on the front. There were no house colours separating them anymore, after all. They were all the same, all lost and trying to find themselves again.

But Harry knew without a doubt, that he would be nowhere near as close as he was to finding who he really was, finding his niche in life without Draco. His lessons in life are probably just what I needed, he mused. Then, at last, those lips met his own, blasting all coherency from his mind with gentle tenderness.

He felt his head spinning at moments like this. Draco had a tendency to be brutal and passionate one moment and tender, almost loving the next. It would probably always be this hectic, this intense, but nothing brought his body to life more. When they were together, he could feel every fibre of his being humming with life like never before.

Groaning in satisfaction, he pushed back into the kiss, answering the tender sweep of Draco’s tongue with his own. He could get used to this, having someone who could make him feel so wanted, so content and yet bubbling with life at the same time. Someone he could give all of that back to, be an equal to, share his life with – the good parts and the bad. Never, since he’d realised he couldn’t be with Ginny, had he expected to have that. Never.
Draco’s fangs were present in the kiss suddenly, grazing his kiss-bruised lips. No doubt the vampire could not hold them at bay anymore. Harry groaned louder into that mouth, lifting up onto his toes to sink as far into the embrace as he could. When he was eventually forced to draw back to suck in a gasping for breath, Harry opened his eyes to stare hungrily into Draco’s.

“Fuck, I want you,” he panted under his breath. He felt the shape of Draco’s smirk against his own lips as well as heard it.

The vampire clucked his tongue in mock rebuke. “Tut tut, Potter, now what would your friends, your pet Werewolf say if they heard such things on their golden boy’s lips?”

In that moment, Draco’s nose wrinkled with disgust, a mere split second before a voice said from behind them, “he would say that he was very worried for your life.”

Draco growled venomously as he whirled to face Remus, his movement giving Harry a clear view of Remus standing there in the main doorway. His world-worn face was creased with worry-lines and Harry struggled to compose himself, standing up straight and willing the aroused flush from his cheeks. The way that Remus wrinkled his nose too, however, suggested that the smell of his arousal was not easily hidden from the werewolf.

“I have just sent Hermione and Ron into the great hall for dinner. I thought it was odd that they were lingering by the doorway. They didn’t say, of course but I knew that they must be waiting for you.” Ignoring Draco’s warning sneer, (thankfully devoid of fangs) Remus descended the steps, bringing himself level with both Harry and Draco. The werewolf gave a weary sigh.

“I suppose it is good that I have found you both together, despite the…awkward circumstance. I have been wanting to speak to you both about the alternatives to the difficult situation you both find yourselves in.”

Harry fidgeted uncomfortably on the spot. There was kindness, a warmth in Remus’s voice that he couldn’t help but appreciate. He always had the best of intentions. But he wasn’t sure they were welcome right now. “Remus,” he began slowly, “Really, now’s not—”

“Oh, Harry,” Draco interrupted, “I disagree, now is the perfect time to tell your Werewolf that you aren’t interested in alternatives.”
Harry glared at him. “As I told you, I’m open to ideas that might allow us some choice in the matter once again.”

Draco snarled in renewed frustration, running his hand furiously through his hair – a habit he had inherited from Harry probably, irritation burning in his eyes. “What difference does it bloody well make if you’ll choose me anyway, Potter?” He rounded on Remus then, forgetting all sense of decorum. “So what is your bloody plan then? Because I’ll tell you now, whatever it is, I’ll have no part in it.”

Remus’s kind face hardened. “Harry has the right to choose, to find his freedom again.”

“Harry was finally accepting his own decisions before you turned up and spun his head with doubt. There is no breaking the bond we share, every day it grows stronger. Our connection cannot be broken unless I die – properly this time.” He stepped up to Remus challengingly then. “Is that it? You intend to kill me? If you knew Harry at all you would have noticed that he would be highly opposed to that—”

“Draco stop it!” Harry demanded, flying forwards to stand between them. “Of course Remus doesn’t intend to kill you.” He looked between the two of them for a moment. Draco was fuming, while Remus was quite clearly displeased at the situation he had found them in. That was his responsibility, his right as family though, Harry thought.

At the same time, however, he could also understand Draco’s short temper when it came to his side of the situation. Hadn’t he, Harry irrationally challenged a vampire elder yesterday when he thought that they might take Draco away?

“There are a few rites known in the inner circles of supernatural beasts,” Remus was saying then, snapping him from his thoughts. “I wanted you to know that I am researching them. I am not sure of their effectiveness, however, it is as you say, Harry; if you can have your freedom to choose your own life returned to you, it is worth a chance, surely?”

Harry heard Draco grit his teeth, biting back another snarl.

“Thanks Remus,” Harry said, grateful that Draco had said nothing. The arousal that had ravaged his body moments before was well and truly extinguished now. “I…I appreciate it, really. I need to shovel some food down me before my lesson with Snape but we should talk about this more another time.” When Draco isn’t caught off guard and in such an unreceptive mood, he added mentally.
Remus gave a curt nod, his wise eyes watching Draco carefully even as he spoke to Harry. “It’s a busy time for you, Harry, of course. I would be thrilled if you could visit Tonks and I for dinner in two weekends’ time? We have missed having you at the house.”

Harry hung his head slightly. He didn’t know how to react to actually being wanted at home. He had never had to balance his Hogwarts life with home life before; it would take some getting used to. “Of course,” he murmured, “I’d like that. It’s strange, actually missing home.”

A warm smile answered his words and he inhaled carefully, unsure how to proceed. In the end, he settled on returning the caring expression, before making his way in through the main doors, Draco hot on his heels. It wasn’t until they were walking through the aisle up to the eighth year table in the Great Hall that Draco slid closer, whispering harshly, “I thought that you had decided to pursue a relationship with me. Why are you still insisting on looking for a way to break our connection?”

Harry grit his teeth. How could he explain this in a way that Draco could understand? “I want to give you the freedom to choose me without the vampire urges affecting your decision.”

“But I will choose you regardless, so the point is redundant,” Draco hissed. “I thought that yesterday – today went well. I…I have enjoyed being close to you,” he murmured awkwardly. “Is the feeling not mutual?”

Taking a seat upon reaching the table opposite Hermione and Ron, Harry gave them a reassuring smile when they looked sheepishly at him. They were most likely worried that they had given them away to Remus and gotten him in trouble. No sooner had he opened his mouth to assure them things were fine, however, than Draco continued.

“Answer me.”

With a deep sigh, Harry turned slightly in his seat to look at him fully. “It is mutual,” he murmured, for his ears only. “But I don’t understand why you’re so desperately fighting this if you insist that you’ll choose me regardless. Nothing will change if your feelings are genuine.”

Draco growled under his breath, leaning in so close that only Harry could hear. “You don’t understand, do you? There is no sure way to break this bond, it is blood deep, only the darkest of magic could have a chance at even altering it. And even if it did, do you not realise what would happen? Think. Your feelings, your thoughts and your life are all tied in with my instincts because of what you are to me. You are what keeps me human, if anything were to be altered–”
“It might make you a ravenous beast, just as Stanton and the others expected you to be,” Harry finished for him. He wondered how he could have missed such a point, when the thought of being Draco’s leash had been so abhorrent to him. Realising that Ron and Hermione were watching them curiously now, struggling to catch what they were saying, he started piling some food onto his plate.

*I didn’t want to lose what we had*, he thought, desperately shoving it towards Draco with all that he had in him. *I just wanted to make sure that you chose me for me, that’s all.* His mental words were answered with nothing but silence, and for a moment he thought that it hadn’t worked – it was only meant to work when he was in some sort of trouble, to start with at least. But then, the barest whisper flittered through his mind.

*No one can be sure that their partner’s feelings are true; we all must simply trust them. All that matters in the end is that they are...compatible.* Draco’s hand slid under the table subtly, caressing the inside of his thigh with such casual tenderness that it made Harry forget to breathe for a moment. *Which we are,* Draco directed at him then. *We are perfect together. And you may be uncertain but I will not fail you, Harry. Ever.*

Harry had never considered himself an overly emotional person, at that moment, however, he thought his insides might tear themselves apart with the intensity of the emotional hurricane blasting through him. That’s what Draco was, a storm that stirred his life up in the most agonisingly blissful ways – a typhoon. He had never felt so confused and yet never so happy, either.

Staring down at his plate of shepherd’s pie, he reached under the table, intertwining Draco’s fingers with his own. *I don’t want you to go meet those vampires in November,* he thought then, unable to bear the thought of all the wretched things that could happen.

The fingers around his squeezed him reassuringly. *Let’s just see what Severus says, alright?*

Harry’s body was still tense. He felt like an over-emotional little twit right now. He just couldn’t get over the feeling in his gut about the coven. He didn’t trust them at all – certainly not with something as precious as Draco’s life.

*They’d have to drag me kicking and screaming, clawing and biting to get me away from you,* Draco whispered into his mind. Harry gave a small nod. Unfortunately, he had an awful feeling that was exactly what Claude Stanton and the others intended to do...
~To Be Continued...
POTTER SPEAKS OUT

Yesterday, Harry Potter, our Chosen One sought my assistance in putting an end to the spiteful, unjust rumours that have been circulating regarding him and his lover, Mr Draco Malfoy – his schoolmate and assistant in ridding of us of He Who Must Not Be Named.

Upon meeting me yesterday, Mr Potter, seeming harassed and worn by the cruel public’s unforgiveable insults to both his lover and himself, asked me to inform the world of the real truth concerning him and Mr Malfoy. Two star-crossed lovers that found each other amongst the horrors of the war, a war that they single-handedly brought to an end for us.

I challenge any reader to not be touched by their tale…

Harry cringed, setting down the copy of the Daily Prophet that he’d spied on one of the desks in the Eighth Year common room. It had been a few weeks now since that article had been splashed across the front page, and yet the fuss still hadn’t died down. At least everyone is up in the air about the truth though, instead of a load of bollocks, Harry thought. The uproar his and Draco’s honesty had created was still buzzing around the school.

Their fellow Eighth Years in particular had approached him with disbelief, questioning his choice of partner whenever they caught him without Draco, which, to his (surprising) relief, wasn’t too often. He had been naturally drawn to Draco over the last few weeks, connected to him, finding his company to be a large part of his everyday routine now. Even Ron and Hermione, who weren’t necessarily pleased about it had gotten used to seeing him at Harry's side.

“Is it true Harry?” Seamus had demanded when he, Dean, Lavender and the Patil twins had first
confronted him the day the article had been released. Harry had reiterated in it Draco’s part of Voldemort’s demise and then had relayed an edited version of their relationship. As much of the truth as he could practically reveal.

“Do you have a problem if it is true?” Harry had asked them casually.

“You’ve got to admit it’s a bit peculiar, Harry,” Dean intervened, “just last year you were with Ginny and now… Why Malfoy? You explained in that article, we know but…”

“If you read that article then that should be enough for you,” Harry retorted stiffly. The rest of the hall had gone silent to listen. Draco had gone to Snape to get his next dose of potion, leaving him, Harry vulnerable for attack. “That should be enough for you, for all of you,” he said for the whole hall to hear, before taking his seat at the breakfast table with Ron and Hermione, turning his back on the rest of the hall.

The article had got across what he wanted to say (albeit in an over-romanticised way) and he felt no need to say more on the matter. In fact, he intended to ignore any further questions. He didn’t have to justify his relationship with Draco to anyone.

That night a few weeks ago had solidified his beliefs in the vampire. With his help, Harry had had a rather successful lesson with Snape. The potions master had given them a knowing look as they had stepped into his quarters together, but otherwise had scarcely acknowledged anything out of the ordinary.

Harry had taken a seat in the same chair as before, while Snape stood a few feet in front of him, just as before. This time, however, Draco was at his side. He’d hovered there for a moment, sharing a look with Snape that Harry couldn’t quite decipher, before the blond knelt in front of him, taking his hands slowly in his.

“Just as before,” Snape said, his deep, drawling tone cutting through the awkward silence while Harry struggled not to groan just from the look in Draco’s vibrant silver eyes. They were locked on his with such possessive intensity that he felt his stomach lurch with pleasure.

His hands tensed where Draco held them. He wasn’t sure relaxing was going to be possible. Especially with Snape watching. Regardless he closed his eyes, he felt safe from the trembles of humiliation and awkwardness with his eyes shut. He could almost pretend that there weren’t two sets of eyes staring at him so intensely. Inhaling deeply, Harry concentrated on the hands holding his that had guided him to that calming cloud of bliss so easily before.
“You remember what to do,” Draco breathed, his words like a loving caress through his hair. “Forget where you are, forget why you're here, and just concentrate on me, like you did before.”

Harry gave a small nod. Yes, he remembered. If he’d been able to find relaxation while Greyback was at their heels then he could do it with Snape watching. He tried not to think what must be going through the potion master’s mind as he watched Draco kneel at his feet, holding his hands as he coerced him into a state of peace.

It can't be worse than him watching me come in my pants just because Draco fondled me though, his mind supplied, his last conscious thought before he pushed all coherency to the back of his mind.

“Focus on a relaxing memory, a calming one that brings you both contentedness and peace,” said Snape's voice.

The hands squeezed him again and Harry returned the gesture, searching himself for a memory, an experience that had filled him with the peacefulness he desired. With pink tinting his cheeks, he realised that that task was not as impossible as it had been before. He could still practically feel strong arms around him when he remembered 'that' morning; still feel the tender touch of Draco's fingers on his. He knew what contentedness was now.

Focusing on that feeling that he had pondered ever since it had swept through his body, Harry slowly phased into the feather light carefree state Draco had helped him find before. He was dimly aware of Draco's voice still sounding like a low, comforting lullaby in his ears and he clung to the sound rather than the actual words, relaxing limply back into the chair.

“Perfect,” Snape said, sounding quite surprised that he had managed to do it so easily. Harry gave a small, carefree smirk at the sound of the disbelief in that voice and waited, not daring to open his eyes lest he lose his state of bliss.

It was almost like the afterglow he'd experienced in Draco's arms, that was all he could compare it to, though whether that was so with everyone or unique in his case because he felt this kind of peace with Draco lone, he wasn't sure. He was still aware of everything, every problem, it was just that he knew he wasn't anxious of them, wasn't panicking, he knew that everything would be well in the end. There was no need to panic. Draco's hands were still anchoring him.

He could hear Draco’s unnecessary breaths and matched his to them as he had before, breathing
in his musky scent until that was all that filled his mind.

“Now, Potter,” Snape continued, his voice sounding closer than before. “I want you to raise your wand to your temple. Keep that state of calm you are now in.”

Hesitating, Harry did as he was told, silently (and shamefully) grateful that Draco's hands rested on his knees when Harry had to release him to obey the command. Somewhere at the back of his mind, Harry was worried that his magic would swell the moment he used a spell, but then he knew it was irrational to be afraid. Draco hadn't let him down before. As soon as the wand tip touched his temple, he heard Snape's voice again.

“Now, Potter, repeat after me and listen closely to the true sound of the words. Aequuserium!” The last word was pronounced slowly, carefully so that Harry could follow but it was not Snape’s pronunciation that he was focusing on. He heard Draco whisper slowly, gently against his free hand an echo of the spell.

Breathing deeply he urged his voice into life.

“Aequuserium...!” He whispered. It wasn't full of enough focus, but he felt a tingle in his hand, felt the gentle whoosh of magic through his hair without the tiger in his gut awakening. Normal magic, his magic’s presence. A sensation he hadn't felt for so long. Swallowing now, he waited for a moment before opening his eyes. Staring directly into Draco’s he chanted strongly, “Aequuserium!”

An almighty tornado shot through his core, blasting his senses to smithereens. He gasped aloud, his head flying back, his wand clattering to the floor uselessly and his mouth moving soundlessly as he felt as if his body was fighting against himself. The tiger in his gut lurched forwards, fangs bared while the light inside him roared back. They clashed in his throat and he choked as the war raged, his fingers clawing at the arms of the chair.

Draco’s voice was there somewhere close-by, panicked and loud while Snape was murmuring something like ‘this was meant to happen’. It hadn't felt like this when Draco had cast the spell on him; it was as if two sides of him were warring together beneath his skin, trying to swallow the other whole. His body was almost lifted from his seat with the inner battle waging inside until at last, he slumped limply in the chair again, feeling Draco's hands shoot forward and immediately grasp his shoulders.

Harry was silently grateful, he wasn't sure he could remain upright otherwise. The beast inside had fallen quiet again, but he felt exhausted.
“What happened?” Draco demanded of Snape. Harry heard Snape approach and the next thing he knew the professor was tipping his head back and pouring potion down his throat. He recognised the flavour – pepper-up potion, and slowly felt energy return to his limbs. The two men before him both stepped back a bit when he straightened up in his seat and blinked up at them dazedly.

“I felt it; I fought the magic off with the spell I... It’s like some portion of my magic comes from a dark place and that’s what swells violently whenever I use my magic.”

Snape gave a short nod. “The Dark Lord’s magic was twisted and dark, any power you inherited from him would be inherently so. You have mastered the basics; you must now practice it and initiate it if you feel your power slipping.” He paused, considering both Harry and Draco with narrowed eyes. “It is wholly unexpected that you have mastered such a precise, delicate art so quickly. I suspect that this great increase in ability has something to do with the increase in intimacy between the two of you that was splashed across the page of the Prophet?”

Harry ducked his head in humiliation while Draco tensed.

“It is as you guessed from the start, our bond of blood is growing every day and with it our abilities. We performed a Dual Cast in Charms without any practice at all,” Draco explained, evidently trying to steer the conversation away from the more embarrassing aspect of it.

Something wicked flashed in Snape’s eyes and the man raised a brow. “Indeed, exponential power we can only but wait to see the extent of. I am concerned, however that you would do something as foolish as to copulate in the showers like randy fifth years. You know your desires for Potter’s blood are even more difficult to control than your desires for his body. What if you had bitten him and revealed what you are to everyone, all for one moment of passion?!”

Harry flinched even now in recalling that dreaded argument. He had simply sat there whilst he and Draco were scolded like children about things he had never wished to discuss with Professor Snape. He'd only just started having a sex life; he most certainly didn't want to share it with his Potions professor, no matter how little animosity now hung between them.

The weeks had passed in a mix of happiness and apprehension. He had been drawn deeply into the work the teachers had been setting during lessons, with Ron, Hermione and Draco close beside him through it all. The revision was ending now and the new, tougher modules were already taking its toll. They had so much homework now, made worse by the fact that last year's horcrux hunt had rendered him unused to school work, and frequently the four of them seized the plot of cosy chairs by the fire, working long into the night to ensure everything was done for the week ahead.
This weekend, however, there were two trials in particular that they had to face that were even worse than the constant questions or squealing over his and Draco's relationship. There was the dinner invitation back home with Tonks and Remus and then of course, the ominous meeting with Claude Stanton. Neither was an event he expected to escape unscathed, although he was looking forward to one more than the other. Despite the awkward avoiding games he’d played with Remus since that incident in the courtyard a few weeks ago, he did miss him and Tonks, even Teddy.

There was, however, some discussion as to what was going on with both.

Harry glanced up from where he sat crossed legged on the carpet, a spread of potions manuals and texts open in a fan around him. Ron and Hermione were cuddled up on the settee with Hermione ‘patiently’ correcting his own Potions essay. Draco was perched in the nearest chair to Harry, his legs hooked over the side and a book open under his gaze. Harry knew very well that it was a text on vampires, however, not Potions, whatever the front cover’s disguise may say.

When Draco and Snape had discussed the other vampires that night during his lesson in control, Draco had insinuated Harry would not be accompanying him, which, of course, Harry would have none of. The vampire had avoided the subject like the plague since, but Harry would corner him tonight.

_There’s no way he’s going into the viper’s nest without me, whether Snape is with him or not!_

“Something tells me you’re not focusing on your potions essay,” Draco mused. When Harry touched down from his reverie at those words, he realised that Draco was staring back at him now. He sat up a little straighter. The last few weeks had brought them even closer, if nothing else. He’d grown comfortable with Draco’s presence and his life had grown more comfortable because of that.

“I don’t understand all of the ingredients’ properties so I don’t know how I’m meant to grasp why holly bark needs to be added precisely ten seconds before the toadstool skin. I’ve never understood why certain ingredients have to go first,” Harry bit out. “I understand when it’s a stabilising ingredient that stops a volatile ingredient like dragon’s blood from reacting to the other elements, but when it’s just some bloody water-lily leaves I don’t see the difference.”

At that, Draco marked his page in the book he was studying with an emerald green ribbon and set it aside, before gliding over to where Harry was sitting on the carpet. The fire was burning warmly behind them in the hearth and had warmed Draco’s skin to a normal temperature, yet Harry still shuddered subtly when those long fingers caressed his as they scanned the passage he’d been reading.
“Think of it like quidditch then,” Draco explained, his body pressed sinfully against Harry’s side as he settled on the floor beside him. His eyes were fixed on Harry’s hand where it had frozen under his own. “You have to kick off from the ground before you can catch the snitch. Every ingredient is there for a reason and fits into the mixture a different way. If you don’t know the potion, it might be an idea to research all of the individual ingredients so that you know what they are and what properties they have before you even start.”

Draco nudged Harry’s hand aside and directed him to an ingredients glossary that had been lying nearby. He cracked it open at random and said, “You see, here. Holly bark in combination with liquefied unicorn hairs make the base of the potion that will stop the Hyperion Toadstool skins from being poisonous. They must brew for ten seconds together or else it will overheat and kill the organisms in the potion that will remove the poison. Think of it this way, the potion must be at a certain temperature to do its job in removing the poison.”

Harry frowned. “I’ve been Snape’s student for years, why didn’t he ever suggest reading the bloody glossary? Potions would’ve been a hundred times easier if I’d known why I had to do certain things.”

Draco withdrew his hand, but did not move back to the chair, instead he remained at Harry’s side, leaning back slightly. To feel the warmth of the fire better on his skin, Harry thought. “In seven years of potions, you didn’t wonder why there were dozens of glossaries in the library?” Draco asked with a raised brow.

Harry glared mutinously. “I can’t say as I’ve spent all my time poring over potions texts up there,” he snorted.

Rather than being annoyed, Draco laughed, a sound that had greeted Harry a few times over the last few weeks. “No, I’d wager you do much more worthwhile things up there,” Draco mused darkly.

Hastily returning to his book, Harry ducked his head a little more over the glossary, making a show of searching for the other ingredients in an attempt to hide his flush at the memory of just a few days ago. Draco had pressed him into one of the bookshelves and stolen himself a few moments of desperate snogging before Herbology. Harry’s tongue darted across his lips subconsciously, wondering just how he must’ve looked stumbling into Greenhouse Six with kiss-bruised lips and mussed hair.

The advantage (embarrassing as it was) about everyone knowing he was involved with Draco, however, was that nobody asked where he’d been or why he looked so ravaged. They all knew –
even the teachers, if the flustered scolding he’d gotten from Professor Sprout was any indication.

“You two ought to be careful,” Hermione said then, looking over to them sternly. “We’re adults in a school full of children, remember? If word gets out that you’re being caught being…indecent all over the school there will be a lot harsher consequences than there would be if you were seventh years. You’re not normal students. Remember?”

It wasn’t that Harry disagreed, on the contrary, he couldn’t agree more, but the reality of it was that when Draco was close to him, not everything was always a rational, conscious decision. “It just sort of…happens. We don’t make a conscious decision to start snogging in the library or—”

“Grope in the spare Charms classroom,” Draco interjected with a devilish gleam in his eye.

“I would have thought that you would have realised such actions have consequences,” Hermione replied evenly, gesturing to herself.

“I’m hardly going to get pregnant,” Harry grumbled under his breath, just enough that only they could hear him.

Ron laughed at that, receiving a hard glare off Hermione. “That’s not what I meant. I meant that…that with one act of clumsy passion you can end up inadvertently changing your life.” She glanced cautiously at Draco then, before securing Harry’s gaze. “You have to be careful, Harry. I’m happier than anyone that you’ve begun to find yourself, to live your life and experience the things you’ve denied yourself until now, but I…I don’t want you to forget the precarious position we’re all in.”

“It might calm your overexcited brain to know, Granger, that since the incident with the third years I’ve done nothing worse than snog your best friend silly in public forums. We got carried away in the changing room; it won’t happen in somewhere so open again. I have enough reason to remember if Harry does not, believe me,” Draco said vacantly, an edge of bitterness in his voice.

With a frown, Harry looked round at him. The last few stragglers had just vanished up the staircase to bed. “What does that mean?” he asked. “I thought you didn’t care less about what the third years or the Daily Prophet or anyone thought of us being outed to the public?”

Draco glanced quickly at Ron and Hermione, who fidgeted awkwardly. They had borne his presence over the last few weeks at Harry’s side, but they still didn’t care to listen to his and
Harry’s personal conversations. Harry watched them snatch up their own books, and they mumbled him a hasty good night before ushering away up the stairs after the last few students. The common room was now empty besides them.

“They have a way of sensing atmosphere that allows them to clear the room at the most opportune moments,” Draco noted aloud, and Harry surveyed him critically as the vampire began to fold up Harry’s books and parchment that had been spread across the carpet, piling them carefully into his bag.

“What did you mean, Draco?” Harry demanded again, his voice stiff this time.

Draco did not stop what he was doing, instead he continued and answered casually at the same time, “The day after our interview with the Daily Prophet was published, I received a letter from my parents.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Why didn't you tell me? What did they say?”

Regarding him with a vacant expression, Draco replied, “They criticised my indiscretion, my recklessness in being caught and my lack of contact with them when the matter arose. They seem to be under the impression that I should have contacted them as soon as we were revealed in the newspaper.”

“Well…maybe it would’ve been an idea to ask them – they are your parents–”

“They had nothing to say to me when I needed them most during the summer, what more could they possibly have to say to me now? Moreover, why should I care what their advice would be, when it is only offered when it suits them?” Draco cut across him sharply. “They are my parents, they always will be, I wish to honour and impress them but I cannot…rely on them as I once did. Not when they failed me so spectacularly over the summer. It is time that they learnt I am not the boy they knew before the war.”

Harry glanced over to the fire, considering his words carefully. Whatever else they were, his parents had loved him faultlessly, had gone into hiding for a year to help keep him safe, had died to protect him. The Malfoys had never kept Draco safe nor sacrificed themselves to protect him.

“It's their fault that you got involved in all of this,” he whispered out quietly, unsure of how Draco would react to that accusation. “They got you involved with Voldemort and they didn't have the
nerve to sacrifice their own lives to protect you from him when things got bad. I...I don't think you owe them anything.”

There was a long pause, and Harry wondered if he'd gone too far in voicing his opinion. Draco got to his feet, taking up his seat in the nearest chair once more and staring pensively into the dancing orange flames in the hearth. “They're still my parents. I can't rely on them as I did as a boy and I am no longer blind to their faults, but I cannot...I cannot hate them for them either. Just as I cannot hate you for yours. I still don't want to disappoint them.”

Rising to his feet slowly, Harry approached Draco, stopping a few feet from him. “You've done nothing to disappoint anyone. You've handled everything you've been dealt better than anyone could have expected, if they are disappointed in that then they're not looking hard enough. And as for...for us, they have no say in that,” Harry said cautiously.

Draco rested his chin on his interlocked fingers, continuing to gaze into the fire. “Just as Lupin has no say in us?”

Harry straightened up. “He doesn't. If he had the final word on this, I'd be as far away from you as possible. As it is, I'm here, and that's my decision, no one else’s.” He waited for a moment, considering his words before adding, “I know Remus isn't the same as a parent, but his family, the Weasleys and Hermione, they are my family. I don't want to come between you and your parents but you can't push them away from me either.”

Draco glared at him then. “I have been civil to Weasley and Granger have I not? I have no objection to your friends, your family, but I do have an objection to the werewolf sticking his nose in where it doesn't belong. You're mine, and I should be able to sit next to you in the Great Hall, kiss you without him glaring at me as if I'm stealing his virgin daughter's chastity.”

Cringing, Harry scowled down at him. “You had to make it sound really disgusting, didn't you?” he griped. “His objection to you is no different to your parents' displeasure with me–”

“It is entirely different,” Draco argued, getting to his feet, “they are displeased by my being caught in public, by my not giving them control and power over me as they once had. They are afraid that they are losing me but if anything, they will only be pleased with who I am with. You are famous, you are powerful and wealthy, they will have no protests at all about the 'who', merely the when and where.”

Harry thought about that, not certain how true that would actually be when he next saw Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy in the flesh, but their opinion of him didn't matter to him particularly, so it
wasn't important at that moment. “Whatever the reasons for our loved ones wanting to interfere, only we have the final say. They can crow all they want but in the end it'll make no difference,” he insisted.

Draco seemed not to believe him, for he said nothing for a long time, merely watched him with the same intense focus as always. Guessing that there would be no answer coming, Harry asked, “Why didn't you tell me that they had sent you a letter?”

Draco gave a dismissive wave of his hand. “You get so tetchy and skittish about peculiar things. I didn't want to have you sitting there and punishing yourself over me arguing with my parents. As I can smell you are right now.”

“I don't want to distance you from them. You love them, they love you, whatever has happened in the past,” Harry replied quietly. He didn't want Draco to lose his parents. He knew how lonely it was to live without them, and he didn't want Draco to experience that because of him. He couldn't bear it.

Suddenly, two lukewarm hands were on his shoulders, coercing him back to reality. He studied the smoky grey orbs that he had come to know so well over the last few weeks that he could even use the shades to depict the vampire’s emotions or levels of hunger. Draco was in a safe medium of the latter right now, his emotions, however were bubbling hotly in the darker flecks of those eyes.

“I wouldn't even be alive and my parents would both probably be in Azkaban were it not for you,” Draco said softly, squeezing his shoulders a little. “As much as you love to play martyr, I'm afraid you can't have this one, Harry.”

At the back of Harry's mind, a part of him still twitched with anger at that derisive statement, but instead, he stepped into the chest in front of him and pressed his lips to Draco's in a firm yet tender kiss. He groaned when Draco's mouth opened for him, and eagerly swallowed the sound, that tongue chasing the source of it as if starving for more. It was getting easier and easier to accept that there was someone in the world again that cared about him more than anything, that thought of him as precious, that wanted him. Easier to experience all of the human emotions he'd once feared he'd never experience rush through him whenever the vampire was near. The irony wasn't lost on him, that someone undead had brought him to life.

“You can't just leave me behind while you head off into whatever trap Claude Stanton and his coven have set for you,” Harry murmured against those lips as he half-heartedly drew back a fraction. “I don't care if Snape's going with you, or if you've both got it all planned, we're stronger together, you said it yourself.”
Draco smirked devilishly, sliding backwards into the chair behind him and staring up at Harry casually. “If I remember rightly, you couldn't behave yourself nor control your tongue the last time we face Claude. I can't risk you exploding with emotions in front of them. If they tasted even a fraction of your power—”

“I'm right on my way to mastering the control spell, Snape said it himself,” Harry cut across him, trying to ignore the way the blond had opened his legs a little. “I don't want to sound like a whiny housewife, but I don't want you to go.”

“And I don't want you to go to dinner with your werewolf and his family,” Draco countered, “the notion that you would be apart from me and out of my reach is abhorrent to me.”

Harry scowled. “This isn't about not wanting to leave you. If something goes wrong with those vampires…”

Suddenly, he felt his knees collapse under the firm pressure of Draco's heels on the back of them and he tumbled forwards, wrapped in the deliciously tight embrace of Draco’s arms. He grunted as he slammed into the blond’s unyielding chest, but the vampire's conniving grin only broadened.

“We're both vulnerable right now. Greyback and some other unnameable force is after you, I don't feel that your werewolf is adequate protection for you,” Draco began. “Let me come with you to your ‘family gathering’ and I will let you accompany me to mine. If you swear to be silent this time. Your hot-headedness nearly got us into trouble last time.”

With a furrowed brow, Harry contemplated the offer for a moment. He was torn. He wanted to be with Draco, to make sure he could protect him, if need be. They could do anything together, if they could only harness the surging power within their bond, but he also didn't think it would be a good idea to invite Draco along to dinner at Remus's house when the man was determined to give Harry his freedom, even if it was at the cost of Draco’s sanity. His will, his emotions, through the bond of course, were the only things keeping Draco relatively human, keeping him sane. It was only him stopping Draco from being a raving beast, as most younglings were, until they learnt to harness their power, their eternal hunger.

“I could always just follow you anyway,” Harry grumbled. Long fingers caressed the small of his back and he couldn't help but tilt his head to the side a fraction when the digits on the other hand traced his collarbone and then the tendons on the scarred side of his throat softly. It was a pleasant, even comforting touch that he had grown quite used to over the last few weeks. Draco would do it quite often, without thinking most times, a habitual caress that blessed his skin with a lover's affection rather than a vampire's possessiveness.
“You could, but I can sense your presence like my own shadow, smell your scent miles away. I would bring you straight back every time you tried,” Draco said simply, with no bluff in his voice. “I think one is a fair trade for the other, and as my meeting is first, you will have to convince me of your sincerity that you will fulfil your side of the bargain.”

Harry still flushed at that statement, at the searing heat in those words and those eyes, it would be a long time coming before his embarrassment at such things faded, but the actual intimacy itself held a common place in their relationship of late. It did not daunt him as it once had and so he shifted slightly so that he was on his knees between Draco's legs. Holding that gaze with a furious blush on his cheeks, Harry's hesitant hand slid over the blond's belt. “You can come with me to dinner, but you're to be on best behaviour as well – and it won't take much to convince you.”

Long fingers slid into his hair, massaging his scalp as Draco replied heatedly, “Only you.”

* * *

No stars were visible in the dark blanket of sky above, only torrents of black, billowing clouds which rumbled with the distant sound of thunder. Harry had decided that it was a bad omen as soon as they’d apparated to the specified co-ordinates Claude Stanton had chosen. Snape had side-alonged them there, being the more magically experienced (and stable between the three of them) and it was he that took the first step towards the odious building they were now faced with.

It was an ordinary, detached structure that fit in perfectly with the ordinary muggle suburban street. Across the road a few drunken muggle teens were stumbling giddily out of the pub, despite the relatively early hour of the evening. The building they stood before was made of the same greyish bricks with a darkly painted sign across the top that read:

**BLOODY MARY**

Sophisticated, relaxing music was coming from inside, classical, Harry thought, but the softer kind as opposed to the garish, overwhelming sort Aunt Petunia had listened to of a Sunday afternoon.

“There are vampires inside,” Draco murmured darkly with a cursory sniff of the chilly night air. “A horde of them.”

“Let’s get out of here,” Harry suggested, looking warily between Snape, who stood between them and the mahogany double doors. “This is a trap.”
“You are going to stick out like a sore thumb,” Snape said to Harry then, as if he hadn’t heard Harry speak. He looked him up and down thoughtfully, his obsidian eyes lingering over the place where Harry’s thick jumper rolled up against his neck. “Take that jumper off, Potter,” he commanded.

Harry’s eyes widened. “What?” he asked, mouth agape.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Draco remarked, seeming to have guessed what Snape was up to. “You’d best do as he says, Harry, we can’t afford you attracting anymore attention than is necessary.”

“It’s bloody freezing!” Harry snapped with a mutinous glare, even as he tugged the knitted Weasley roll-neck jumper over his head and handed it over to Snape. “I want that back, it was a present.”

“Indeed,” Snape murmured dismissively, studying Harry critically again after he’d shrunk the garment and stowed it away in his robes. Harry shuddered with the cold, rubbing his bare arms. Beneath the jumper he was wearing only a short-sleeved blue chequered shirt, he’d had it for years and so now was a bit tight on him. That hadn’t mattered, of course since he’d had no intentions of removing his jumper, but the way Draco’s eyes darkened with want told him that the more form-fitted look was a good thing.

“Fold the collar down and open the top button to show as much of your neck as possible,” Draco practically hissed, his voice thick with desire. Harry’s cheeks coloured.

“This will get me more attention if anything!” Harry protested, undoing the first few buttons and adjusting his collar, “What are you trying to do? Get me a date?”

“We’re trying to keep you alive,” Snape retorted warningly, “You’re young and attractive and famous and…virginal, most importantly. Your blood is the kind they prize most and if you walk in there unclaimed you will be snatched up in seconds.”

Harry nodded slowly, he realised now why they wanted his neck on show. The one side that wasn’t adorned with his permanent bite mark was painted with purpling love bites, fresh from just this morning, when Harry had woken up to a ravenous mouth around his…

“You want it clear that Draco has already…claimed me,” Harry acknowledged, the last two words
very hard to say aloud for reasons of pride and embarrassment. As much as he had come to care for Draco, he wasn’t sure he liked the idea of being anyone’s ‘claim’ or possession.

When he met Draco’s eyes then, however, Draco’s expression was deathly serious. “If you behave yourself and play the part of subservient First, you won’t make such a target of yourself. Remember your part in all of this, stay quiet,” Draco urged him. He stared at Harry a moment, as if to assure himself that Harry would comply.

Across the road, some more drunken patrons had stumbled out onto the street and Snape turned his gaze on them. “We should get inside; we’ll only draw attention to ourselves out here. And we cannot postpone the inevitable forever.”

Harry straightened his back. He couldn’t believe this was happening, he was heading into a vampire den with his teacher and his…whatever Draco was. He wasn’t afraid as such, but he was wary and his gut was telling him that this was a very, very bad idea. Even with Snape with them, they couldn’t stand a chance against a whole bar full of vampires.

They were approaching the door now. Draco at the front and Harry walking between him and Snape. There’s nothing we can’t do, a very Draco-sounding voice reminded him in a whisper at the back of his mind and he raised his chin defiantly, stepping into the bar right behind Draco.

As soon as the door closed behind them, he paused at the dizzying sensation that rushed through him. The air he inhaled was thick with a perfumed, heady scent that was not altogether offensive, but was too potent to be good. The room was softly lit and filled with unusual patrons that were sprawled leisurely across deep burgundy loungers and perched on high stools near the bar area, which was carved from the richest mahogany and dominated one side of the large room.

Harry felt Draco move further into the unsteady atmosphere and followed close behind with Snape. All eyes were on them now.

If nothing else had given it away as they walked cautiously through the elaborately dressed room, the dozens of supernaturally glowing eyes did. Vampires, Harry realised, his gaze lingering over one of the dark-haired women that had paused over the dazed human man that lay beneath her on the loveseat she had chosen. His head was lolling stupidly to one side, a crimson trail of blood weeping from the wound in his throat that she had left. The human’s face was one of ecstasy, his hands were tugging frantically at her but her focused remained on him, Harry.

Draco tensed in front of him and seized his wrist, tugging him along faster. All of the patrons were on the edge of their seats, poised like lions ready to strike. Draco growled warningly under his
breath and Harry felt Snape hasten his steps to ensure they did not get separated.

Suddenly, someone stepped into their path. It was a tall man, easily Snape’s height and with short burnt red locks that stuck up in all directions. His eyes were the purest black, glinting ominously like a cat’s in the light as he surveyed them. “What’s your business here, youngling?” he hissed. Scanning Snape and Harry with an animalistic fervour. “You bring two humans as your escort into a place such as this?”

“They’re wizards and can easily handle themselves, and a few dozen vampires, if need be. I was invited here personally by Claude Stanton. Would you insult his guest by attacking him?”

The vampire looked thoughtful for a moment, as if deciding whether eating Harry and Snape was worth Claude’s wrath. In the end, he bowed aside, gesturing to the end of the room, where a dark archway, dressed in burgundy drapes stood, like a dark void. “Through there,” he murmured darkly.

Draco raised his head, stepping towards the doorway. The second he did, however, chaos erupted. A grunt of surprise sounded as Snape disappeared into a wall of attacking vampires and Harry snarled as a bruising force shoved him down to his knees, his head yanked roughly back by his hair until he swore his head would be ripped clean off his neck. His arms were held captive by dozens of hands, his adam’s apple quivered in his taut throat as he struggled to breathe.

Pungent breath skimmed his neck on both sides. His body tensed, his muscles burned as he struggled frantically against the prison of vampire hands and in the end, he screamed furiously when he felt the presence of fangs scraping his skin, about to sink into his flesh.

Draco’s mark throbbed menacingly. In a last ditch effort, Harry slammed his head back hard against one of the offending demons, feeling some of the hair that had been holding his head in place ripped from the roots. He heard Snape roaring from somewhere nearby, heard Draco snarling like a rabid beast and he screamed again as the hands on him tightened.

Fingers like talons gripped his jaw, held him still and he closed his eyes against the overwhelming sight of bodies piled on top of him. He couldn’t reach his wand but he could do them damage without it, he’d done wandless magic before, albeit never in a position as desperate as this before.

Just then, the bodies suffocating him flew away. Something hard collided with his chest and he slammed flat on the floor, the wind knocked out of him. Draco was standing astride him, growling menacingly and Snape was on the floor at his side, drawing his wand as he recovered himself.
Gasping for air, Harry did the same, staring around at the vampires that had formed a ragged circle around them, hissing like disturbed vipers.

“I’ll kill you,” Draco sneered. “I’ll kill you all if you take another step forward.”

Harry stumbled to his feet while Snape did the same, as soon as they turned their wands on the surrounding creatures, however, a low voice sliced through the room.

“It is a pitiable creature indeed that disobeys his master at the first sniff of a tasty titbit,” Claude Stanton purred dangerously, appearing from behind the wall of vampires and staring round at each of his followers in turn. They retreated like stung animals. “You will all be dealt with. Now return to your donors, they haven’t paid to watch you scrap like rabid dogs.”

Harry winced at that. Those people he had seen at the mercy of the vampires, they had willingly come here? They had paid for it? His stomach churned worryingly. He knew the pleasures of a vampire’s bite more than anyone, enjoyed it even, but that was only because it was part of what Draco was. He couldn’t imagine surrendering himself, putting himself under any other creature’s power, much less paying for it!

A hand rested on his shoulder then, stilling him in his thoughts. He glanced back, seeing Professor Snape watching Claude Stanton carefully, and squeezing Harry's shoulder slightly. In a reminder to keep silent, Harry thought. Although he wasn’t sure.

Stanton was standing before them now, and though Draco was still tensed, his fangs had retreated into hiding again and his stance was no longer as threatening.

“My apologies for that rudeness, it will be severely dealt with, I assure you,” Stanton promised, his eyes surveying Harry and Snape carefully. “I trust that your humans were unharmed?”

“I would appreciate it if they would remain so,” Draco said stiffly, but gestured to the door they had originally been heading for at the back of the room. “I believe you invited me here for a purpose? I would much like to continue this in private, sir.”

Claude nodded. “It pleases me that my cohorts’ blunder hasn’t disrupted your faith in me. That is honourable. Of course, come this way. Your humans, will they—?”
“They’ll be coming with me,” Draco said, politely but firmly. “This is Professor Snape, my mentor and friend. Harry, my First you have met.”

The elder vampire’s pale face broke into a fanged grin. “A pleasure. Shall we?”

Still unsteady on his feet after the attack, Harry didn’t much care for the dark stairway up to the next level. He squinted in the dimness to make sure Draco was still in sight, and he felt Snape close behind him. His fingers clenched around his wand. Every fibre of his being was fighting against this. Why were they even here? What did Draco hope to gain by risking his life at Stanton’s hands?

The room they were lead to was a great expanse of space. The floor looked and sounded like solid oak under their feet and the walls were decorated with rich green wallpaper that Harry thought looked quite Victorian. His gaze roved every inch of the room. It was quite bare, as if a great deal of the furniture had been moved specifically for their visit. When the door closed behind him, the sound echoed ominously in the practically empty space.

“The wall colours match your eyes,” came a voice from the corner. There, perched on the edge of a plush daybed was Merritt, his face pale yet bright with a smirk, his blond curls making him look quite the mischievous boy now, in the generous light of the room.

Harry just nodded, thinking it best he remain silent. If he broke his vow over something so trivial, he was bound to snap easier later on, under Claude Stanton’s inevitable taunts.

“I was hoping you’d come, it makes things so much more interesting,” Merritt continued.

That hand was back on Harry's shoulder again. Snape’s long, potion-stained fingers gripped it so tightly that he winced, but it was as a display of warning to Merritt more than anything else.

“And the professor has come with you today,” Merritt chuckled, gliding gracefully to his feet and stopping a few feet from them, cocking his handsome face to the side as he considered Snape. “I think the golden boy is taken, Professor, but I’m barely out of school myself. Or I was, a few decades ago. Perhaps I might be a suitable consolation prize?” His voice was alight with boyish teasing and in any other situation, Harry might have smiled at seeing someone tug Snape out of his depth.

“Don’t presume to flirt with me,” Snape said stoically. “I am here as Draco’s confidant, not for
matters of pleasure. Keep your attention on the matter at hand.”

“A fine suggestion,” Claude echoed, sweeping a wine glass off the side and tipping it gently so that Harry saw the thick liquid within slide past his lips. Blood, he thought, slightly nauseated. These vampires, their attitude to blood wasn’t the same as Draco’s and it disturbed him, for some reason. It made his gut clench even more when the glass was offered to Draco.

“I only drink from Harry,” Draco refused politely. “That is how a First works.”

Harry’s cheeks coloured a little at that. He wasn’t sure why, but the tone in which Draco had spoken seemed to reveal something very intimate and personal.

“Ah, yes, my mistake,” Claude apologised. “You take a healthy diet I assume? A younling has to feed often.”

Harry’s hands curled into fists, but he remained silent. Draco gave a small shrug.

“Once every few days is enough to sustain me.”

“Fascinating,” Claude hissed, glancing from between Draco to Harry with a haunting look in his eyes. “His blood must hold a potent power indeed… But I digress. There are many things, of course, that I will teach you, as your grand-sire, but some things are more important than others.” At this, his eyes lingered on Harry for a moment. “You have obviously learnt how to feed without killing your victim.”

“Harry takes a dose of Temporentia Sensium to ensure I do not let my desires run wild,” Draco explained civilly. “If I am not deeply hungered, however, I am able to control it without the potion. It is difficult, of course.”

“You’re barely into your fangs yet, of course it’s difficult,” Merritt interjected. “And he is so delicious.”

Harry took a step back at the attention, shifting his arm so that his wand was visible to Merritt’s lingering gaze. The vampire was curiously aware of him and Snape and he couldn’t figure out why. Stanton seemed to barely acknowledge their existence. As had the other vampire that he had met down by the forest, Osborne. Why was this creature different?
“I have also harnessed the use of the influence,” Draco continued, and Harry could not help but notice the look of surprise on both Claude and Merritt’s faces. *Our connection, my blood is rapidly enhancing Draco’s abilities, as we thought,* Harry realised.

“What else can you teach me?” Draco asked, almost challengingly.

“Oh, a great many things,” Claude practically cooed, and began listing but a few of the said subjects.

Meanwhile, the grip on Harry’s shoulder tightened harder than ever before and he glanced back up at Snape, seeing that dark gaze focused somewhere off into the corner. With a frown, Harry followed his line of sight to the dim corner just behind where Claude was standing. His insides jerked with horror at the sight of those haunting eyes staring back at him, and the awfully familiar, furred beast that they belonged to. There in the corner, sat one of the hounds that had attacked them before, poised, waiting, watching him as if he were a scrap of meet he was waiting for his master to toss to him.

~To Be Continued…~
What are those things? Harry wondered, pushing the thought in Draco's direction. The blond titled his head a fraction, and Harry knew that was a signal that his thoughts had been heard.

“I wasn't aware that you needed a guard,” Draco murmured, gesturing to the hound in the corner. Claude did not even glance back at what Draco was indicating.

“I was not aware that you needed one, either,” the elder vampire mused, his amber eyes flickering to Snape and Harry. “That beast is my favourite, my pet, if you will – much like your own. He watches because he thinks that your humans are my meal. He is quite partial to a few scraps from my plate.”

Harry winced in disgust. Not only because he was quite sure he was the favourite pet that the vampire had been referring to, but also because it was quite clear, any donor that came to Claude Stanton was feasted upon in the most brutal fashion, whatever Claude's calm, sophisticated mannerisms may say. He lets the wolves eat them?

“They feed on blood, or flesh? We have not heard of their like before,” Snape retorted.

“They're a secret privilege of vampires, bottom feeding guardians,” Merritt chimed in happily, flashing his dazzling hazel eyes at the potions master. “I suppose in mortal terms, you could say that they are like the fish that cling to the sharks in the sea. The hounds are the familiars of the vampires; they survive on the titbits, scraps of blood from whatever the vampire feeds on. They begin life as a hellhound and become our servants when bitten and drained to the point of death by a vampire. They have more stable, corporeal forms as they are now. In essence, we create them, they assist and guard us, and in return, we give them enough human blood to live off.”
Harry sneered. “It's disgusting that people are disturbed enough to donate themselves to you, even pay for it. What's worse is that you feed whatever is left to your mongrels, as if they're nothing more than butcher's meat,” he hissed in revulsion.

Merritt smiled, tilting his head slightly so that his luscious blond curls dusted his cheekbones flattering. “It's no secret that our bite gives unrivalled, insurmountable pleasure, little human. You yourself have felt it often enough, tell me that it doesn't make your human body explode with bliss?” the vampire challenged him. Harry struggled to wipe his face clear of his emotions.

“I can smell it on you,” Merritt pressed on, “you bathe in his scent and the scent of the pleasure he gives you. Is it so hard to believe that the lonely or hurt or affection-starved patrons would want to feel that too? It clears their mind, gives them release for a short time. What wouldn't any tortured soul pay for that?”

_I only feel that because it's Draco_, Harry thought. It made sense, but he couldn't fathom Merritt's words. It was true, Draco did give him peace and pleasure and warmth he had never even dreamed of feeling, but that wasn't because of his vampire abilities. _It's because of him_, Harry thought. It was unbearable to imagine feeling that with someone else. He was sure it would not feel the same. No matter how much he paid for it.

_It would not be the same_, a voice hissed in his mind, Draco's soft, possessive tone sweeping through him like a warm blanket being pulled over his shivering bones. _But not everyone is the same_. Some are desolate with loneliness and pain and will willingly accept, even pay a fortune for _just one beautiful lie – just a few hours of release_. You may not understand it, but that doesn't make it any less true. _The human donors benefit just as much as the vampires._

“And we hardly throw their limp body to the dogs after,” Merritt continued with a chuckle. “The donors are usually quite happy to pour some of themselves into a bowl. Or in some cases our familiars lap up the spillages. You make the feeding process sound so ugly and crass, but it is in fact so beautifully intimate.”

“Why would you want to be intimate with anyone who isn't…_yours_? With someone you have no feelings for? That's just…” Harry gritted his teeth. “Just empty and hollow and…wrong. They're using you.”

Both Merritt and Claude laughed. “Oh my, so delightfully passionate and innocent,” Claude mused, “you must have hours of entertainment, youngling. He is completely infatuated with you.”

Harry flushed with anger, but Merritt’s reply stifled any razor sharp retort that had been brewing in
“We use each other, golden boy,” Merritt answered, still smiling. “They use us to sate their needs and we use them back to sate our thirst. It is hard for one so young and so innocent to comprehend, but it is the way the world works. Not every vampire has a luscious young, vestal virgin donor hopelessly in love with them. We cannot all starve because of it.”

Harry’s mouth opened to protest, but Snape stiffened at his side and his words died on his tongue. Belatedly, he remembered his promise to be silent.

“It intrigues me that your abilities have grown so greatly in just a few weeks,” Claude said then, swirling the stemmed glass in his hand before taking another sip of the bloody beverage within. “And you seem to have developed all of the usual powers. Have you developed a tolerance to the sun yet?”

Evidently sensing the answer without Draco saying a word, Claude continued, his face breaking into a smile. “It does not happen until many decades later, until the vampire is much, much older in normal circumstances. Even Merritt here, one of my children of twenty years cannot withstand more than a few moments of sunlight. I had to ask, however, since you are so advanced in everything else.”

Harry wondered if that meant that Claude himself was able to go out into the sunlight. The man was wealthy and successful in the wizarding world, perhaps that was because he was able to venture out where a lot of his fellow creatures were not?

“The theory is that after absorbing the magic and blood of wizards for enough generations, some of their magic is instilled within our bodies,” Merritt elaborated. “That is why aristocratic vampires will only feed from magical donors. Over a great many years, their magic will unwittingly build a protection in our skin, allowing us into sunlight for a short time.”

“Indeed,” Claude continued, “I would not recommend a burning hot summer’s day, but our fortunate English weather does permit us near enough boundless freedom in the daylight. It took me nearly a century of drinking only from the most pure of wizards to build up the tolerance. I am curious as to your position there.”

Without any further warning, Claude crossed the room with vampire speed, seizing black velvet drape from where it was lying across a sphere-like shape that had gone unnoticed before. The sheet flew back under his hand and a blinding light sliced through the gloom. A scream pierced the air and Harry felt movement around him. He squinted through the light, seeing that it was radiating...
from a large globe-like sphere sitting in a wooden stand. Claude was standing behind it as still as stone.

Where was Draco?

“Enough!” Came Snape’s harsh, rasping voice from the side and when Harry found him amongst the blinding light, he saw that the man was on the floor, his arms around a black bundle – his own cloak, thrown over a quivering, screaming body.

“Draco?!” Harry cried out, but before he could take so much as a step towards the body under Snape’s cloak, the light vanished – as quickly as it had come. With coloured dots dancing behind Harry's eyes, he watched as Claude arranged the black velvet material carefully over the globe again. As if he hadn’t just risked the lives of two of the people in the room.

Without so much as a second glance at the hateful creature, Harry flew to Snape’s side, wrenching the potions master’s cloak from the body on the floor. His eyes widened when he spied blood-soaked blond curls amidst the slowly healing, seared flesh. Snape had taken pity on the screaming creature and Harry, having heard the blood-curdling sounds he’d made, could not blame him. No one deserved to die that way.

Flying back to his feet, Harry rounded on Claude but at this slightly different angle, it was then that he saw him. Draco was on the far side of the room, his face and throat were burnt and blistered. It looked as if he had been doused with scalding water and sunburnt in the same instant. His skin was rippling as it slowly healed. Grey eyes were wide with shock, the shock of surviving such an onslaught from a sunlight imbued object that seemed to have rendered Snape’s sunlight potion useless somehow. The same shock that made Harry launch himself at Claude.

“Silforgium!” he screamed. A missile of pure silver bolted from his wand tip and shot through the air. Claude side-stepped it easily.

“Harry, no!” Draco roared, his voice cracked, but one of Harry's hands had already seized the elder vampire’s collar, his wand stabbing the vampire in the throat.

“What if it had killed him?” Harry hissed in a low, serpentine snarl. “You couldn’t know for sure that it wouldn’t. I don’t know what your game is, but your interest is not enough reason to kill someone. If you hurt him, if you do such a thing to him again…” Harry’s voice trailed off for a second and he pressed into the vampire’s iron-hard skin until it felt like his wand was about to snap. “I should just kill you now, since Draco is blinded by his aspirations and will probably think you useful.”
Suddenly, Claude’s hand shot out, seizing Harry's wand hand and twisting it so that the throbbing blue veins on his wrist were perilously close to the vampire’s exposed fangs. Rich amber eyes flickered up to meet Harry’s as a grin twisted those lips.

“You are an amusing specimen, pet,” Claude purred. Harry sneered, tugging at his arm, but he could not break free. “Your passion for your vampire burns brighter than the sun. It’s very intriguing indeed.”

With a roar of fury, Harry sent a non-verbal Incendio bursting through his wand, singeing the vampire’s cheek and making him drop his hand on instinct. Harry staggered back, rubbing his abused wrist where he felt a bruise forming. “We are not some science experiment for you to study. You swore a wizard’s oath that no harm would befall Draco—”

“And no harm has,” Draco murmured from behind him, causing Harry to turn on his heel. Draco stood right before him now, his face tinged with pink where it had recently healed but with no other damage on display. “I hadn’t thought to check my tolerance to the sun as I had not read anywhere that I would accumulate one over the years,” Draco said to Claude, even as he kept his eyes fixed on Harry. “How is it that I seem to have the same amount of tolerance as your companion over there, who is a good many years older than I?”

Harry glanced then to where Merritt was straightening at Snape’s side, his face also tinged with a raw pinkish glow. Snape stepped away from the vampire with unhidden distaste, wrapping his travelling cloak back around himself.

“I am but twenty years your senior, Malfoy,” Merritt said indignantly, “though my body is the same age as yours, give or take a few months.”

“It is to do with the magic coursing through the blood of your First, and also the intensity of the bond you share,” Claude explained, ignoring Merritt’s self-involved comment as if it had never been voiced. Merritt seemed to be a decoration at best to Claude, Harry noted and he wondered what virtues the younger vampire had that permitted him so close to Claude’s side. The beast seemed concerned solely with how those surrounding him could best benefit him, after all.

“That blast was the equivalent of perhaps two days in constant, unveiled sunlight in potency,” Claude added. It was the magic of the object that had allowed the light to harm Draco despite the potion then, Harry surmised. Perhaps the potion only worked to guard against natural sunlight?
Harry saw Draco catch Snape’s eye. If this were true, in a year’s time, maybe a bit more, he would be able to go about his business under the sun without need of Snape’s potion, providing he was careful. *And that he always has a pitcher of me handy*, Harry's mind supplied.

“What else can you tell me?” Draco asked, sounding far too eager for Harry's liking. “What other lessons can you teach me? You are aware of my thirst for success, what else can you teach me to aid in that goal?”

Claude tilted his head, still wearing an expression imbued with amusement. “I would make my main lesson in controlling your instincts, but you and your First have control of that better than most vampires twice your undead age. You say you have absolutely no taste nor desire for another’s blood?”

Harry saw Draco’s eyes narrow.

“Not even if there was a tide of blood in front of me,” Draco assured him. “Harry's is the only blood that affects me. But then you know that.”

Claude slid regally into a high-backed Victorian chair nearby, folding his fingers together as he surveyed them. “I do indeed, but then, a union such as yours has not been made in an age, and even then, it was never with a First of yours’…potency and purity.”

Harry raised his chin, glaring at the elder vampire hatefully. What was the creature’s game?

“He is so tempestuous, it makes me wonder how well you can control him – he is privy to a great many of our secrets, after all,” Claude added.

Draco's eyes flashed and he edged towards Harry a little more, his fingers wrapping subtly around his wrist. “He is headstrong and hot-headed but he is unfalteringly loyal to me, as you've seen tonight,” Draco assured him. “Surely you do not require any further evidence?”

“He is powerful, more powerful than any other human privy to our secrets,” Claude replied coolly, his amber eyes wandering over Harry again, that same intrigued glimmer flashing within. “I would like not evidence of his loyalty, but of your control,” he murmured dangerously. “So far, it appears that you are under your First's fickle thumb. You cannot even bid him to quiet. Our coven requires proof that he is within your power.”
Movement at his side caused Harry to glance to his right, seeing Snape taking his place beside him, his face set with suspicion. “And how do you propose such a thing can be proven?” Snape asked.

Claude's pale fingers reached out, plucking up his glass again so that he could take another sip of blood as he surveyed them. “I wish to see you taste him.”

Harry's body flinched. The hand around his wrist tightened slightly.

“After what happened downstairs?” Draco challenged. “After the stunt just now?” He seemed to realise that his emotions were overcoming him then, for he swallowed, taking a moment to gather himself. “Forgive me, sir, but I am still very human and am plagued by the need for privacy during such an act–”

“He doesn't want the bite right now,” Claude cut across him with a careless gesture to Harry. “That is why I asked for it in particular as a display of your power. Do not drink deep if you are concerned with waste but do not believe that you have a choice here either. As this coven's leader, it is my responsibility to ensure its secrets are safe-guarded. If you cannot control your First, then we are not safe.”

Harry could understand that, he supposed. It didn't make him anymore amiable to Draco biting him in front of anyone, however. It was humiliating enough when Snape had had to watch the first time. That and he wasn’t entirely confident in Claude’s motives.

Draco turned to him suddenly, his eyes burning as he stared deep into Harry's own. *Give me permission,* Draco insisted, the voice of his thoughts sounding quite desperate in Harry's head. The chosen one realised quickly what he meant. It was almost as abhorrent to him as becoming aroused under Draco's bite with an audience but it was the lesser of two evils, he decided. And he trusted Draco not to abuse the power Harry was about to allow him.

*It will be stronger this time, I am stronger, thanks to you,* Draco warned him. Harry gave the slightest of nods that only Draco could see, and kept his ground when his vampire slid close to him. He inhaled sharply when their chests touched, gazing unflinchingly into those silvery eyes.

“Look into my eyes,” Draco breathed in a hypnotising, husky voice. “You can feel my will coursing through you, can't you?”
Harry breathed out shakily, trying to convince himself not to panic inside himself as Draco's thrall swept through him, seizing his own willpower with two firm yet gentle hands. He could feel Draco's cool affection and his concern. He didn't want to do this and he wouldn't hurt him. Harry fazed out, just letting the vampire's influence take control and trying to distance himself from it as much as possible. He was terrified of what Draco might make him do to prove his control. “Yes, Draco,” he exhaled dazedly.

Those long, pale fingers that brought him such pleasure reached out and wrapped carefully around the wrist that Claude Stanton had abused, bringing it up to his mouth so that his now exposed fangs could graze the rapidly purpling flesh. It ached and Harry twitched under the attentions. “You don't want me to do this, you're embarrassed aren't you?”

Torn between arousal at Draco's voice and horror at his humiliation, Harry whispered, “Yes, Draco.” Those lips were caressing his bruised skin now, healing the throbbing pain with a flickering stroke from his tongue.

“Yet despite this, you'll do anything I desire, won't you?” Draco asked.

“Yes, Draco.”

“Get on your knees.” With his pride screaming in his ears, Harry dropped slowly to his knees, his wrist still locked in Draco's grasp even though it was now healed. He kept the vampire's gaze, unable to look away as he positioned himself at Draco's feet. It was disconcerting to say the least, feeling his body move without his instruction, but he focused on Draco's voice, trusting that husky drawl with everything he had. This was Draco's chance to prove himself. He had Harry completely under his power and what he did with that power right now would dictate the rest of their lives.

Harry's adam's apple quivered, he was level with Draco's crotch and it put ideas into his head as to what Draco might do. He only hoped it was nothing sexual, but he wasn't sure what else would satisfy Claude's need for proof. He seemed the perverted sort.

“Tell me…what is it that you want most in the world?” Draco asked, apparently choosing the kindest of tortures to drag out of him – a personal admittance. Even then, as his lips parted with his dazed answer, Harry knew that Draco could not have known what his answer would be; the shocked look was far too genuine to be feigned.

“The happiness of my loved ones, my happiness – you.” The final word was a shuddering gasp as he tried in vain to cling to the word, not wanting it to leave his lips. Draco’s eyes widened and he dropped Harry’s wrist, some odd, uncertain emotion glistening in his gaze.
“And when my fangs break your skin,” Draco murmured, his voice cracking slightly. “What is it that you want most then?”

An echo of the very pleasure that seized his body when Draco bit him was now burning in his groin and Harry felt arousal trickle through his veins. The other two vampires in the room must have felt it, for they both emitted deep, raspy sounds, just as he tipped his head back as far as it could go and declared to Draco, “Fuck me.”

Just like that, Draco blinked and the influence Harry felt controlling his body faded. His limbs slumped uselessly, his body heading for the floor until two strong arms tugged him swiftly to his feet. He felt the cool comfort of Draco’s chest against his for but a moment, before the vampire stepped back, holding him at arm’s length, not looking at him.

“There is your proof. I can command his mind and body if it comes to it, I simply prefer not to without just cause,” Draco said stoically. “Now, tell me, the other things you say you can teach me, what are they? Why am I here, other than to give you opportunity to probe at me and my First like lab rats?” There was no force, no emotion or anger behind Draco’s words, he hid his feelings well, even if his words were more blunt than before. His encounter with Harry's helplessness seemed to have rankled him even more than it had Harry.

“I have ascertained that our secrets will be safe with your First,” Claude said in his usual, disinterested tone. “You and your First must have some trouble controlling the surmountable, ever-growing powers between you. We would of course, be thrilled to assist you in learning to wield it accurately, whilst you yourself can use your connection to me as a weapon to battle your way to the top of any office you desire.”

Draco remained motionless, and Harry watched him, knowing what a tempting offer that would be, despite the dangers. Power and position, both were things his vampire longed to have, even Harry had to admit the aspect of learning to control his magic even quicker, so that he would not always have to rely on the spell was attractive, even if the rest of it wasn't. Tonight had shown what lengths Claude Stanton was a prepared to go to in order to please himself, however, and Harry was sure that his and Draco's joint powers were something he had every intention of abusing while he 'helped' them to control it.

*He wants Draco and our joint power under his roof, as his weapon,* Harry thought, seeing the wicked cogs turning behind those fiery amber eyes. Wondering just what the potions master thought of all this, Harry glanced to the side, only to see Snape staring fixedly at Merritt, while the blond vampire stared back. It was as if some silent conversation were happening between them. Just as Harry realised that there must be exactly that, however, the blond snapped out of his trance-like state, turning to his master, who hadn't seemed to notice the exchange.
“I will check below, my Lord, make sure that all is well,” Merritt said brusquely, and with a nod from Claude, he crossed the room and shut the door behind him on his way out. Draco's arm slid subtly around Harry's waist.

“You must expect payment for your assistance?” Draco asked with an air of politeness. “Such gifts are too generous to be free of charge.”

Claude's wicked grin widened. “I am sure that you would do me a favour or two in the future, should the situation ever arise,” he replied, “in the mean time, entertaining you and your First will be reward enough for me. After a few centuries the world does grow… tiresome. One needs something to spice things up a bit.”

_We're not pawns for your amusement_, Harry sneered, forcing himself to remain still otherwise.

“I would like for you to return here before the festive season starts to begin the training of your magic – and to introduce you to a few of my business colleagues,” Claude continued, picking up an odd, slender crystal instrument from the table beside his chair and gliding towards them. The clear crystal glowed ominously in the light and Harry felt Draco's arm tense on his waist when the elder vampire stopped before him.

“Your blood is of my own, my subordinates will sense this without pause, but your First,” he cast a furtive glance into Harry's wary eyes. “He is a stranger to them. To ensure his safety when you return here, I would have a drop of his blood for a protection charm for him. We do this for all of the pets of the coven, to ensure they are known as one of us.”

The vampire held his hand out now, his long fingers exposing the peculiar object for what it was. It looked like a crystal vial with a hinged matching lid, on the inside of the stopper, however, extended a sharp needle-like point. There was no question as to what it was for.

As if sensing their hesitation, Claude added, “I believe next time it might be prudent to discuss tactics to capture our mutual problem, Caius Alaric as well. You are what he wants. We can come to some arrangement as to a trap that we could set for him quite quickly, I imagine, and make you and your First safe once again.”

At this, Draco glanced at Harry offering him the slightest of nods. There was something in his eyes, a secretiveness that told Harry not everything was as it seemed, that Draco and maybe even Snape were plotting something here. Draco was insanely possessive over him, all of him, including
his blood, he would not ask this of him if it wasn't necessary.

Ignoring his gut feeling, not for the first time that night, Harry raised his thumb and scraped it across the needlepoint. A thick globule of blood ran down into the crystal vial, giving it a beautiful crimson sheen. When Harry retracted his finger, however, it was ensnared swiftly by Draco's grasp and brought to the vampire's mouth where that devious tongue made love to the wound until the throbbing pain and flow of blood had both vanished.

Would he ever need a healing spell again?

“Excellent,” chimed Claude's voice, snapping the vial shut securely as Draco released Harry's hand. “The 19th of December, I think, same time? I will of course, remind my companions downstairs to greet you a little better this time.”

“That would be much appreciated,” Draco replied politely, steering Harry towards the door, Severus close at their side. “We have a second engagement now; I hope that you wouldn't think it rude if we were to take our leave?” The door was already open under Snape's hand before Claude had even answered. The vampire was following them to the door, his hound following their every step as he shadowed his master.

“Of course, you cannot apparate within our building but if you take a few steps outside you should be able to. Security measures, you understand,” Claude explained.

“Naturally. I would expect no less, Good night, Sir,” Draco said with a small bow, before pressing his palm into the small of Harry's back and urging him down the stairs the way they had come. When they were out of sight of the elder vampire, Harry could not help but notice that their steps had hastened. Snape was just ahead, his wand drawn and Draco was urgently pushing him forwards.

“What's going on?” Harry asked them warily. He opened his mouth to insist on an answer when they remained silent, but Snape cut across him.

“Not now, Potter, we haven’t much time. Hurry.”

They were in the main room again, though it seemed suspiciously emptier than before. The humans were gone, as far as he could tell, and the vampires were now spread across their settees with revoltingly satisfied looks on their faces, which were mostly strewn with blood.
“They haven’t killed them all?” Harry asked desperately in Draco’s ear as they moved swiftly towards the door.

“You’ll see,” Draco replied vaguely, pulling the front door open roughly. It was then, in the next few seconds that followed that countless sounds and sensations registered in Harry’s mind – all in slow motion.

“Now!” Snape screamed at the top of his lungs, flying through the door. The sweep of his robes was all that Harry saw in the dimness before Draco’s weight slammed into his back, sending them soaring. They crashed into the hard, unforgiving concrete ground, just as a deafening explosion tore through the air. The ground shook. The world roared with overwhelming heat and light.

It was still trembling and burning with a fierce orange glow when he struggled to his feet, Draco’s hand steadying him when he swayed a little. “Are you hurt?” the vampire murmured, his fingers sweeping over Harry’s forehead, which was throbbing slightly. Harry winced. Draco’s fingers came away red.

“I’m fine, it’s just a little scrape,” Harry insisted, raising his wand to the wound. He should’ve known better by now, he supposed. Before he could even utter a syllable, Draco’s mouth was gracing his forehead with a swift, healing kiss. It was an odd touch though, as if Draco’s mind was not truly with him in that moment. *Something’s wrong,* Harry thought, and not just because of the inferno he now spied burning behind them – where the *Bloody Mary* had been moments before.

It was a fitting end to the vile place, he supposed, particularly on this day of all days. November Fifth.

“Why did you give me opportunity to save myself?” Came a voice off to the side and when Harry turned, he saw a ruffled, very stern looking Merritt standing there, watching him, Draco and Snape with suspicious, bright hazel orbs that reflected the blazing inferno surreally. There were people behind him, a handful of vampires and humans that were watching Merritt as if he was the deciding factor of their next move.

“You displayed a touch more humanity than the others, Draco told me this, and I had to agree,” Snape replied coolly, “And I have seen enough unnecessary bloodshed in my life to not wish anymore upon the innocent, if there were humans and good-intentioned vampires in that coven, we wanted them out.”

Merritt raised a brow. “That’s why you threw yourself at me, saved me from the magical sunlight? I’m hurt. It wasn’t simply to whisper sweet nothings in my ear, then?”
Harry realised then that this was why Snape had saved Merritt so dramatically. *He wanted to get close to Merritt to warn him that he and the ‘innocents’ should get out. And that’s why they were staring at each other afterwards.* He had thought it peculiar that Snape had continued to hold the creature for longer than needed after the feigned sunlight had faded.

Snape’s face contorted with irritation. “Insolent whelp. I hardly call advising you to get the guiltless to safety a kind of endearment. What I wish to know is why you acted without a second thought – he was your master, Claude, was he not?”

Merritt frowned. “He was my sire; I have been his favourite since Vesper fell out of his favour by falling for that vampire hunter, but… Claude Stanton is a cruel, manipulative creature whose human emotions grow more distant with every year that passes. He is older than most vampire aristocrats, he sees himself as superior to everyone and everything…”

“We had noticed,” Harry grumbled, wincing as agonised screams filled the air. The vampires left within the pub were shrieking as they met their gruesome, painful end. He understood the reason for it being done this way, but he didn’t think he could ever justify causing such suffering to another creature. *Even if they do take advantage of those poor lost people, just looking for a moment of peace,* he thought, staring at the inferno as it clawed at the pitch black heavens.

Smoke permeated the air, the heat of the flames licked at his body in the cold night and yet he shivered at the haunting sounds of their demise.

“The way that we live now, feeding only when he permits us to, leaving to venture into the real world only when he allows it,” Merritt continued with a shake of his head, “Years I’ve tried to convince myself he was right, out of fear of striking out on my own, but it’s finally come to this.”

“Do not pretend you don’t relish having blood easily within your reach,” Snape retorted scathingly. “It may have been at his discretion but you lived well, did you not?”

Merritt’s unnaturally bright eyes shone in the orange light of the smouldering inferno. “There isn’t much beauty in eternal youth, eternal life if there is no one to share it with,” the vampire answered, looking pointedly at Harry and Draco. “My un-life is a meaningless existence. It is just that, *existing,* not living. The only chance I have of finding better is by being free. I am indebted to you for helping me attain that freedom.” He bowed his head slightly in thanks, just as muggle sirens filled the air. Blue lights were flashing from only a few streets away.
“We must go before the muggles come, they will find nothing here by the time they reach it, do not worry,” Merritt said to them, focusing solely on Draco now. “I do not know if this will help you, but Caius Alaric was…he was a passionate man, Mr Malfoy. He is so driven with grief because he loved Lucan Vesper with every beat of his mortal heart. Take advantage of that if you can.”

Draco gave a curt, thankful nod, gazing at the roaring fire thoughtfully.

“The bulk of the coven has been vanquished with your fire, there may be an enquiry at the Ministry, but no one will be able to track it back to you,” Merritt said, seeming to understand the concern permeating the air from both Harry and Draco. “They will most likely assume it the work of some rogue anti-vampire enthusiasts. All I pray is that my master perished in the flames as effectively as the others.”

Harry frowned. “Why wouldn’t he?” he asked. “I know the feeling of those flames – they were made from the cinders of fiendfyre. Nothing can survive that.” He may not know much about vampire etiquette, but he bloody knew a thing or two about dark magic.

Merritt fixed him with his warm, hazel gaze. “He was a very ancient evil, Mr Potter, his body pounds with the blood and magic of decades worth of potent magical blood. The finest. However, I can only hope you are right…”

Beside him, Draco raised his chin with a snort. “The screams have died, there is nothing in there but ash,” the blond insisted, “And even if there is, they know exactly what they’re dealing with now. Not a skittish youngling and his pet human. We’re a force to be reckoned with, and the next person to learn it will be Caius Alaric.” His words were spoken with such conviction, such strength that Harry could not help but stare at his lover in awe. The vampire had such confidence in him, in them. Despite the darkness they had touched on tonight…

The sirens wailed deafeningly now and it was Snape that spoke next.

“We must go,” he urged Draco and Harry, taking hold of both of their forearms.

“We will meet again, Mr Malfoy, Mr Potter…Professor,” Merritt whispered the latter with a flicker of a smile before he vanished into the night after his rescued comrades and the humans. A sharp jerk in Harry's gut was then his only warning, before Snape's magic made their world spin into a torrent of light and kaleidoscopic colour and they disapparated.
It was a cold autumn indeed, a stark contrast to the raging inferno earlier, the grass crunched noisily underfoot as they made their way around the lane, with the *Lumos* glowing at the end of theirs wands the only light thanks to the vacant sky above. The air was oddly calm and quiet compared to the chaos of earlier that evening and Harry found himself tensed, apprehensive as if expecting another attack. He shivered as Draco walked alongside him in the dark, his cool hand brushing against the back of his every now and then in a comforting gesture.

“You've been quiet since we returned from the *Bloody Mary,*” Draco said softly, the subtle vibrations of his words slicing through the silence. There was an edge of uncertainty in his voice, of apprehension and Harry wondered if he was going to find out why the vampire hadn't met his eyes since the 'display' in the vampire dwelling. “I…I hope that you know I tried to choose the least…humiliating proof for Claude that I could,” Draco paused, glancing over to him as if to gauge his reaction. “I took no pleasure in controlling you.”

Harry sighed, his breath coming out in a light mist on the chilly air. “I gave you permission to do it. I'm not happy about it by any means but that displeasure isn't directed at you. You did what you had to in order to get us out of there. I know that you will never use your influence on me again, that's not what has me so quiet.”

Lifting his head as he walked, Harry stared up at the little specks of light just ahead, soft glows from the windows of the house just up the lane. This wasn't the time to be getting melancholy about the coven they had just all-but vanquished. They came to a large, wooden country gate and Harry laid his hand on the metal latch, about to lift it up so that the gate could swing open, but Draco's long fingers settled over his, stilling his movements.

“Harry,” Draco said softly, summoning his gaze up to meet with his own, silvery orbs. “Those creatures happily took advantage of lost, lonely people. They took their blood and money – they would have drained you dry. I could smell the sin on them, the lives they have squandered and *enjoyed* taking. Do not feel any sadness for their demise. It is unwarranted.”

Harry gave a small, weak smile, looking down at where Draco's fingers were caressing his own with the slightest of movements. “I just can't justify taking another creature's life. I don't think I'll ever be able to.”

At that, Draco moved towards him, as if he were being pulled by an invisible force, like the tide to the moon. His body pressed flush to Harry's and while one hand continued to pin Harry’s to the gate, the other cool palm caressed the scarred side of his throat, before dancing across his skin to tilt his jaw up a fraction.
The next thing Harry knew, those lips were covering his own, massaging him with a firm yet tender passion that made his blood bubble softly and coerce a sound of exhausted bliss from his mouth. He melted forwards, his own free hand reaching up to grasp the back of Draco's neck and hold him to the kiss for longer. He groaned, diving in to taste the wet muscle of Draco's inquisitive tongue and feeling his head spin as if it were being starved of oxygen.

It was terrifying, that he had grown so attached to someone, was so hungry for another person. That someone had torn their way through the fierce barriers he had erected around himself. He was falling and deeply, but if anything had been proven by tonight, it was Draco's sincerity, his feelings. He wouldn't fail to catch him, no matter what the cost. If he broke apart into a thousand pieces as it felt he might, there would be someone who cared about him more than anything else to piece him back together. Tonight had been more of a test to Draco, to their relationship than anything to do with Claude, and the vampire had passed that test.

Suddenly, their kiss broke with a thin trail of saliva and a guttural moan from both of them and Harry stared into those stunning, darkened eyes, seeing two kinds of hunger there. The healing must've taken a lot out of him after that sun spell, Harry thought dazedly, finding it odd that he no longer minded the lines of the bite and their relationship crossing anymore. It was like any other normal couple incorporating food into their bedroom play, he supposed, having had an experience only last week where Draco introduced this point to him with a bowl of strawberries and cream. He flushed darkly at the memory, but that did not stop him from knowing his thoughts were the truth.

Whatever anyone else thought or said, Draco needed his blood to survive and if the feeding gave them both pleasure, why should they not indulge in that? They weren't hurting anyone, not even he, Harry was truly harmed by it thanks to the blood restorative and Temporentia Sensium that both safe-guarded him. They only had themselves to please.

“You should feed later,” Harry breathed huskily, his eyes lingering over Draco's lips as he tried to convince himself not to ravage the blond against the fence. He was sure Remus wouldn't appreciate their lateness or the scent of their orgasms in the garden.

“I can wait–” Draco began, but Harry cut him off by pushing the gate open and casting him a furtive glance.

“I want you to,” he clarified for him brazenly, before leading the way up the garden path and toward the house. Draco was hot on his heels.

“Look, Harry,” the vampire said as they approached the house. “I know that this isn’t the best time to discuss this, but you’re trying to push away a very important fact in your life and until you accept
Harry stopped on the crisp white wooden porch. It was sheltered by the grey tiled roof that projected out across it, framed at the edge by a few strategically placed matching wooden supports. Draco leant against one, staring at him with crossed arms as he surveyed Harry. The hand that Harry had set on the white-wash door fell away as he turned to set a frown on his lover.

“What are you talking about?”

Draco studied him levelly. “You cannot accept that you killed Voldemort, you dance around the subject, blame the spell instead of your own hand. Harry, whether it was wrong or right is redundant, you need to accept that you killed him, that the people that died in the war didn’t die because of you. It’s quite the contrary, you saved everyone’s lives by taking his—”

“Stop it!” Harry hissed, glaring sharply at him. “I… I don’t know what you’re talking about. Where the bloody hell did this all sprout from?”

Approaching him now, Draco laid a hand on the man’s shoulder, sighing heavily when the touched was shrugged off. “I’ve been pondering it for a while now, but I didn’t realise how much it was affecting you until I saw your face when you saw the Bloody Mary burning.” He paused, staring thoughtfully into Harry’s eyes before adding, “You need to accept responsibility for the one death you actually caused and come to terms with the fact that not every other death around you is your burden to carry.”

Harry recoiled from him until his back was pressed against the front door. “I can’t help that I… I mourn death of all kinds, no matter who it is. That’s just who I am, Draco—”

“It is not that which concerns me,” Draco pressed on, “it is the fact that your inability to accept that you took a life, truly ended Voldemort. It makes you unconsciously seek the blame in other parts of your life. I saw your face when you heard their screams, despite the fact that they’d near enough ripped your throat out less than an hour before.” He set his hands on Harry’s shoulders, squeezing them so that Harry could not shrug him off or escape this time. “I won’t let you destroy yourself over killing Voldemort, not when you’re finally starting to open up to me.”

Harry bowed his head slightly, staring down at his feet so that he could avoid those searching eyes. “I didn’t kill him,” he insisted quietly, but his voice lacked the conviction he had hoped for. “I can’t talk about this…”
Those hands squeezed his shoulders a little tighter. “Not now, but when you’re ready,” Draco murmured, and stepped back suddenly, just as the front door opened.

A woman with violet, pixie-cut hair stood in the doorway, her eyes a warm hazel, even as they widened in surprise. And there in her arms, was a (currently) yellow-eyed, blue-haired tot. Teddy sucked thoughtfully on his dummy for a moment, before reaching out for Harry, his hair fading instantly to a dark hue to match his own, his large eyes bleeding into green.

“He’s a—” Draco gasped, dumbfounded.

“Metamorphmagus like me,” Tonks finished with a smile, “and you’re my aunt Narcissa’s boy, aren’t you? Blimey, if you don’t look like your mum.”

Draco’s mouth, that had been hanging open in shock at Teddy’s sudden transformation, snapped back shut and he averted his gaze from Tonks’s awkwardly. It must have been strange, meeting a cousin for the first time at his age, especially when his mother had helped to cast Tonks’s out of their family decades before…

“Sorry, yes, I suppose I’m your cousin,” Draco said sheepishly, holding his hand out with a surprising lack of hesitation. “Draco Malfoy.”

Harry watched the exchange curiously, never having really known just what Tonks thought of her wizarding relations. Thankfully, the woman shifted Teddy higher on her hip with a grin and shook Draco’s hand. “Just call me Tonks, although I suppose I’d be Nymphadora Lupin now, officially.” She bounced Teddy on her hip, the infant still reaching for Harry as she said, “And this is Teddy, who as you can see, loves his Harry.”

Harry tried to keep the discomfort off his face as Tonks pushed Teddy into his arms. He did love the boy, but he felt awkward at best, being around something so young and fragile and…innocent. Perhaps it was because, aside from when he was that young himself, he’d never been in contact with children, but he felt distinctly nervous around him, especially since he was so eager to follow him around.

Just as he was reminding himself that he hadn’t had much time to settle into ‘family life’ yet, and that the unease would probably fade with time, Harry swore he heard Draco mutter, “We have that in common then.” Before Harry even had time to glance back at the vampire, however, Tonks began ushering them inside, making no effort to retrieve Teddy from Harry as she did so.
Harry tightened his grasp around the tot, following Tonks through the cosy warm hall into the kitchen-diner, Draco close at his side and looking at him peculiarly. He looked odd with a baby in his arms, he supposed. He felt odd with a baby in his arms, but that wasn’t his main reason for feeling skittish around the child and family who adored him.

Maybe it was because of Draco’s presence, because or what the vampire had proved earlier, or the concern, the support he had displayed a few seconds before the door had opened, but he felt slightly more optimistic being back here again. It wasn’t as difficult to relax in the homely environment as he had pictured it to be. He was settling in, he supposed, still adjusting to living with a normal family – being included in that family.

Yes, definitely more optimistic, he even smiled slightly as he saw Teddy fiddling with his shirt buttons – awestruck. He was silently grateful he had changed his shirt back at Hogwarts after the ‘visit’ to the Bloody Mary before coming here. He mentally cringed at the thought of Teddy being even that close to such darkness.

*Maybe that’s why I find it hard to relax around him,* Harry thought on entering the kitchen-diner. *Maybe I’m so protective of him that I want to keep him at arm’s length along with everyone else, just in case he gets dragged into the chaos that always surrounds me.* A glance to Draco beside him reminded him that that was changing. Slowly but surely, he was letting people back in, letting them close to him again. If that was possible, maybe a meal with his ‘family’ and Draco could also possibly not end in disaster. There was always hope.

The kitchen had honey-coloured wood floor with matching units and cupboards, it was the perfect image of the ‘ideal’ country kitchen he’d often seen on the front of Aunt Petunia’s lifestyle magazines. The table cloth and curtains were matching checked white and blue – a gift from Andromeda when they’d first moved into the house at the start of the summer. And Harry, despite his feeling out of place in such a loving family environment, couldn’t help but feel the warmth radiating from the room.

It was the heart of the building. However difficult waking up over the summer had been, breakfast in this room had always been bathed in light and the kind of comfort he had only ever felt at The Burrow.

*And with Draco,* his mind supplied quietly.

“Da!” Teddy squeaked excitedly on spying Remus on the far side of the room, at the same time Harry did. The werewolf was fetching plates out of the cupboard above the Belfast sink. It was now November, meaning the tyke was around eight months old now, by Harry's memory, and still talking in gobbledygook, it seemed. He smiled brightly at Remus, feeling slightly guilty about the way he had been avoiding the werewolf the last few weeks.
“Wotcher, Remus,” he chimed in typical Tonks style, sliding a reluctant Teddy into his highchair. The werewolf returned his smile, before wrinkling his nose, his expression dropping as he noticed Draco at Harry's side. Before he could say a word, however, Tonks had taken the plates from his hand and seemed to make a point of setting an extra place for Draco at Harry's side.

“How is your mum fairing?” Tonks asked jovially, beginning to dish out what Harry recognised as Remus’s home-made toad in the hole. His stomach rumbled loudly at the smell of it. He hadn’t expected to miss home cooking either…

“I…I haven’t heard from her much recently, she and father live a fairly quiet life now though,” Draco said tactfully, evidently pretending he hadn’t heard Harry's rambunctious stomach.

Tonks’s bright expression fell as she seemed to realise the hidden meaning behind those words and she poured an extra helping of gravy onto Draco’s portion, gesturing for him to take a seat beside the one Harry had taken up. “Well, the entire wizarding world are eager to see you two together, so I consider myself lucky that Harry invited you round to introduce us properly before the ruddy Prophet announced your wedding day.”

Harry hurriedly poured himself a glass of milk from the pitcher on the table in order to hide his embarrassment. The Daily Prophet’s stories about him and Draco had not stopped by any means, they had, however turned to the sort of everyday celebrity gossip, where their ‘first date’ would be, and most recently, when they’d tie the knot. His gut felt tight at the thought. That didn’t even bare thinking about right now.

“Sod off, Tonks,” he murmured good-heartedly grateful that she at least seemed quite happy to accept Draco’s presence, even if Remus was still sceptical of him.

“Good to have you home, Harry,” Tonks laughed, looking to Draco next. “Would you like something to drink, Draco? Harry likes milk with his dinner but maybe you’d prefer…” She stopped dead then, seeming to realise what she was saying. “Oh, bugger, sorry Draco, I’m not really… Do you drink? Besides umm…Harry, I mean?”

Harry almost choked on his mouthful of milk. He supposed he should have suspected that Remus would tell Tonks – there were no secrets in their marriage. Subtly, he reached under the table to squeeze Draco’s hand reassuringly, he knew that neither would betray his secret, he hoped Draco knew that too.
“I’m…surprised you say that so casually but yes, I can drink and savour food, it is simply that it doesn’t give me sustenance,” Draco explained, not seeming to know what to make of Tonks. She wasn’t like everyone else.

Tonks smiled, seating herself between Remus and Teddy, who was making an admirable mess of his bowl of baby food. “I don’t know much about vampires, but I remember how difficult it was to make people understand about our relationship,” she began, gesturing between her and Remus. “I don’t think anyone can truly understand the dynamics of a ‘supernatural’ relationship unless they have experienced it for themselves. Some people are squeamish or simply can’t understand how it could work or even be…healthy. Merlin knows, I had enough raised eyebrows and not so quiet whispering behind my back at the Ministry when word got about that I was having Teddy. I have an insight to what you must be going through, what you will go through when you eventually let what you are be known to the public.”

Harry didn’t know much about how Remus and Tonks had got together, and he only knew pieces of what they’d had to endure as a couple with Remus being a known werewolf, but it was nice that Tonks seemed to understand his position. There was no possible way he could make anyone understand or see his and Draco’s relationship as he saw it. He could understand Remus’s disapproval, of course, but it was that very viability that made this so hard to convince him of.

“I can see the similarities too, Dora,” Remus murmured quietly. “But the difference is that you chose me of your own free will, a werewolf does not have any abilities that would seduce a human without their consent. Vampires do. I am not misunderstanding anything, I am only saying that after everything, Harry deserves to have the freedom to choose this for himself with a free mind, or walk away, if that is his wish.”

Harry just knew instinctively when Draco’s fangs had broken free of his gums. The vampire’s jaw was tense, as if struggling to keep the canines behind his closed lips. Draco was somewhat uncontrollable in matters that concerned him, Harry was starting to realise. And vice versa, he thought.

“And why do you not ask Harry instead of trying to force your way between us based on what you think is best for him?” Draco snarled, his fangs visible now. Teddy squealed with excitement, drawing everyone’s attention to him, just as two little vampire fangs popped into his mouth. There was a short silence around the table for a moment, and then Tonks burst into laughter.

“My me,” she chuckled, patting her son’s currently dark hair affectionately. “Seems that makes three against one on the subject of Draco, Remus, but really, Harry seems happy, why do you need any further assurance than that?”

Remus looked as if his wife not taking his side was trying his patience. Harry felt sorry for him
really, his heart was in the right place and he, Harry, wasn’t exactly giving anyone a straight answer. He set down his knife and fork, staring at his half-eaten toad in the hole as if it might hold all the answers to his problems.

“I am happy, or at least I think I’m on my way there better than I was before. I’m still recovering from…everything but Draco’s been a big part of that and I would like the choice to choose this for myself but…” He paused, wondering on how he could possibly voice the torrent of feelings, the gratitude, the connection, the passion he felt for the vampire beside him. Things he had never felt for anyone before.

“I’m not willing to risk something that makes me happier than I’ve ever been for a choice that I would make exactly the same, I suppose,” Harry murmured quietly. “And I appreciate you wanting to give me that choice, Remus, but I… I don’t want you to think that I’m being forced into something I don’t want, or for you to worry about me anymore. I want to start contributing more to… to this family than just problems and bitterness.”

It was then that Remus reached across the table to grasp Harry's hand. “We are not always in a position to choose our family, Harry, Tonks’s mother learnt that lesson the hard way.” Despite knowing that Remus hadn't meant that as an insult to Draco, Harry could not help but notice Draco tense beside him. “We chose you, and you us,” Remus continued, “and I think you must know that you contribute a lot more than that, Harry. You’ve suffered greatly, you can't expect to move past that any quicker than you are. But part of being a family means that we are certain to worry about each other.”

Harry nodded slowly. “I know I'm…I'm still adjusting to that too,” he replied quietly, glancing at Teddy as the boy started chewing on the edge of his spoon happily. “But surely it also means accepting my decisions, my choices. I've… I've realised now, that even if I had the freedom to choose, I would make the same choices all over again. Draco isn’t some evil I need saving from.”

That had a lot to do with it, he thought, that Remus had been unable to offer much in the way of help in the fight against Voldemort and was perhaps over-compensating now. The war would still affect them all in different ways for years to come, of course.

“I just can't comprehend someone as good, as pure as you being happy with someone who needs to drink your blood to survive,” Remus sighed, retracting his hand and staring between Draco and Harry in frustration. “Don't you want to get away from all that bloodshed?”

Under the table, Harry felt Draco's hand grasp his knee under the table, as if he weren’t sure he wanted to hear the answer. The blond seemed more unsure of Harry’s emotions after the events of the day than he, Harry was, as if he thought that what had happened would change their relationship for the worst.
“Look, Draco doesn't come at me like a ravenous beast,” Harry said, trying to hide his mortification by clearing his throat. This was definitely not the topic he wanted to be discussing with Remus and Tonks. “I don't feel any pain by it, quite…quite the opposite, actually. He always heals me immediately afterwards and I always take *Temporentia Sensium* and a blood restorative. To me it's just...just another branch of intimacy. One that just so happens to give Draco life.”

Remus visibly blanched at that, while Tonks looked away uncomfortably. It seemed they were more embarrassed about the idea of Harry having sex than Draco sucking his blood. Harry fidgeted in his seat as another, longer silence fell.

“One thing that has had me curious,” Remus said then, cutting through the disconcerting quietness. “I can…I can smell that you are…well, *virginal*, Harry. Not that that's a bad thing, on the contrary, but I could not help but assume that you and he would… With his desires and...*hunger* being what it is, I mean.”

Harry stared at him. Never had he ever heard Remus so tongue-tied. But then, he was quite sure that the werewolf had never asked him something so personal before, either. He fiddled with the corner of the checked tablecloth to give himself some sort of distraction so that his throat did not close up with humiliation.

“I’m sorry,” Remus murmured, “I don’t mean to be difficult. If you’re not hurt and you’re not unhappy then I don’t have any objection. I just find it hard to believe a vampire would leave you… pure for so long.”

Draco straightened up in his chair then. “If I were interested in Harry for only what he could give me – sex and blood, then I probably wouldn’t have. But he means more than that to me, Mr Lupin.” His gaze and voice were so intense that Harry doubted even Remus could argue with the vampire’s sincerity.

“Eat up boys,” Tonks chimed suddenly, her enthusiasm breaking the uncomfortable lapse in conversation. “Remus managed to get hold of some muggle fireworks for us – we’re going to have our very own display in yours and Teddy’s honour, Harry.”

“BANG BANG!” shrieked Teddy with delight, slamming his spoon down on his highchair for emphasis. Harry beamed. This was what he had imagined families to be like when he’d laid awake in his cupboard reaming of a better home, one to which he truly belonged. One like the place he had right now.
Everyone began eating a little quicker as the now green-haired baby rocked back and forth in his highchair in excitement, seeming to have recognised what the word ‘firework’ meant. “We tested a few in the back garden a few days ago, he loved them,” Tonks laughed. “Wait ‘til you see his little face…”

It seemed that Teddy was eager to see them, so they returned to their plates, wolfing down their food quicker in an attempt to stop those over-excited sounds from piercing their ear-drums. Draco even continued with his own, seeming to enjoy the taste if nothing else. Harry wondered just why Draco was bothering putting on the display of eating in private company, but he supposed even if the food did vanish inside of him, devoured instantly by his volatile organs without giving him sustenance, that didn’t mean he couldn’t enjoy the taste.

* * *

It must be weird eating and yet not getting full, Harry thought blushing profusely as he thought of the one thing that did give the vampire that satisfying ‘fullness’. Far from disturbing, the fact that he gave Draco even that simple pleasure was…nice. He didn’t know if that made him strange, he didn’t really care either.

“So, Severus told me that you’ve been asked to continue teaching Defence until the end of the year,” Draco said to Remus conversationally, seeming to want to test the waters now with the werewolf to see where they stood. The man gave a small nod as he finished his mouthful.

“Yes, it’s an honour, really, I haven’t been asked to stay on at a position before in my life. It will be nice to have an on-going position, and paycheque of course,” Remus elaborated softly, his tone lacking the usual wariness or bite that it had when he’d previously addressed Draco.

Harry continued to eat quietly, listening to Draco and his family, watching them all contently. Perhaps things would work out alright in the end after all.

* * *

The distinctive smell of smoke and blood still filled the air, despite the fact that the muggle authorities and the bystanders had all vanished now, leaving nothing but a ruin surrounded by smoking ashes and a barrier of flimsy yellow tape in their wake. The Bloody Mary had been levelled with magical fire, that was for sure. The muggles could not explain nor fathom how nothing but the pub had burnt down into nothing – the surrounding buildings and the pavement were completely untouched. The muggles didn’t know, but he knew exactly what had happened.

Walking forwards into the ash-covered ruins, the man cloaked in black scanned the rubble. This had been a magical fire, a carefully constructed magical bomb that contained the essence of
And yet if anyone could find a way to escape it, it would be Claude Stanton, he thought with revulsion. An odd feeling was clawing its way through his chest as he stared at the destruction around him, breathed in the smell of death. He wasn’t sure what he thought or how he felt about the building in which his life had changed forever being burnt to the ground. It wasn’t exactly a sad feeling, but it wasn’t happy either.

He’d been brought here, freshly snatched from Hogwarts by the vampire that had stalked him for months. He had known what he was from the first, he was in training to be a hunter, after all, and could recognise them on sight. When he first saw this one, however, he had been unable to do anything but avoid him wherever possible. For some reason, he hadn’t killed him that first time he’d seen him lurking in the shadows, watching him. And that one decision had changed the course of his life.

With his insides burning with nostalgia, Alaric bit back the melancholy that tore through him, forcing himself to study the surroundings for clues. He had to know if any had survived. Draco Malfoy was his first target in revenge for what had happened, but Stanton and the coven were next in line. He’d planned on ruining them first by selling their precious secrets to those they feared most, allowing them to stew before he would then end them as effectively as he planned to end the Malfoy wretch. It seemed, however, that his first prey had stolen his second from under his nose.

Alaric’s fingers curled into his palms as he walked the length of the charred remains. He could still picture where everything once stood as if it were still surrounding him now in all its dark glory and he winced as he spied a burnt metal ring bolted to the floor. A shiver caressed his spine. Oh he remembered the shackles well, more than the room that had once been where he stood.

It was in this very place that he had been chained to the floor for days, weeks, perhaps, snatched from his school on his way back from his graduation by none-other than Claude himself, and all because he’d shown weakness in sparing Lucan’s life – all because he had dared to love him…

~To Be Continued…
The icy, magically enforced steel burned his flesh where they held his wrists above his head in the darkness. The shackles clinked noisily as he shifted, struggling in vain to shift the agonising ache in his arms and shoulders. How long had he been here now? He should have known that things were going too well. He’d finally completed his odious ‘Hunter’ training a few months prior, and so the prospect of returning home after his graduation from Hogwarts was not looking like the morbid, daunting prospect it had been since he was a child.

Hogwarts had been his escape from the incessant training, the hard, cold family that had surrounded him back home. His friends at Hogwarts had once said that his family were very ‘military’ in their coolness. They did not know that he was seen as a soldier to be trained rather than a son to be nurtured. It wasn’t that they didn’t love him, no; it was just that their love came in the form of harsh training schedules and strict rules. Ones that would prepare him for the world they fought to protect from ‘the most unholy of beings’ as they had put it. Vampires.

Only for some time now, several years in fact, that family tradition, that job did not have the appeal it’d once possessed. Ever since I met him, he thought, hanging his head now and staring into the darkness at where he could only guess his feet were. Ever since that coincidental meeting three years ago, every belief he had been raised with had been called into question. He had never felt more confused about his purpose in life than now and it was all thanks to one man, one vampire – Lucan Vesper.

He smiled pensively in the gloom, the name bringing warmth to his cold surroundings. Despite his single-minded upbringing, he had never seen a real vampire before then and the moment he had first seen Lucan, his interest had piqued. It had started off as simply that, interest, a desire to see exactly what he would be expected to hunt down and kill one day. But morbid interest had swiftly turned to deeper, more complicated feelings…

Will I ever even see him again? He wondered, closing his eyes and praying that unconsciousness would take him away from the pain and the blinding dark of this prison. No sooner had his lashes
fluttered, however, than a groan of wood sounded from across the room – the door was opening. A harsh, glaring light burst in through the doorway and Alaric hissed in pain, wincing as his light-starved eyes struggling to adjust once more.

Footsteps echoed across the room coming closer and closer. Alaric tensed in his steel bonds, feeling them sing warningly, reminding him that his magic was cut off from him as long as they were locked around his wrists. He squinted up at the creature that stopped before him, mere inches away, but his eyes were still useless. Then, suddenly, a low voice, deep and resounding struck through the blinding light like lightning.

“Caius?”

Something in Alaric’s body broke and he made a choked, gasping sound. The creature he didn’t dare believe was true kneeled before him now, blocking out the light just enough so that it was less harsh on his eyes and he recognised that face he knew so well instantly. His arms ached now with the desire to throw them around those shoulders, he felt that desire more deeply than any desperation for freedom. He struggled to make his voice work but his throat was too dry.

“Caius,” the man said again, his cold hand reaching for him. Those fingers brushed his haphazard blond locks from his face where they had been driving him insane since he had been chained here and cupped his cheek with the kind of tenderness that only he had ever offered him in all of his seventeen years of life. Despite the situation, Alaric could not help but melt into the touch.

At last, he forced a raspy, ragged sound from his throat, “Lucan.”

Instantly, that face seemed to be torn between adoration and wretchedness. “I am so sorry, Caius, I had never wanted you to become involved in all of this.”

With those words, Alaric realised what must have happened. From the moment their secret relationship had begun when the curious, affection-starved fifteen-year-old had chased after a lonely, tortured vampire and they had both found something in each other, they had known there would be problems. He had made it clear what he was from the start, despite Lucan being able to sense it in him regardless and they had both warned each other of the difficulties their ‘families’ might pose if their connection ever became known. He supposed Lucan’s ‘family’ must have discovered just who Lucan snuck off to visit on a nightly basis...

He knew exactly where he was now; he could even smell it in the air, now that he had inspiration enough to care. Now that Lucan was here.
I’m in their nest, he thought. A vampire coven’s base. He had watched his parents and their comrades tear apart many of them under the cover of night. The Hunters Association was not strictly speaking a legal one any longer, according to the Ministry, of course. They’d been secretive about their names and faces, they’d covered their tracks well enough. He had watched them desecrate entire lairs and covens without leaving a trace behind them.

But there would be no one coming for him now, not once they’d found out what sin he had committed.

Two years of secrecy had come to an abrupt end, making the decision for them that they had been struggling to make for some time. To be together, in the open. Only if my suspicions about Lucan’s ‘family’ are correct, we won’t be together for much longer, not in this world at any rate, he thought dread and fear settling in his empty stomach, churning the bile.

“Do not be afraid,” Lucan whispered, leaning closer, his lips almost touching his own now. “I will do whatever is necessary to keep you safe. They found out about you – that little rodent, Osborne followed me to our meeting place, he saw us, and reported back to Claude. Claude was…” Lucan paused, as if the memory of Claude’s discovering them still haunted him.

Claude must be his sire then, Alaric realised. Lucan didn’t spoke about his vampire family often, but Alaric could tell the signs of a free vampire and one bound by fear of their sire’s strength. “He will never let me go,” Lucan had once whispered to him when they had dreamed of running away together. This Claude, he was the one that Lucan had been protecting him from all this time. What exactly was going to happen to them now?

“If Claude had intended to kill you, he would have done it from the start,” Lucan continued, “he is efficient like that. He must intend to use you as a means to control me, I have always been his...his favourite pet,” Lucan winced, spitting out the last word as if it were the vilest swear word. “He will do anything to get me back under his thumb, and you – you are my only weakness.”

Under any other situation, that declaration might have been endearing, now however, it only filled him with foreboding. He squirmed again as a familiar jolt of pain shot through his arms and back, a shallow hiss spilling over his lips. Lucan looked at the bonds holding him, reaching up for the thick shackles. He seized them with his hands, slamming them so hard against the wall that they snapped like flimsy tin under his age-old strength, which, thankfully was practised enough that it didn’t cause any damage to Alaric’s already abused wrists.

Cradling them close to his chest, Alaric winced as the blood flowed back into them, and the pain from having them held aloft for so long burst through his shoulders with violent throbs. “And it is
no coincidence that your only weakness just so happens to be the heir to the Alaric hunter line?" Alaric asked, a low hiss leaving him as Lucan examined his wrists.

“Oh yes, I have no doubt that he is thrilled he can reel me back under his control and deal a mortal blow to the most esteemed hunter family in the same instance,” Lucan breathed, his dark eyes shadowed with humanity, a vulnerability that he’d only ever allowed him, Alaric to see. “No harm will come to you, Caius, I will not allow it.”

“Don’t keep saying that as if my own life is all that concerns me!” Alaric hissed, his voice cracking with lack of water, with exhaustion. “What exactly will he make you do now he has me to control you with? The creatures that chained me here, Lucan, they used the influence on me until they’d drained me of every personal secret of ours like water from a colander.”

He winced as he remembered the rape of that vampire magic tearing through his mind with furious efficiency, devouring every tender feeling, personal thought, private pleasure he and Lucan had shared over the last few years. Everything. “They know what we mean to each other,” Alaric whispered, resting his head against Lucan’s as the vampire’s lips massaged the place where blood wept from his wounded wrists.

To think he’d been looking forward to finally being able to take control of his life as an adult. “They know you’ll do exactly as they say for me,” he continued, swallowing as his lover’s vampire mouth healed his wrists before laying a tender, doting kiss on each. He shuddered despite their location, falling with exhaustion so that his head rested on that cool, comforting shoulder.

“We’re never going to be able to just be together, are we?” he breathed. One hand caressed his dirty, dishevelled blond locks as the other pressed against his lips, wet, with a distinct, metallic scent rising from them.

“I am grateful that you were not tortured or harmed too greatly. But you are weak, drink,” Lucan insisted, presenting him with his forefinger that he had bitten to feed him from.

It was strange that he had fallen so in love with one of the very beings he had been trained since childhood to annihilate. Had he been the only hunter to realise that there was such a thing as good vampires? Vampires that were more human than most humans, even? Perhaps he had always been too soft to be a hunter, or perhaps his loveless upbringing had rendered him a prime target for a suicide romance.

His lips closed around the weeping digit and he sucked gently. Those fingers caressed his hair as they had done hundreds of times before in more welcome settings. Slowly, energy and life returned
to his body and he released the finger, watching Lucan draw it into his own mouth next to seal the cut.

“Things are going to change, aren’t they?” Alaric breathed, ashamed of how young and afraid his voice sounded then. Those arms embraced him tight.

“Yes and not for the better, I am afraid,” Lucan murmured, pressing his lips to his hair and breathing him in, stroking his pulse that fluttered in his throat swiftly. “But whatever happens, we will be together. And I will always love you – that will never change.”

“How touching.”

The arms around Alaric froze and both he and Lucan turned their heads to the doorway. The light was now silhouetting a tall figure dressed in a crimson red cloak. Amber eyes shined ominously in the dark as the creature stepped forward, his pale face twisted with a worrying smirk.

“Caius Nicodemus Alaric, son and heir to the most esteemed vampire hunter family. Oh yes, the identities of the hunters cannot be proven – to the Ministry officials, particularly with many of your own working the inside to your advantage, but your name has been known by our kind since the day you were born.” The vampire stopped before them now, surveying them as if their closeness was something highly amusing. Though Alaric swore he saw a sharp glimmer of jealousy in the corner of those eyes.

“I could not believe it when I was told the identity of the little human that had captured my Lucan’s heart. Especially when I had been convinced that had vanished long ago. I wonder how it was that you convinced him that he loved you when he has been incapable of loving anything but himself for years.” The vampire elder smirked. “A vampire hunter and a vampire. Quite poetic, really. Unfortunately, your tragic little romance has stolen his loyalty from me, his dedication and I cannot allow that.”

Alaric sneered. “You created him to torture him,” he snapped viciously, with all the ferocity of a taunted viper. “You’ve made his existence a living hell for decades. Perhaps he was incapable of love whilst surrounded by malicious, selfish beasts but I assure you, he is quite capable of love when presented with a worthy partner.”

At that, the elder laughed sadistically, the sound carrying through the chamber, resonating through the walls. “And you are worthy, are you? Stalwart and true, pure and devout? Whatever unfortunate illusion the two of you have spun together, you, Caius Alaric are my leverage in all of this and if Lucan wishes to keep you alive, he will do exactly as I say.”
The arms around him tightened again and Alaric felt his head pressed slightly into Lucan’s chest.

“Release him, Claude, let him go and I will be yours-”

“He will remain here, at the Bloody Mary,” Claude interrupted, his voice leaving no room for argument, “where I can properly keep an eye on the pair of you, and use him to enforce your cooperation, if necessary.”

Alaric blinked back the spiteful tears that pricked the back of his eyes as he bottled the bitter memories (sweetened only by Lucan’s presence in then) in a glass vial. He shoved the stopper in it a little harsher than he’d intended, as if that would eradicate the moment his life had begun to fall downhill from history. If he had just been faster, stronger, if he had just evaded capture, then he and Lucan would never have been put in that position with Claude.

And Lucan would not have taken me and fled to that rising ‘Dark Lord’ and exchanged his ‘services’ in exchange for our protection, his mind supplied. A tear did break free then, rolling down his cheek as he attached the vial to the letter he had written and attached it to the leg of the owl that was waiting patiently before him. It was my fault that Lucan went to Voldemort, that he did his bidding in hopes of keeping us safe, only to be killed in the process.

Their romance had been a doomed one from the start all because of him, he supposed. The moment that he and Lucan had confessed their feelings, had given in to them and come together in the simplest yet most intimate manner two beings could, he had signed his death warrant. And my own, for I will not endure this world much longer without him, Alaric thought, sending the owl soaring into the sky to deliver his memories to their intended recipient. But my end will not come until I have avenged your death, Lucan.

He stared after the owl, watching the creature grow smaller and smaller in the sky until it vanished into the misty evening. He would destroy the creature that had stolen his lover from him, and only then, would he allow him to die. A bitter smile touched his lips. If there was one thing losing the one he loved most had taught him, it was that it was worse than any death or torture.

By morning, Harry Potter would receive his memories, and the process of destroying Draco Malfoy would begin.
“You can’t hide it forever you know,” Harry murmured across the table to Hermione as he watched her try to arrange her robes to hide her slightly swelling stomach. He glanced up and down the tables subtly, grateful that no one was looking at her suspicious behaviour. “Sooner or later people are going to notice.”

Immediately, Hermione dropped her hands down. “I know that,” she snapped under her breath. The extra work they had all been loaded with on the weeks leading up until Christmas had gotten to her most of all, and here it was, the last day before the Christmas holidays and she looked ready to explode with the stress. He had a feeling that was not purely due to the increased workload they had been wading through lately.

“Ron and I decided to tell both our parents on Christmas Eve,” she whispered, “we want them to know before anyone else. My shame will be known to the world by the start of spring term, never fear.”

Beside her, Ron smiled softly, petting her arm where it lay on the table. “You're tired and frustrated and worried, Hermione, you know you don't mean that. Don't worry about anything just for a bit, yeah? You keep making yourself upset about things, saying things that no one in their right mind actually thinks.”

Hermione glared at him lividly. Her mouth opened to spit out a retort, only to snap shut again silently. She turned back to her meal, seeming to have caught herself before her fluctuating hormones forced her to say something else she didn't mean. She'd gotten a handle on controlling the way her emotional rollercoaster affected her recently, Harry thought and he smiled at her reassuringly, wanting her to know that her efforts had been noticed.

It can't have been easy, being in her situation. Hermione had never seemed like a very maternal person and he wondered how she was dealing with the strange connection that would doubtlessly be forming between her and the child growing inside her. He frowned. Maybe it was because he was a man, but he was unable to even contemplate how he might feel in that situation.

“You can come to me, you know, if it gets too much,” Harry whispered to her when Ron turned away to pull the jug of pumpkin juice towards himself. He knew Ron might not appreciate the implication that Hermione might need anyone else's help besides his own; Ron Weasley was a very proud man, after all.

Hermione gave him an appreciative glance. “Later, perhaps, I think Ron's right at the moment, I…I didn't mean that the baby was… I just need some sleep, that's all. We've been up so late every night for the last few weeks, struggling to get these assignments in before Christmas,” she said,
looking pointedly between him and Malfoy then. “You haven't said much since you got back from that 'training' session with Snape and Malfoy – about you and Malfoy, I mean. Is all going well on that front?”

A training session had been his alibi for when they had gone to the Bloody Mary, since he could hardly explain his presence in a vampire den. And if truth be told, it had rubbed him up the wrong way to have to lie to them, again. The latter part of that statement, however, he could answer truthfully, even if he knew Draco was listening in from beside him, easily picking up his and Hermione's whispers with his supernatural hearing.

“Things between Draco and me have been good,” he said, his smile betraying his feelings so that Hermione's expression turned into a grin. “It helps to know that Remus and Tonks aren't going to crucify him when we finally do, uhhh…you know, it.” he flushed slightly. “Teddy really liked him the other week when we watched the fireworks and had dinner. I almost felt normal, bringing my…my boyfriend home to meet my family.”

It felt strangely good to claim that he had both of those things. It made the warm feeling that had overshadowed his unease regarding the Bloody Mary incident bubble pleasantly in his stomach. A few weeks had passed since that night, and the dinner at Remus's – at home, his mind corrected. An odd sense of normalcy had settled into his life, so much so that it had him suspicious as to which of their problems would come and interrupt this newfound peace first, Alaric, Greyback, the nameless beings coming for him or something else. Things had been far too normal recently, and he was enjoying the simple pleasure of being with his friends, being with Draco and throwing himself into school work for it to last.

“And when will Malfoy take his boyfriend back to meet his family?” Hermione asked, with her brow raised in interest. Beside him, Harry felt Draco tense in a way that was noticeable only to him. Well naturally, his mind interceded, only you are so in tune to him. You’d notice if he blinked differently from normal…

“It’s best if Draco goes back to his parents alone this Christmas,” Harry replied. He and Draco hadn’t discussed the holidays beyond that they had both been invited to their respective homes. But Harry thought he knew pretty well the situation in the Malfoy household. “Things are…difficult for them at the moment, they need the chance to reconcile with each other without my presence throwing a spanner in the works.”

“Makes sense,” Ron interjected through a mouth full of food, having obviously heard the latter part of their conversation. “Malfoy has been raised to be their perfect heir and beget more heirs and improve their family name while doing so. I reckon shacking up with you won’t help him do either of the first two, mate, no offense.”
Harry was dumbfounded by that statement. He hadn’t thought of it before but he realised that it must be true. Draco couldn’t have children now, whether he’d found himself a nice witch as opposed to Harry or not. Vampires couldn’t have children, could they?

Besides which, he seriously doubted that they would approve even if they did like him and he could somehow squeeze out Draco’s children – they’d had no say in this after all. And if there’s anything I’ve learnt from what little Draco has told me of them, it’s that they have controlled every aspect of his life until now. They couldn’t be too happy that it was largely because of him, Harry that was giving their son the strength to carve his own future independently.

“Don’t act like you know everything there is to know about my family, Weasley,” Draco sneered, evidently having had enough of them talking as if he weren’t there. “Every Malfoy has expectations of him, duties to his family. Circumstance may prevent me from fulfilling them in the conventional way, but they are by no means impossible. My parents are just accustomed to more of a…a say in the way I go about things, that is all.”

Ron snorted. “Go on then, who out of you and Harry is gunna push the sprogs out of your minge then?”

Harry could not help but laugh into his pumpkin juice at the outraged looks on both Hermione and Draco’s faces. He couldn’t allow the teasing on Draco’s behalf to continue for too long, however. “It didn’t really occur to me that you’d want kids, much less how we’d go about having them to be honest,” Harry said seriously. It was a bit of a surprise, but then again, the blond had been fabulous with Teddy a few weeks ago, better than he, Harry was that was for sure.

“I haven’t really thought that far ahead to tell you the truth,” Harry added, “I don’t know what I want for the future, what job I want or where I’ll live or…anything really. It’s still quite novel for me to have a future outside of vanquishing dark wizards, I keep expecting the next great evil to crop up and demand the next seventeen years of my life.” The words were spoken light-heartedly, but they carried with them some of his underlying concern. He really didn’t know what he wanted from his future.

“I’m happy now,” he murmured quietly, for Draco’s ears only. “With you, I haven’t really thought any further than that.”

A delightfully cool hand that sent pleasurable shivers up his arm caressed the back of his own hand subtly where it lay on the table. “At least you have the important aspect of your future decided then, that it will be spent with me,” Draco said with that same arrogant smirk that had somewhere along the way become endearing rather than infuriating.
Sometimes, that over-confidence, that arrogance roused a spark of appreciation, of attraction in him that made him feel quite warm when he was confronted with it. Only with Draco, however. *It’s part of his charm,* he thought with a smile.

Not too long before the end of the meal, a telltale commotion from above signalled the arrival of the morning post. Harry had already received a letter from Tonks yesterday, accompanied by a colourful yet indecipherable scribble-drawing from Teddy, and Remus, was of course still in place at the head of the table. So it was a great surprise when a ruffled looking grey owl landed regally in front of him, extending its leg to him.

“He looks like he’s come a long way mate,” Ron noticed, offering a crispy hash brown to the creature. It hooted gratefully as it accepted the food, just as Harry freed its other leg of the scroll that was attached.

“Who would send you letters?” Draco wondered aloud, his eyes narrowed with suspicion as Harry began to undo the red cord that bond the small scroll of parchment in a tight roll.

Harry scoffed at that, “I might know life outside this castle, you know.”

“One of your many admirers, probably, begging you to consider them instead of Malfoy,” Ron said, grinning broadly at the death glare Draco sent in his direction. “Maybe the *Daily Prophet* wants another interview? They use a lot of owls like that. Empty Pig’s cage into the letter and send it back, Harry, they’ll get the message.”

“As amusing and harmless as a lot of these things are, you really must set up some sort of… scanning charm for these,” Draco began. Harry nodded, listening as he raised the scroll closer to his face to better see the tight knot in the cord. He tugged at it carefully, feeling it give way under his precise movements.

“You grow more famous by the day, and among those hapless fools who admire you faultlessly, there are those who wish to cause you harm for some reason or another, you should not readily receive every letter sent to you. I’ll have to show you how to set up filtering spells to keep away the fan mail and the potentially harmful – *Harry, no!*”

The second the scroll had opened before Harry's eyes, Draco caught but a glimmer of light playing along a clear, crystal-glass surface, before the object exploded with a flash of light. He swore he saw something within the glass, a pearly substance caught between liquid and vapour burst in
Harry's face before the man was thrown backwards from his bench.

With unrivalled speed, Draco dived to the side, catching his lover’s body before it hit the ground, pulling him up against his chest. “Harry? Harry?!” He shook the man roughly in his arms, those eyes were closed, his body still warm but unresponsive, as if he had been knocked unconscious. And yet Harry's eyes were moving under his eyelids, his breath coming out in ragged pants as sweat broke out over his forehead and his heart thundered loudly in Draco’s ears, like he was running a marathon.

Draco sniffed the air, but the vapour-like fluid that he had sworn he saw splash Harry's face had left no trace on his skin or scent on the air. The hall around them was alive with noise now, everyone standing up, some standing on tables to get a better look at where Draco was cradling Harry's body on the floor.

“What was that?” Weasley gasped, hurdling the table to come to Harry's side, just as Hermione hesitantly levitated the scorched scroll into the air to better look at it.

“The shards of the vial have completely vanished,” she said, examining the parchment closely. “It must have had a charm cast on it to vanish it the moment it came into contact with air – it didn't explode, it disappeared, and the sudden force of that caused the contents to splatter over Harry.”

At those words, Draco scanned the man's face, finding no trace of liquid or vapour around him even with another scrutinising look. “Whatever it was, it was drawn into him faster than the human eye can see,” Draco murmured. The loud, murmuring whispers had swept through the hall now like a swarm of angry bees and Draco tensed as he felt the familiar presence of the teachers around them.

“We need to get Harry out of here,” came the voice of the werewolf, “there are too many people.”

Draco just nodded and mentally berated himself for not getting Harry out of here sooner – Harry hated being stared at. He would hate the stories that were sure to be tossed around the media as a result of this even more. He hated being weak, especially in front of others.

Sliding one arm under Harry's knees and the other around his back, he pulled him tightly to his chest, carefully tilting that face into his neck so that it was hidden from the view of others before rising effortlessly to his feet. He was flagged by Weasley and Granger, as well as a few of the teachers, Severus and Lupin included as he made his way out of the hall, making a beeline for the hospital wing. He didn't think he so much as processed a single thought until he was laying Harry’s unconscious body down on a crisp white medical bed, and he saw Madame Pomfrey bustling
towards him through the collection of people gathered around the bed.

“Not Mr Potter again surely?” Pomfrey sighed, drawing her wand and already performing the usual stabilising spells. “What happened this time?”

“We're not sure,” Granger gasped from where she stood behind Draco, quite out of breath from hurrying here along with the others. “He opened a letter and the container within seemed to vanish with such ferocity that the contents sort of…exploded over his face. He fell, but there's no trace of whatever the contents were. There's not a mark on him.”

Across the bed from him, Draco saw Severus standing, and he met his eyes with a significant gaze. It appeared Severus had the same suspicions as he did.

“Harry isn't short of admirers, but he isn't short of enemies either,” Weasley offered, his hand on Granger's shoulder for support while he stared at his unconscious friend.

“This isn’t any kind of poison that I have ever come across,” Draco said significantly. He'd spent a lot of time in Severus's private lab whilst he'd been bound to the dungeons for fear of sunlight, he was certain he could recognise any ingredient by scent. No, this wasn't a poison, this was something else.

*Maybe the beings we were told were after Harry, Draco thought, or, more accurately one of my enemies – Alaric, or a survivor from the coven?*

*But no one could have survived that explosion, it was made with fiendfyre itself to ensure that,* his mind argued. *Severus and I forged it ourselves for that specific task!*

“He doesn't seem to be in pain,” Pomfrey said after a few diagnostic spells, leaning closer to flicker her wand over the man's face. Draco tensed at this, fighting the urge to lash out at anyone brandishing a wand at his First. It was an instinctual desire, to care for the man himself, and it was a tribute to how much control he had over those instincts that he could suppress them enough to bring him here.

“It's almost similar to the effects of dreamless sleep, except instead of drifting in nothingness, Potter is lost in… Not a dream, precisely, although the haze surrounding his mind looks almost similar.” The matron frowned, lowering her wand thoughtfully. “I have stabilised his body but it is the mind that is lost to us right now. I must consult the books – Severus, Remus, Minerva? Would
“Filius,” McGonagall said to the tiny Charms professor, “Ensure that everyone gets to their classes on time, would you? Try to eradicate any lurkers in the halls – they're all certain to be eager for news of Potter for some reason or another.” With that, she too followed after Pomfrey, while Flitwick hurried through the main doors back towards the Great Hall, leaving Draco alone with Weasley, Granger and an unconscious Harry.

“Could your parents have done this?” Weasley asked cautiously. “To make a point?”

Draco sneered at the implication. “Even if they would do such a thing, Weasley, they would not choose such an obvious manoeuvre to attack the chosen one. My parents owe him a debt for keeping them out of Azkaban, and that kind of debt is one that we Malfoys consider as serious as the life debt. They could not attack him even if they wished it.”

One of his hands was still clasped around Harry’s, while the other reached up mindlessly to sweep that dark fringe from the man's forehead. It felt a normal temperature. *Who has done this to you Harry?* He wondered, mostly to himself, although he urged the thought in Harry's direction, despairing inwardly when he got no response. Something had truly trapped Harry within himself somewhere, if he could not hear him.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Granger and Weasley come around the bed to stand on the opposite side, where Granger took up a seat. She clasped Harry's free hand in her own with Weasley watching on silently. Draco caressed his lover's hair without a care for their presence, trying to find the cool mask of indifference that he needed to function right now. He had to put his emotions away, had to force them back enough that he could focus on helping Harry.

Harry needed him.

“I examined the parchment, but I couldn't get a name or magical signature from it,” Granger said, her voice cracking a little as she brought out the scroll from her pocket.

Draco froze at the scent that wafted from it, recognising it instantly even if the handwriting of the few words upon it was unfamiliar. ‘*Know the truth of what you have done and suffer as I have suffered,*’ it said.
“Alaric,” Draco all-but growled, “He sent it to Harry.”

Granger frowned. “How can you be sure? What exactly is this vendetta that Professor Alaric has against you that he would act through Harry and me?” When Draco breathed no word of answer, she leant in closer, dropping the scroll in favour of supporting her subtly swelling stomach. “Malfoy, we can’t help you or Harry until we know.”

Draco entertained the notion of divulging the truth to them, but quickly reconsidered. It would help Harry, it might make Harry happy, they were the only reasons he had even considered it, but he could not trust them to run and expose him for what he was the moment that they thought it was the ‘right thing to do’. They were faultlessly loyal, but to Harry, not to him, and he was unsure how they would react to the truth of his and Harry’s unconventional relationship. Probably as well as the werewolf reacted, he thought bitterly, shedding his school robe with a sigh of preparation.

“But now, the truth may divide us and we need to help Harry,” he evaded them quickly, glancing to the office door Severus, Pomfrey and McGonagall had through vanished. “They are looking for poisons and antidotes, but this is no poison.”

While Granger gave a small nod, Weasley looked doubtful. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because I have received a distinction in every potions exam and assignment since I started at this school,” Draco retorted impatiently. “I know what I am talking about, I wouldn’t be so confident in my decision if I didn’t.”

Ron snorted. “As if you’d ever admit there was something you didn’t know,” he mumbled.

Draco glared. “I wouldn’t risk losing Harry for the sake of my pride. Distrust me and question my methods and my character all you like, Weasel, but do not doubt that what I feel for him is more complex and powerful than you can hope to comprehend.”

Any biting retort that had been on Weasley’s tongue died as Granger gave him a sharp jab to his ribs with her elbow. “You know your stuff, Malfoy,” she said then, glancing at Harry with concern filling her eyes. “If this is some sort of curse, we could always...Finite it. Together.”

“That would take an incredible amount of concentration and power,” Draco murmured, surveying the two seriously. He didn’t know if either were up to such a complex task, or if a simple Finite would even work on this kind of spell – one that was wrapped so intricately with Harry’s delicate
“There is a spell,” Granger began then, her eyes still riveted to Harry's prone form. “It is used mainly to help draw coma victims back into consciousness. It erases psychological and magical barriers that prevent the conscious mind from surfacing. I am sure it would work, but it requires… great strength–”

“‘The combined powers of all three of us will be enough,’ Ron said confidently.

Draco raised a brow. “We are talking about Harry’s mind, here, something not as easily fixed as a broken arm or leg – even with magic. If you undertake this task Weasley, you will have to put your desire to help Harry before your hatred of me. We three, we must be in perfect unison, a perfect joint cast, from three ways rather than the Dual Cast you have yet to master.”

With a scowl, the red-head’s head began to flush an unflattering maroon. “You’re not the only one that cares about Harry, Malfoy, and you’re not the only capable wizard on the planet. Get over yourself, will you, so we can help Harry? Bloody hell, what does he see in you?”

Seething, Draco spat, “I could ask the same thing of Granger, but there is no time.” Without giving Weasley chance to retort, he turned to Granger once more. “It just may work, you and Weasley fetch the book containing the spell – I’ll wait here with Harry.”

Surprisingly, it was Granger that gave him a lingering, suspicious look, as if she might know more than she was letting on. Or at least, that she suspected all was not what it appeared to be, before she and Weasley hurried through the main doors. He and Harry were alone now, at last, but he knew he didn’t have much time.

Rolling up his sleeve, Draco cast a cursory glance at the closed door of Madame Pomfrey’s office and extended his fangs, sinking them into the vein at his wrist. The pain was sharp, and he grimaced but he pushed past it, pain did not rule him as it once had, nor did the fear of it. Blood wept from the wound and he hastily lowered it to Harry's mouth, gently parting his lips and pressing his wrist to them so that the fluid trickled down into his throat.

Moments passed with all the speed of a kettle that was being watched and even when Draco pulled his hand back to seal the wound, Harry had not so much as moved. Shit, he cursed, staring down at his lover’s terrifyingly still face. This isn’t an injury, as such, so my blood won’t heal it. He had been counting on it, in fact, not wanting to trust Weasley of all people to perform such a delicate spell on Harry’s mind. He could probably do quite well with Granger alone, but they needed power to overcome the complex structure he was sure Alaric had woven into this ‘curse’. As much as it
pained him, they needed Weasley. He only wished he had Harry to turn to. I’ve grown frighteningly used to him, Draco thought with a bittersweet smile, carding his fingers through Harry’s fringe once more. The man often blinked relaxingly whenever he did that whilst he was awake. He takes pleasure in the smallest, most simple of gestures. The room was deafeningly silent around him, the sound of Harry's uneven breaths and pounding heartbeat still pulsing furiously in his ears. Harry was in trouble, wherever he was.

Panic was thick in his throat and he barely managed to swallow around it, shoving it back with all of his strength.

I don’t know what I’ll do if I lose him, he thought, despair swirling like a thick tide of bile rising in his throat. He had woken every morning from his sleep-like state to find a messy-haired, slumbering angel with golden skin lying beside him, often wrapped around him or sprawled across his bed in the most free, intimate manner. Most nights had been blessed with clumsy yet endearing fondling, panting orgasms groaned out against his lips as they used their mouths and hands to wrestle each other toward completion. He had spent nearly every hour of the day breathing him in, hearing his heart, his breath and words, watching the way his eyes flickered away in embarrassment whenever they locked on his for too long. His chest ached when he thought that all of that might vanish.

Fuck, he cursed, dropping onto the side of the unconscious man’s bed. Pressing the heels of his palms into his forehead, he tugged roughly at the roots of his hair in a mixture of anguish and frustration at this situation – at his realisation. Bloody hell. I love him.

*                      *                      *

There was a distinct fuzziness, a surrealism to the world around him that set Harry on edge the moment the white light from the letter had sent him here. It was almost like being in a pensieve, although he’d had become painfully aware of the one major difference the moment he had caught sight of what was unmistakably a young Caius Alaric walking aimlessly through the street of Hogsmeade.

These were memories alright, and Alaric's memories at that, but Harry felt instantly suffocated by his surroundings, by the fuzzy glow dusting the world of recollection and the feeling of emotions, pain that was not his own burning like acid under his skin.

Somehow, the spell or potion he had been struck with not only had forced on him Alaric's
memories, but had connected him to Alaric's emotions at the time. *I can feel his pain,* Harry thought, clasping his hands over his heart that was suddenly aching with someone else's anguish. He had known this kind of internal suffering before, of course, but to feel someone else suffering like this, even Alaric’s, it was unbearable.

The memory crackled warningly, like disturbance on a television screen and Harry knew instantly what that meant. He hurried to follow after Alaric. He felt compelled to, for some reason, as if he just had to know. Maybe he was every bit as nosy as Snape had insisted in the past, all he knew was that Alaric had brought him here to share something with him and he had to know what that was. After meeting with Claude, he had a feeling that deep down, Alaric was just as much of a victim in all of this as anyone else.

Young Alaric's head hung on his neck slightly as he traipsed through the world without concern for the merriment, the life going on around him. He seem disconnected from everything else, lost in a way that Harry knew all too well. It was easy for him to keep up. From the look of him, Alaric was around fifteen years of age, tall but slender in an unhealthy way, his face drawn with exhaustion. If anything, this creature looked and felt as vulnerable and afraid as a newborn kitten.

“What happened to you to make you such an embittered, spiteful person?” Harry wondered aloud, studying the young, world-weary face as he followed him out of the main village and out onto a quiet, undisturbed grassy area. The tall grass encircled a small pond that reflected the greyish skies above like a mirror. One that Alaric stared into pensively when he dropped unceremoniously down onto the bank, disturbing a little brown mouse as he did so. It gave a great squeak and scrambled frantically away, but not fast enough. Alaric's hand shot out with blinding speed, snatching the little creature into his hand and bringing it up to his face to examine.

Forgetting this was a memory, Harry started forwards when he saw the boy start to squeeze the little creature until it squeaked with fright, a sickening sound that combined with Alaric's feelings of disorientation to make his stomach churn. He debated turning away, unable to watch the boy crush the innocent animal to death, but at the moment that thought crossed his mind, Alaric's hand loosened slightly and the other raised to run his fingers reassuringly over the mouse's little head.

“I can't even kill you,” Alaric murmured softly to the animal, “I can't even hurt a mouse and they want me to hunt, to kill vampires?” With a growl of frustration, Alaric delved into his robe pocket, offering the mouse the piece of broken biscuit he found there and setting both it and the food down beside him. “Weak, pathetic, pointless creature you are,” Alaric snarled at his reflection, swatting the water's surface hatefully. As he did so, however, the now damp hand was snatched out of the air by a paler, larger hand.

Both Harry and Alaric jumped in surprise to find another man suddenly at their side, a man that it took Harry a few moments to recognise. The Cold Stranger, the vampire that had bitten Draco and then tried to make Draco devour him. Lucan Vesper. Only now there was softness to his white
face, warmth in his dark eyes that shimmered as they looked on Alaric's shocked face.

“You mustn’t mistake kind-heartedness for weakness, Caius,” the vampire murmured softly. Harry heard Alaric snort derisively, only to watch him be silenced by both of those hands seizing his face, holding him still for the kiss that was pressed to his lips. Harry flushed as he watched them. It felt wrong somehow, as if he was intruding, to see them wrapped around each other, to see the jaded young Alaric give a groan of release into his lover's mouth that was almost a whimper. Vesper gave an answering growl of devotion, pressing the young human back into the grass before drawing back to stare down at him.

Harry knew he wasn't always a good judge of character, but he was sure that this could not have been a man that enslaved and tortured his human lover – his human lover who he was staring down at as if he were the centre of his world. Either Merritt had lied to him when he had explained to him the dynamics of Alaric and Vesper's relationship or he, Merritt had been lied to in the first place. Merritt had seemed the honest kind and had most likely been hoodwinked by Claude along with everything else, but Harry would have bet his life that Alaric and Vesper were as deeply in love as any couple, and would die before hurting each other.

Just then, Vesper bowed his body over Alaric, who lay sprawled carelessly in the grass, as if the weight on his shoulders had been lifted by Vesper's arrival. The vampire pressed his nose into the boy's throat, breathing him in deeply.

_They look like me and Draco_, Harry thought. _They feel like me and Draco_. He could feel the freedom that Vesper's touch was gifting to Alaric, feel the way the boy's stomach trembled and flipped with both excitement and relaxation simultaneously. It was a confused, frantic longing and satisfaction that he knew well. It was everything that he felt when Draco drew him close, when he looked at him the same way that Vesper was gazing at Alaric now.

_There is no way in hell that this is a 'master and pet' relationship_, Harry thought.

“Fuck me,” Alaric groaned longingly, wrapping his arms around Vesper's neck. The vampire smiled thoughtfully, pulling slightly against Alaric's embrace so that he was leaning over him instead, their faces a good few inches apart.

A flush coloured Harry's cheeks at the words, seeing the similarities between them and him and Draco more than ever now, and hoping beyond hope that his voice had never sounded that breathy when he had whispered those words to Draco.

“Not until you are of age,” Vesper told him, his fingers smoothing lovingly over the boy's throat.
“You will always be delicious to me, perfect,” Vesper assured him, pressing closer to him and parting his lips so that his now exposed fangs were visible to both the boy beneath him and Harry. “And you are far from innocent – sometimes I think that it is you that is the demon.”

Alaric raised a finger, tracing the sharp, pearly whites of Vesper's fangs with thoughtful silence. Harry instantly felt the boy's renewed sadness swallow the bliss he had been feeling moments before. “I can't stand the thought of what they're training me to do,” he breathed, suddenly the same vulnerable, lost child that Harry had followed here again. “I don't want to kill anything. I can't. I've been raised to do it but it's unthinkable. I'm not the person they want me to be.”

Vesper offered a soft, comforting hum, brushing the backs of his knuckles over Alaric's jaw. “You must be the person you want to be, love, not anything more, or less.” He punctuated his words with a fluttering, tender kiss to the hunter's lips. “I will follow you, whatever you decide, but you must forge your own future for you own satisfaction. No one must ever rule you, no one.”

Alaric stared at him then, his brow furrowed. “You mean the way that your sire rules you?”

Vesper looked stern then. “I would break free if I could be certain that would not bring a whirlwind of devastation upon us both.” He pressed his forehead into Alaric’s then, closing his dark eyes as if to prevent his lover from seeing the sadness within. “He will never allow me to be happy, to be in love, he will never allow me to be free, Caius.”

Suddenly the memory jerked away, twisting into something different. A torrent of bittersweet memories assaulted him, moments of intimacy and heartache and trials that thoroughly convinced Harry of the couple’s devotion to one another. By the time the memory of Alaric being chained as a captive in the Bloody Mary, it had become apparent to him that from the very start, they were a star-crossed couple, hopelessly in love, saving each other from agony but doomed from the start.

It felt like he was experiencing Alaric and Vesper’s entire first two years together, both the events
and the emotions. His body shook from the intensity of Alaric’s love and despair and anguish coursing through him. It was as if those feelings were drowning from the inside out.

Then, suddenly, the final memory began, emerging from a veil of thick, white mist, with a horrifyingly familiar voice sending shivers through his skin until the hairs stood on end. He was standing in a dark room, a cavernous chamber and both Alaric and Vesper were on their knees, bowing before the snake-like being towering over them.

“And why should I accept you into the fold?” Voldemort’s whispering, foreboding voice hissed, an edge of mirth in his tone. Those serpent eyes, however, were narrowed with piqued curiosity – Voldemort knew how useful a hunter and a vampire could be to his arsenal, no doubt. “As I have learnt the hard way, vampires are proud creatures. Why would you go against your instincts and offer me your services? What precisely are your motives?”

Harry swallowed hard at that voice. It made his blood run cold more now than it ever had when he’d faced the man when he was alive. Because now it was inescapable, the glaring truth he had been running from blindly at all cost for the last few months. *I killed him,* his mind gasped, the realisation hitting him like a tonne of bricks, crushing his windpipe until he felt himself hyperventilating, gasping for breath.

*I took another’s life. I…I killed!* But he did not have time to spiral into despair; Alaric’s fear was throbbing in his veins like an electric current now.

He watched as Vesper turned his head slightly to meet Alaric’s eyes before answering, careful not to raise his eyes to Voldemort. He was just as strong as Voldemort, no doubt, but where he could not use that strength against his sire, Voldemort could, with the right incentive.

*That’s why Vesper is forgoing his pride; he’s trying to be polite, chivalrous.* Harry knew instantly why the two were here, and why they had been in Voldemort’s service the day he, Harry had found himself in the dungeon, long before Vesper found his voice.

“My sire is a proud creature, My Lord,” Vesper began, his voice filled with strained courteousness. “He seeks to take out his vengeance on my consort for my recent urge to remove myself form under his reign.” He paused, seemingly allowing Voldemort to process the words before he breathed, “I have heard of your greatness, My Lord. In exchange for protection for myself and my consort, I would happily devote my services to you.”

*He only came to Voldemort and did his bidding to keep Alaric safe from Claude,* Harry realised, not sure what he thought of either of them now. They were victims in this just like he and Draco
had been, Voldemort had had them right where he wanted them, with no way to escape. Vesper had thought he was doing what was right, was doing all he could to save the one he loved most, even things that went against his nature and soul.

_He bit Draco because he had to, to keep Alaric alive._ And Draco had killed him. He was obviously biased towards Draco’s side of the situation, but having felt what they had felt, seen the way they had found and lost each other, he found himself struggling to swallow the rising lump in his throat. He understood everything now.

A wicked, insidious laugh filled the room then, tumbling forebodingly over Voldemort’s thin, pale lips. He began to speak, but the words twisted incoherently. The world of memories around Harry began to shake, shuddering and fading in and out like a badly tuned in television set. Something outside of the spell was interfering.

_Draco?_

But then, out of the flickering white fog encroaching on the still disturbed memories came a low, echo of a voice.

“We are not that different, you and I, Harry Potter, as you have now seen.”

Harry whirled on the spot. His surroundings were still shaking unsteadily, as if the whole illusion may shatter at any moment. And yet there before him stood a fully corporeal Caius Alaric, staring thoughtfully at him. Looking at him now, Harry could see how the years had affected him. From what he had learnt from the memories, he’d spent four years as a captive of the coven before he and Vesper had gone to Voldemort, and who knew what had happened when they took up residence there. There was barely a flicker of the innocent, quiet boy left in the jaded man before him.

“You have felt my suffering, seen what I have lost, Potter,” the vision of Alaric murmured, “so similar to your own.”

Harry stiffened, remaining silent. The similarities between himself and Alaric were indeed indisputable, but he would not voice that agreement aloud. To do so would be a betrayal of Draco and although what he had seen and felt just now had changed his perspective, it had not affected how he felt about his vampire in the slightest.
“If this has been an exercise to make me turn on Draco, it has failed,” Harry said stiffly, unwillingly to surrender anymore information than that.

Alaric smiled with a pensive sorrow tainting the expression. “Oh, Potter. That was never my intention; you are far too loyal for that. No, my aim here was simply to make both you and your lover understand.”

*And to divide us on our opinions on this matter*, Harry thought. Deep down, he was not sure he could allow Draco kill Alaric, not now. His insides were still churning with the realisation that he had killed even someone as depraved as Voldemort!

“Why did Merritt and Claude lie about your relationship with Lucan Vesper?” Harry demanded, wanting to know the truth, once and for all, though neither party could be completely trusted.

Alaric sneered at the mention of Claude. “Merritt was not there all the time when I was kept at *Bloody Mary*. The lies he told you were most likely fed to him by Claude. That idiot always was a foolishly good-hearted, simple creature, it would be all too easy and satisfying for Claude to manipulate him. But just why do you think Claude Stanton wanted you to believe those lies, Potter? Think, *hard*."

Harry frowned. He didn’t know the answer to that. It made no sense!

There was a pause, and then, “I have no qualms with you,” Alaric said warningly, “but you are Malfoy’s most precious one, Harry Potter, that unfortunately makes you a prime target, by myself as well as...*others*. I will tear you from him, Potter; I will rip you from his life with all the brutality that he ripped Lucan from mine. *They* will make you wish you were dead, *they* will make me seem like a bloody saint and only when your precious vampire is despairing at your loss, will I end his miserable existence. He may even beg me for an end, before then... I understand starving to death is a vile way to die, after all. And he would starve without you, wouldn’t he?“

Harry stared at him, unable to comprehend how a child that had been unable to even harm a mouse was now talking to him as an embittered, sadistic man.

“I am more powerful than you seem to realise, especially with Draco and I joined the way we are,” Harry warned the man. He felt for him, sympathised for his plight, but it was not enough to compromise Draco’s life over. “I am not some victim, some damsel in distress. I will kill you before you touch him.”
Alaric’s smile twisted into something ugly and menacing on his tired yet handsome face then.
“You are powerful, Harry Potter, but I have more tricks up my sleeve than you seem to realise…”

* * * * *

Draco found that breathing deeply was still soothing to him, despite the fact that it was unnecessary to his existence. He inhaled, studying the looks on Weasley and Granger's faces as they formed a circle around Harry's bed. He licked his lips unconsciously when he gave a glance to Harry's still unconscious body, thinking that a multiple cast would be much easier if Harry were with them, it was him and Harry that formed an unconquerable alliance after all. Still, he would have to work with these two as best he could, for Harry's sake.

“Once we begin the spell, we must not speak until it is done. This is…delicate. One wrong word and we could cause Harry more harm than good,” Hermione began only to be cut off by Snape as he strode back into the room, the sight of Lupin close behind him a peculiar sight indeed.

“That one truth alone should be enough to deter three students from meddling in the matters of the mind,” the potions master said tersely, approaching the bed with a scowl for them all. “You would attempt such a spell without practicing it? Without mastering your joint powers? Reckless, foolhardy imbeciles,” he spat.

Lupin, for once, seemed to agree with him, his scarred, usually warm face twisted with anger. “Have you learnt nothing from last year?”

Ron raised his chin defiantly in a gesture that reminded Draco painfully of the comatose man on the bed. “We learnt to work together, to act where everyone else is afraid to, and to try, no matter how bleak things look,” he retorted, not as afraid of Snape as he had once been after facing the trials they had during the war. “Perhaps if most of the adults hadn’t been so bloody useless all our lives, the students wouldn't have had to act.”

“Mind your tongue, Weasley,” Snape snarled, “I am still your professor and while I admit, the adults in your life have been…lax in their usefulness during your trials, I am not one of them, as you recall.”

At that, Lupin studied the boy on the bed with something that looked like regret tugging at his features. “I, however, do regret my inability to do more to help you all, to help Harry when he needed an adult most.”
Draco felt like saying that yes, he, along with all the other adults in Harry's life had failed him spectacularly when he'd needed them most. Out of respect for Harry and the minute ground he had gained with the werewolf, however, he stayed silent.

Granger, meanwhile, seemed to take pity on the man. “In all fairness, after so many teachers failed us so many times the first few years here, we simply gave up relying on them,” she offered kindly, “We haven’t given anyone the chance to help us for a long time. We’re too self-reliant now—”

“And headstrong,” Lupin supplied, giving Granger a grateful smile before glancing down at Harry's prone form. “None of you have any experience whatsoever in the matters of the mind, and as much as you wish to help Harry—”

“It is long past the time when the ‘useless’ adults take responsibility for the problems they have wreaked upon the young,” finished McGonagall tartly, sweeping back her sleeves as she marched into the room, Pomfrey following close behind her. “Professor Lupin is correct, we were willing to allow children to fight our battles but we did not trust them to understand the world around them a great deal better than us at times. If you and Severus say that this is the best way to continue, then we must try. Potter and all of you deserve that much. We will cast the spell, together.”

Weasley and Granger shared a look, before drawing back, but Draco did not move. Both his vampire instincts and his human nature blanched at the thought of handing Harry's life into someone else's hands, especially so soon after he had realised…

He winced. Each time he had allowed someone else to take control, each time he had relied on another, more often than not, it had ended badly.

“Draco,” Snape said, laying a hand on his shoulder, drawing him back to reality from the void of dark possible outcomes that his mind had been reeling through. “We do not know what unconscious plain Potter is held captive in; it may help if you try to reach his mind while we cast the spell. Call him back.”

Draco knew instantly what he meant and why he had suggested it, and he was grateful to his favourite professor for giving him something to do here. He did not think he could ever physically allow himself to have no hand in his future, to be helpless again. While Severus, Lupin, Pomfrey and McGonagall arranged themselves around Harry's bed, Draco stood behind them, close enough to still see Harry but not enough to interfere.

Struggling to stifle the urge to swat them all aside and crouch protectively over Harry’s vulnerable body, Draco sank his teeth into his lip, focusing on searching for Harry's mind as the oldest in the
room began to chant. He only hoped it would not be in vain, that they would awaken the one he had only just realised he had come to love.

_They had better_, he thought, his jaw tensed as he tried to push aside the overwhelming tsunami of emotion sweeping through his mind at that realisation. _They’d better save him, or else there’s no telling what I might do to get him back._

~To Be Continued…
It was peculiar how cold and empty the castle could be. Even he, Draco had always seen it as a place of warmth and homeliness and he knew Harry felt that too. Right now, however, he had never felt so lonely. The Hospital Wing was dark with the fall of the moonless night and he sat on a chair at Harry's bedside, a single flickering candle on the bedside cabinet offering an orange, dancing light. His abilities allowed him to see his First quite well despite the gloom, however and he studied the man’s unchanged face as he lay flat on his back on the bed, unmoving.

When Severus and the others had cast the spell earlier, Harry's body had shaken, writhed as if live electricity were coursing through it. When he had slumped uselessly back to the bed however, he was still unconscious and the only movement he gave was to turn his head slightly to face Draco before remaining still again. Pomfrey had diagnosed that they had cracked the iron-clad shell of the curse that was imprisoning Harry in his own mind, had caused it to crumble before Harry's own defensive magic had seen them as a threat and shoved him from his mind, quite literally.

“Harry is probably the most powerful wizard alive right now, we keep forgetting that,” the werewolf had murmured thoughtfully.

Harry’s cold-sweat had vanished, his breathing and heart-rate had levelled and Pomfrey had deduced that it might be best to let Harry's magic heal the rest itself. For Draco, that had been almost too much to bear. The teachers had vanished, Snape with a promise to renew his search for Alaric using his own ‘contacts’ and Lupin staying last of the ‘adults’, only leaving when Pomfrey insisted that he return to his wife before she started to worry.

Granger and Weasley had stayed longest with him, just sitting quietly in the dying light until a Tempus charm had showed it well past midnight and Weasley had insisted that his girlfriend and the life within her needed rest. Now Draco was alone with his thoughts and Harry's soft breathing. He could almost be asleep, Draco thought, reaching over and dragging his smooth fingertips over the back of the man’s hand. Almost, were it not for the aching chasm of agony throbbing in his chest. He would not be at peace, not be able to close his eyes even for an ‘undead sleep’ until Harry
came back to him.

His eyes stung where they had remained opened so long, staring at his First, his lover like two gaping, silvery rifts in the darkness. He had never felt so hopeless and lost in all his life, not even when he had been tortured by Greyback for refusing Voldemort that night. And this was because of love? He was drowning in it, choking on it. *Whoever said that love was a wondrous thing was a bloody liar,* his mind spat.

Just when he was forging a life for himself again, just when he was growing in strength... He’d thought he was in control of it all, but the whole time he’d been falling for Harry. He hated Harry for making him feel this helpless, for leaving him behind to realise how he felt alone, in the most soul-destroying of situations. For making him feel so weak again, like he was about to crumble.

Alaric knew what he was doing by targeting Harry. Draco was lost without him. He thought he was becoming independent, but the truth was, he didn’t know where to turn now. All he could do was sit here and watch and wait. Like a cold, unmoving statue.

*Who are you to do this to me and then leave me here to suffer it alone?* He demanded of Harry's unconscious body, his eyes stinging treacherously. Could he even still cry? Could a vampire manage such a thing? He couldn’t even keep himself warm without Harry's soothing heat pressed against him, it something he had become far too dependant on. He growled under his breath, grinding his teeth in frustration at his helplessness.

He snarled aloud then, his fingers closing tightly around Harry's hand as he tipped his head onto the side of the bed, breathing in Harry's scent in an attempt to eradicate his despair. Harry would pull through this, he was too strong to be defeated by such a simple spell. He had already died and come back, after all. It didn’t help to tell himself what probably would be and might happen. What should. Not when Harry was still lying there, not moving.

*How dare you piss on all of the progress I’ve made in making myself strong again by making me fall for you?*! His body quavered with pent up emotion, he felt like he was going to explode. *Fuck you, Potter. Don’t you dare do this to me, then piss off and not take responsibility for it!* He leapt to his feet then, determined to pace, to run, to break something, anything to expel the tension writhing through his muscles. A hand snapping tightly around his wrist stopped him dead in his tracks.

“Wha’ve I done now?” Harry murmured croakily through his dry lip, clearing his throat groggily. Draco whirled around to see Harry's eyes blinking blearily around and found himself frozen on the spot. He dropped his wrist. Harry's hand reached out blindly to the nightstand, snatching up his glasses before setting them on his face and squirming to sit up in the bed.
The object of Draco’s affections glanced around, before settling his dazzling green eyes on him again. “I remember… I s’pose you must’ve brought me to the Hospital Wing, yeah? What’s the time?”

Draco stared at him, listening to his voice and drinking it in as if he hadn’t heard it in years. He swallowed, struggling to find his words. “It's…it's nearly two o'clock in the morning,” Draco murmured, cursing the way his voice broke treacherously. He steeled his resolve, standing a little straighter as if that would help him not to break. “You've been here since this morning.”

Harry stared at him a moment, as if it was taking his brain a while to catch up with the rest of him in waking, but then he gave a solemn nod. “It was Alaric,” he said raspily, looking around before setting his sights on the jug of water at the side of the bed. Before he could so much as reach for it, Draco had already begun pouring him a glass. Perhaps it was because he had just realised exactly how much Harry meant to him, or perhaps it was because he'd just nearly lost him but even the sight of Harry's throat working as he swigged back the water greedily was capturing his attention more than it should. I am doomed. Beyond pathetic, he hissed at himself, taking care not to aim that thought in Harry's direction. He didn't think this was something he was ready to share with anyone, especially Harry himself.

“I was trapped in his memories,” Harry continued to explain, his voice sounding more healthy now that he was more hydrated. “Alaric's, I mean.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. He'd thought Alaric was torturing him or…or worse! This attack seemed suspiciously subtle. It worried him. “How can you be sure the memories were accurate?” Draco asked cautiously.

“I could sense it,” Harry said, his words filled with conviction. “I could feel it, everything he felt, everything he feels. Trust me, Draco, his methods may be dodgy but there's no way he could conjure those emotions. I just know they were real. Alaric and Vesper, they were in love. Claude drove them to Voldemort. Vesper only did his bidding to keep himself and Alaric safe from Claude. Alaric may be twisted but he's only what others have made him. Him and Vesper…I felt how much they loved each other, I felt how Alaric felt when he lost him. They…they’re not like we thought at all, Draco.”

Draco grinded his teeth together. “I don't care if theirs was the most tragic love story ever told,” he snarled, “Alaric tortured me, Vesper changed what I am, he tore my life away with one bite and then tried to make me kill you! You will not make me feel shame in killing the bastard that ruined me, nor will you stop me from killing the man that seeks to steal away what I have managed to grab back. You may be filled with misplaced guilt for killing the Dark Lord but you will not make me feel such a wasteful thing. I am glad I killed Vesper for what he did to me, and I will take pleasure in sending Alaric to join him.”
He saw Harry flinch at the biting rage in his voice, at the bitter vengeance causing his tone to quiver. The man looked away from him, unable to meet his eyes as he said, “I don't want to make you do anything,” Harry murmured. “I just think that… Alaric and Vesper, they could've easily been us. They were forced into doing those things by circumstance, by love—”

“I cannot deny I would do exactly the same thing, exact the same pain on countless others to save you or to avenge you,” Draco cut across him, “but that would not mean the victims deserved their vengeance any less.” He studied Harry's eyes when they focused on him again, allowing his words to permeate the man's brain for a moment, allowing him to assume what he would from that statement, before he spoke again. “Their suffering and loss does not justify what they did to innocent people, to your friend Granger, to you, to me. Vesper deserved to pay with his life for ruining mine and Alaric the same.”

“You speak of taking life so casually!” Harry snapped, glaring at him, “I can't… I can't comprehend it! You used to value life, I know you did! I saw you hesitate, saw what being ordered to kill Dumbledore did to you, even though you hated!”

Draco felt his own expression harden. “A lot has happened since then, Potter and I have changed because of it. You have too. I do not think of life and death in the same way. Life matters to me, my own, my parents’, Severus's, yours. Death matters to me in various ways. I cannot help changing—”

He was cut off by a frustrated scream tearing from Harry's lips. “You're talking like a vampire,” Harry snapped, “not like Draco. You sound like Claude bloody Stanton. Can't you understand why it bothers me to hear you talk about killing someone that way?”

“The same way you can't understand why it bothers me, that you believe killing the likes of Voldemort should be an offense and try to push that belief onto others. We are all different, I am entitled to my vengeance as you are entitled to mourn the Dark Lord where no one else will, if you so choose.” His tone was a little more bitter and spiteful than he'd intended, but it was too late to take it back now. His frustration with what he had realised only a few hours ago and nearly losing Harry was still coursing through him. He couldnt think straight.

“I don't choose to feel that,” Harry spat, “I know it's mental, I know I shouldn't care but I took life and it's tearing me up inside to know that!”

Draco stared at his First then. This was probably the first time the man had ever admitted what had truly happened to Voldemort and he was admitting it to him before anyone else. That trust had stunned him senseless for a moment.
“You…you can’t see why your carelessness for life other than those you cherish bothers me?” Harry whispered now, staring down at where his fingers were fiddling with the blankets distractedly. “I saw a good boy become an embittered lunatic, I felt what it took to make that change. There’s nothing left of the boy he was.” He paused then, chewing his lip before raising his chin to glare at Draco. “I can see how easy it is to lose yourself in negative emotions. I can see how easily I could fall down the same path, how you could and I…I can’t bear it. I can’t bear to see you become just like Alaric.”

“That will never happen,” Draco swore, his voice thick with intensity as he lowered himself onto the side of the bed, holding Harry's impassioned gaze. “You will never be Alaric, or Claude, you will only ever be Harry – infuriatingly good and selfless, mine.” He leant in, aiming for a kiss but Harry turned his head away at the last moment.

“I’m more concerned about you,” the man breathed, “I…I can’t help but see us in Alaric and Vesper–”

Draco leant in again, locking his eyes with Harry's, the green of them shimmering in the candlelight. “Because we feel so strongly for each other?” he asked huskily, their lips almost touching. The words were dancing on his tongue, desperate to whisper his most intimate secret into Harry's mouth. Three words that had the power to shatter his immortal body. But the movement of Harry's lips forming words distracted him.

“Because…because I know that without thought you would sacrifice your pride, bow at Voldemort’s feet, kill, die for me,” Harry replied. “You would become a monster for me, just like Vesper did for Alaric and I don’t want history to repeat itself. I don’t want you to end up an emotionless beast like Claude and I don’t…I can’t lose you.”

Staring at his First, his lover for a moment, Draco drank in the tone, the heartache in those words. What Harry had felt in Alaric’s memories was real, it had affected him every bit as Alaric had anticipated it would, no doubt and Draco had to wonder just what the purpose was of the hunter’s method of attack. Why show Harry his memories? Why make him feel them? How does this benefit him?

“You won’t lose me,” Draco vowed against those lips, one cool hand sliding up to rest over Harry's heart and relish in the feel of it beating there. It seemed even more of a phenomenon than before, after being faced with losing him. “I will only ever be concerned about those close to me, and I will always kill for them, for you without hesitation. That is who and what I am. But taking a life to protect one that I…cherish will not change me–”
Harry shoved suddenly at his chest, fixing him with a solemn look. “Killing for vengeance will. Don’t kill Alaric, Draco. Give him to the Ministry for what he’s done, send him to Azkaban but don’t lose yourself in vengeance.”

“Don’t preach to me about things you don’t understand, Harry,” Draco said abruptly, giving Harry's heart a lingering caress before sliding to his feet.

“Don’t talk to me like a child, I understand death and life and the whole bloody lot as much as anyone, especially seeing as I’ve done both!” Harry snapped.

Draco’s hands clenched into fists. Harry really did have the power to wrench every emotion from his body within the space of a few minutes. “You don’t understand the mind of a killer. Vesper took my life and twisted it into something bloody and dark. Whatever his reasons, he killed the boy I used to be and not even you can make me feel sorry for exacting my revenge. You also don’t understand that Caius Alaric will never, ever stop until he’s made me suffer for what I did. The best route to which is through you. He’ll never stop—”

“Don’t you dare make it out like you’re doing this for me,” Harry growled warningly. “Don’t you dare paint anymore blood on my hands. You’re doing this for yourself!”

“Yes,” Draco agreed impassively. “But your safety is the reason I won’t give in to you, not this time. If this were only about my vengeance I would give you what you ask, Harry, believe me.”

Those eyes focused on him for a moment with such a myriad of emotions shining within that it made his own ache trying to decipher them. Harry's jaw tensed, and Draco watched the muscles and tendons work as he grinded his teeth before murmuring, “I know that sometimes the hard decisions are already made for us by circumstance, I know that. I knew I had to kill Voldemort, I know now, despite my feelings on the matter that there was no other way. It’s not what you’re saying that I’m disputing, it’s the ease of which you’re committing to it that disturbs me.”

At that, it was Draco’s turn to snarl with frustration. He lunged forwards, seizing Harry by the shoulders tightly and barely refraining from slamming him back against the headboard. As it was, his arms shook with the badly restrained desire. “I want to bloody shake you sometimes, Harry Potter! You’re letting your guilt for killing that snake cloud your judgement, you’re letting it dictate your beliefs. Why am I the one that’s wrong for not tearing myself up over wanting to kill someone to protect those I love? It’s you who has it wrong! Voldemort was responsible for the deaths of thousands, you saved everyone by ending his life, you saved those you love most. How can you hate yourself for that? You…”
He was shaking now. “I want to smash your head against a wall until you see how fucking stupid your mentality is! Stop playing that martyr role you love so much and open those eyes of yours! I’ve played along to your pity-ditty because you’ve been through a lot. You’ve died for goodness sake and that’s after the vile upbringing you had, losing your parents, losing your godfather – but now here’s the fact, Potter. Stop letting that misplaced guilt rule your life, because that’s half the bloody reason your magic is eating you alive from the inside out! It’s his magic, Harry, it’s dark magic and it will never be yours until you stop letting him control you.”

“He’s not controlling me,” Harry began, but his voice was quiet, almost inaudible even to Draco’s ears.

“He is,” Draco insisted. “Until you realise that killing him was the best thing you could’ve done, until you set yourself free from the guilt of taking his miserable excuse for a life you will be forever in his power.”

Harry squirmed out of his grasp. “S-Stop making this about me! Stop directing this at me and… Just stop it! I don’t hate myself. I don’t – you don’t know anything about me you pompous arse!”

Surveying his lover critically, Draco took a step back, giving him the space he obviously wanted. “I know you better than anyone, better than you know yourself, you absolute prat,” he replied simply. “But any fool can see you’re at breaking point with this. So break, let it out, Potter, scream it out if that’s what it takes to let this unwarranted guilt go. What are you so afraid of?”

He could have sworn those eyes were shining with treacherous wetness then, but any tears were soon hidden by a furious scowl. “I’m not afraid. And if you really believe that my concerns for you killing Alaric stems solely from my… my guilt over killing Voldemort then that shows how little you know me, Malfoy.”

With that, the man laid back on the bed, turning so that his back was facing him. It was a rejection if ever Draco had seen one and his innards clenched in agony at the sight of it. Harry was turning away from him. Alaric’s plan was working.

“Harry,” he began, not liking the way the man had used his last name, but Harry cut him off.

“I don’t want to see you right now,” the man said, keeping his back to him. “Just… just leave me be, Malfoy.”
For a moment or two, Draco could not move, he remained rooted to the spot, his mind and mouth raging in search of something, anything to say to get Harry to face him again. Something told him, however, that they both needed their time with their thoughts, despite how repugnant he found it. Unable to shake the feeling that this had been Alaric’s exact intentions when he had drawn Harry into his feelings and memories, Draco forced himself to about face.

“Goodnight, Harry,” he murmured, before vanishing through the door, his lukewarm, dead heart feeling more alive than it ever had when he was human – alive with pain. Love was agonising.

* * *

There was a heavy atmosphere in Siddlebury cottage over the Christmas holidays, a lingering shadow like a single grey cloud in a perfectly blue sky that threatened to douse the festivities with gloom. The tempest held off, however and Harry found himself smiling more often than not, particularly as the days lead up to Christmas and he watched Tonks and Remus sneak about to fetch last minute presents for Teddy and their glee in decorating the house.

It was novel, being included in that, and despite the heavy weight of gloominess hanging over his head, there was a fluttering of happiness inside his chest as he helped them dress the cottage with an assortment of muggle and wizarding Christmas decorations. Andromeda was staying too for the holidays, filling the house with festive cheer and loving warmth that could rival Mrs Weasleys.

The Weasleys.

Harry was worried about how things were going at The Burrow and with Hermione’s parents too. They were going to tell both of them on Christmas day. He was sure that their news would be accepted with love, but he was concerned about how his friends might be worrying themselves over the situation before they’d even confronted their families. Hermione in particular. She looked as if she was carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders recently. He just hoped Mrs Weasley didn't scold as much as he thought she might before embracing them both with loving arms.

It was now Christmas Eve, and after a stunning meal made by Andromeda (Tonks's cooking wasn't quite edible yet) he had made his excuses, smiled and headed up to his room. Christmas cards were hanging down by the bay window where he sat, staring out at the frosty evening. Snow clouds were hanging in the sky, promising snow but otherwise the night was clear and calm. Leaning his head against the comfortingly cool glass, Harry could not help but miss the soothing coldness of Draco's body as he stared at his cards. Draco hadn't sent one in reply to the one he had sent him, after they'd returned home at the end of term.
I probably hurt him by saying I didn’t want to see him, Harry thought. He had dwelled on it a lot since returning home, and perhaps Draco had been right that Harry’s concerns for him stemmed from his own guilt concerning Voldemort, but it wasn’t purely that. It might change him immeasurably if he comes to see taking life as a necessity in all scenarios, Harry thought, running his fingers across the thin layer of mist that had gathered on the glass from condensation.

He’d bothered Kreacher nearly every hour since he’d sent the package to Draco, and he was sure that Remus and Tonks had noticed, to his mortification, but there had been nothing. Kreacher had followed him here to Siddlebury and now lived in a roomy little cupboard under the stairs, the irony of which was not lost on Harry. Harry had even allowed the elf to ‘sneak’ some of his treasures from Grimmauld into the hideaway, which looked almost like a little bedroom of its own now – much better than his own cupboard at Privet Drive.

The elf was healing slowly, his murmuring comments had grown fewer and fewer and he even happily took on the majority of Siddlebury's housework and would appear suddenly whenever Teddy tossed a bowl of baby food on the floor or similar. In fact, Teddy was so delighted with him that he would often make a mess on purpose just to see him. It pleased Harry that the elf was slowly healing. He would always be a bitter old coot, Harry thought, but it was clear that the busy environment and endless things to do was having a positive effect on the creature.

Perhaps Hermione really is wrong about House Elves, and Dobby really was one of a kind, Harry thought, it was an undeniable fact, that Kreacher loved to work. Draco had suggested Harry set up filtering charms for his mail, but that was also a task that Kreacher had taken on with relish. A proud, almost pompous look would befall his features whenever he magically checked all of Harry's mail, filtering out the gems from the rubble so that the public could not bother him. Siddlebury was under extensive protection charms of course, but that would not stop the smart owls from finding him just by name alone. Owls like Hedwig.

His gut clenched at the memory of his old friend. Hedwig would have instinctively known Harry's feelings and pecked at the vampire's fingers until she'd got a decent enough reply from him, even if he hadn't asked for one aloud. She’d known his feelings even when he didn't, just like Draco often seemed to.

With a sigh, he stroked the iridescent scar of Draco's mark at his throat and felt it tingle pleasantly. At that, a startling realisation shot through him. Draco would be needing to feed, he hadn't since two days before the end of term. Oh shit! Harry thought, leaping to his feet, his eyes wide, panic sweeping through him. What if something happened at his parents? What if he's starving again? What if he hasn't replied because he…?

“Kreacher!” Harry called. The elf appeared almost instantly before him, wearing a ridiculously large christmas hat which had two holes for his large bat-like ears. He was also wearing an old green jumper of Remus’s that hung down to his toes and a ring of multi-coloured tinsel around his
neck that Teddy had insisted on putting there.

“Master is being mopey in the festive season,” Kreacher mumbled gruffly. “Kreacher is thinking you should be enjoying yourself with the others.”

“I know, I know,” Harry said impatiently, he thought he had been enjoying his first holiday with his ‘family’ quite well, he didn’t feel awkward at all, in fact, but there was no time to argue. “I need you to go to Malfoy manor for me and tell Draco Malfoy I need to see him. Don’t take any excuses, make sure you give that message to him directly. It’s urgent.”

At that, creature gave a deep bow. “At once, Master,” Kreacher replied, clearly gleeful at being given a more important order than even safe-guarding Harry's post. Wait. That was it. A pop signalled Kreacher’s departure, just as Harry realised that he had neglected to ask the elf just how Alaric’s owl had managed to pass through his strict safe-guarding. When he was at Hogwarts, the owls were directed to Kreacher before being sent onto him. So how had that one reached him?

He could only ask Kreacher when the elf returned, but that would have to take a back seat until Draco was taken care of. What if he was rendered insane with hunger the way he had been at the start of term in Snape’s rooms? What if something had happened to prevent Draco from answering his card?

Moments that felt like hours passed, during which he’d paced until he swore he was wearing a hole in the floor. That was until he struggled to find rationality in the situation and stopped himself. Draco was probably just angry at him, probably just giving him the (only partially deserved) silent treatment.

And he’s going to be hungry, Harry thought, caressing the scarred side of his throat again as he headed into the small shower-room that lead off of his bedroom. He still smelled faintly of the baby sick Teddy had generously vomited up on him after a game of ‘aeroplane’ after dinner. Draco won’t want to smell that when he feeds, Harry thought, trying to give himself a practical distraction.

The sound of the steamy water cascading into the shower cubicle helped to drown out his thoughts for a moment. But only a moment. A growl of frustration left his lips as he slammed his palms hard into the tiles, the water rushing over his skin. Not even that could help to soothe him. He clawed at the tiles with his nails. Draco wouldn’t have left it this long to see him even if he hated him, he physically couldn’t!

His hunger would drive him to me despite any discrepancies between us. So why isn’t he here?
He didn’t think he had felt this panicked or lost or afraid since Dumbledore had died. He didn’t know what to do, or where to begin in even processing the limitless awful possibilities that were rushing through his head with all the speed of a freight train. All of the progress he had made in not blindly bolting into every problem, not believing he was the only cure for them all went out the window when it came to Draco. No one could protect him as well as he could, not even his parents. If Draco had been hurt because he had severed their contact in the Hospital Wing that day, he didn't know what he'd do.

He dried himself purposefully hard, deeming his skin unworthy of more delicate attention before dragging on his bath robe and tying it around his waist. Draco, he thought, directing his voice towards wherever Draco now was.

Suddenly, his mark gave a jolting throb and his hand flew to his throat, just as a loud pop tore through the silence of his room. He flew through the bathroom door, skidding to a halt, relief rushing through his veins like fire through a woodland at who he saw standing there.

Kreacher gave Draco a low, respectful bow before vanishing again with a pop, leaving Harry alone with a flustered looking Draco Malfoy. The vampire looked almost white, his eyes were black with hunger but he seemed frantic about something than ran much deeper than that. Harry opened his mouth to question him, but before he could get a word out, Draco had shot to his side, gripping his biceps with his hands tightly. Enough to bruise.

"Harry," the vampire gasped, his dark eyes scanning his face for something. Harry couldn't guess what. "What's wrong? Are you alright?"

Harry blinked. "Am I–? Why didn't you answer my card? Why haven't you come to me to feed? I thought something bloody awful must’ve happened to you!"

"Me?! Your elf came charging into my home nearly rugby tackling my elves and my mother and not stopping until he got to me!” Draco snapped. "He kept shrieking at the top of his lungs that you needed me and then I heard you call my name in my head – what the bloody hell am I supposed to think?!"

Staring at his vampire, dumfounded, Harry cried, “And what the fuck were you doing ignoring my card before that?”

"The card you didn’t even sign?” Draco taunted.
If he hadn’t been so fraught with worry mere moments ago, Harry might have blushed at that. He hadn’t known what to write in the magical, glistening Christmas card that snowed on cue whenever opened, accompanied by the soft, subtle ringing of sleigh bells. He didn’t know what to write partially because he knew Draco was expecting an apology he only partially deserved from him and partly because he felt a bit silly. What did a man write in a card to his boyfriend? Did they even send cards?

“I…I didn’t… You knew it was me, you’d be able to smell it, isn’t it the thought that’s meant to be important?” Harry retorted defensively. “How am I supposed to know what men do and don’t do when they’re—”

“Indeed I could sense the sender, even your… feelings you were experiencing when you sent it,” Draco cut across him, his lips suddenly breaking into a smirk. “It makes a difference to the scent, you know? And I wish you wouldn’t concern yourself with what men should do, we’ve only ourselves to please. We can do as we wish.”

“Fine, well I wish you’d replied to me so I didn’t start thinking you’d starved to death or worse!” Harry said, feeling a little awkward now he realised he had worried over nothing.

“It was you that claimed to desire space in the first place, so don’t turn into a little nag on me,” Draco admonished. “If you must know it was the very thoughtfulness of your card and accompanying gift that made me realise that it would be a crime to return to you without an equally worthy offering.”

At that, Harry fidgeted on the spot awkwardly. The vampire stepped closer again, his hands sliding down Harry's sides and his hunger darkened eyes studying him as Harry managed out, “it wasn’t anything that amazing…”

“You are so bloody shy about showing affection that any display of any kind is a monumental one,” Draco corrected him. “And besides which, like the Solaris Sphere, this was something you gave me because you care for me, wasn’t it?” With that, the vampire reached into the folds of his crisp white shirt, retrieving a mortifyingly familiar golden chain, on which hung an ornate snake charm, a tiny vial of crimson fluid clutched between its fangs. His blood.

He had been worried it was a morbid thought, but his blood was precious to Draco for various reasons and more than that, the gift was an ever-present safe-guard to Draco’s life. If he ever needed the replenishing abilities of Harry's blood, he had magically contained enough to last him a few days in there. It was only the practicality of the gift that had allowed Harry to move beyond the uncertainty of it at all, but if Draco’s expression was any way to tell, the gift had been the right
Those dark eyes were smouldering with feelings he couldn’t even begin to separate. “I am sure you must remember me telling you not to play down something that I consider a highly treasured gift,” the vampire murmured. “Even if you haven’t the words to express how you feel, your gift express them quite well, I was…taken aback by it, touched. I didn't think there was anything I could say or do in answer that would be adequate enough other than an equally personal treasure.”

“So that's why you made me worry about you? Why you ignored me?” Harry asked, his anger was diminished slightly by Draco's words but the anxiety had bubbled up to a froth in his belly and was taken a while to quieten. “Because you thought I'd rather see a gift than you? How many days does it take to buy a present anyway?”

Draco's smirk broadened, probably due to the dwindling aggression in his voice. He could tell his fury was fading now that he was here. He knows that I missed him, that I worried about him, Harry thought, pulling his bath robe tighter around his body, quite aware suddenly that he was all-too exposed as his flush travelled down his face, throat and across his chest.

“The gift had to be the perfect one, I searched rigorously to be sure of the quality,” Draco explained, as if this were the most logical thing in the world. “I had intended to arrive later on tonight with it, I'd only jst finished wrapping it, you see before your elf burst in on me, however…”

At this point, Draco took a step to the side, gesturing to the large package that Harry had not seen until now. It was finely wrapped in smooth, matt gold paper with glossy silver ribbon that glittered as he inclined his head to look on it better. “Before you discredit my excuse, perhaps you should evaluate your gift for yourself?”

Harry blinked stupidly. Recieving gifts was still something he found an awkward yet thrilling experience. It was like being reduced to a child again, making up for the lack of generous, heart-felt offerings he had had whilst growing up, most probably. Even now, Harry's gaze flickered from Draco to the finely wrapped package uncertainly.

“What on earth has he spent so much time choosing for me? He wondered, dropping down onto his knees to begin tugging at the delicately tied silver ribbon. “How is it that your wrapping skills are so pristine?” Harry asked. It was almost a shame to disturb the fine bow.
“Mother used to get me to help her wrap the presents for her friends and father's colleagues when I was young, it is something I just learned,” Draco said dismissively. “Open it.”

At that, Harry gave in to curiosity and the rush of excitement and tore the wrappings away. His breath caught at what was left beneath it. There was a fine yet sturdy looking silver cage with glistening clasps and joints and there within on the perch sat a white-breasted barn owl. Her golden eyes stared up at him as he surveyed her, her dusty honey coloured wings stretching slightly as if she were trying to impress him with her plumege.

Harry could not help but grin at that. The little creature reminded him oddly of Draco in that way; Draco also liked to show off for him. *Maybe that’s why he chose this one, because it’s like him,* he thought as he pushed the clasp open on the cage, offering his forearm for the owl to hop onto.

“It’s a she,” Draco clarified for him, his tone filled with apprehension, as if he were unsure of Harry's reaction to his ‘gift’.

She shimmied gracefully onto his arm, and Harry straightened up, watching the soft light of the room dance across her downy feathers. She couldn't have been more than forty centimetres tall, surprisingly light and was both like and yet completely different from Hedwig. He had never gotten another owl, he hadn't been able to face choosing one, not after he had lost his precious friends. But Draco, he had chosen perfectly.

“She's beautiful,” Harry murmured in awe, caressing the owl's breast feathers gently. She stretched subtly, welcoming the touch. “Does she have a name?” For the first time since the wrapping had been torn away, he looked at Draco and found a warm, doting look touching his features. The vampire was staring at him, positively enamoured.

“You don't want to name her?” Draco asked with a curious lilt in his voice. Harry looked back to the owl thoughtfully.

“I want you to.”

“The Latin name of her species is *Tyto Alba,*” Draco announced after a moment. “I would suggest Alba?”

The owl gave a baleful hoot and Harry smirked when he realised that was the creature’s way of
telling him his hand had stopped its stroking. She seemed incredibly focused on him, hungry for attention. *Just like Draco,* he thought with amusement, lifting the cage with his other hand and setting it on the side. He left the generously sized door open for Alba to hop in and out as she pleased, before coaxing her back onto the perch. She fluffed her wings, seemingly eager for more attention and from Harry's side came a small laugh.

“She likes you already,” Draco mused, stepping forward and offering Harry a large bag of Eeylops owl treats, pressing the one in his hand into Alba’s outreaching claw. “That should pacify her. She’s a voracious little thing, I’m glad you like her.”

*Voracious. Insatiable, just like you,* Harry's mind supplied.

“She’s perfect,” Harry said, meaning it. He winced then. “I can’t believe I bought you jewellery with my blood in…” He groaned. What had he been thinking? Draco’s gift was so thought out, so personal and full of…love. *Mine was full of his favourite food!*

A soft flutter of a laugh drifted over his ears, his only warning before Draco was standing chest-to-chest with him his fingers caressing the line of Harry's jaw until Harry lifted his chin and met his eyes. “It was more than that,” Draco breathed, his words dancing across Harry's slightly parted lips. Harry had accidentally directed those thoughts to Draco, evidently. “It means more to me than blood, as do you.”

Harry's skin tingled with the tide of blood suffusing his cheeks with colour. He breathed out shakily, searching for the rational conversation he had been practicing, playing over and over in his head every night since he had told Draco to leave him be. Despite the rehearsal, it was now nothing more than a garbled mess in his head. “I…” He chewed on the inside of his lip, searching for his nerve. “I killed Voldemort,” he managed out. “I saw things, felt things in Alaric’s memories that not only made me afraid for you but me too. I still don’t want you to kill Alaric but I…I saw Voldemort and I…I wasn’t sorry, or guilty. I wasn’t…”

Why was it that words were so easily thrown about on some occasions and yet were so difficult to come by on others?

“This...feeling, this denial you all say I have. I’ve realised it’s not guilt, I’m not guilty that I ended him, I’m not regretful. I’m just…I’m afraid how little I hesitated when I cast that spell. I…I staggered, but I cast it with every ounce of power in me, I unleashed the most brutal, efficient spell the books of our ancestors yielded to me and I took a life. And it wasn’t as difficult as it used to be.”
A deafening silence fell through the room, during which Harry glanced to Alba again. She was tugging happily with her beak at the treat she held in her talons. He smiled sadly. “Hedwig was only one of the loved ones I lost to him,” he whispered. “But when I was faced with Bellatrix in the Department of Mysteries when I was fifteen, I couldn’t even cast the Crucius curse properly. I was…I was a good person, I couldn’t kill. I’ve…I’ve changed. I’ve killed. I’m not the boy I was anymore. I – I killed far too easily. I’m not as good as I once was anymore.”

There it was, the confusion, the fear, the truth out there in the open. He’d finally done exactly what Draco and everyone else had urged him to do. He’d admitted it. His darkest secret. Only, perhaps it was the way he said it, but it sounded quite foolish once the words were actually in the air.

Draco looked at him critically. “You listen to me, Harry Potter,” the vampire began rigidly. “Every man has their flaws, their darkness inside of them, but that doesn’t make them bad. By comparison, I am the devil, you know. You aren’t perfect, Harry, but you are far from bad. You saved people — everyone. You’re brave and foolish and caring, you care so bloody much it’s driving you insane!”

Harry scoffed but Draco seized him roughly at the sound, passion burning in his dark eyes. “You listen to me, Potter,” he growled. “You – you are the purest, most kind, warm-hearted person in my life. You have the power to light me up from the inside like my own bloody sun. You’d give your life to a stranger in an instant. If every ‘bad’ man was like you then the world would be a lot better off. Your worst flaw is that you worry whether your good deeds were done for the best! I’ve seen enough evil in my life to know it well, you are a good man, Harry. So let the past go, for yourself, for your friends. For me.”

Speechless for a moment, Harry just stared at the vampire, this man, his lover, stunned by the truth he was speaking. Let go? It sounded so simple but felt so much harder. And yet, the task seemed to be a less arduous one with those darkened eyes looking avidly into his own.

A hurricane of emotion and pain and adoration spiralled from the dark pit in his stomach that had been weighing him down for so long, surging up to explode in his chest. His eyes stung with the overwhelming relief of the burden finally being lifted from his shoulders alone. He had made the first difficult, shaky step, Draco, his friends, they would help him shoulder this weight from now on. The release was so profound he felt quite giddy with it.

A small, nervous laugh brushed past his lips before he launched himself across the short distance between him and Draco, slamming his mouth against the vampire’s. The sound was swallowed quickly by those lips, devoured along with the explosion of emotion that was threatening to drown him from the inside. He wrapped his arms around Draco’s neck, gasping frantically into the moist cavern of his mouth, lashing that tongue with his own.
If there had ever been a doubt left in his mind about Draco, those qualms had been eradicated by those words.

With a groan of bliss, Harry drew back from the kiss wetly, his eyes shining as they surveyed Draco. Whatever these feelings where that he felt for Draco, they were the strongest he had ever felt about anyone in his entire life. Without a shred of uncertainty, Harry raised his unsteady hands to the ties of his bath robe, tugging it open until it shuddered down his body, pooling at his feet.

A thousand different things were happening for the first time with the vampire before him. No one had ever known this much about him nor seen so much of him so intimately in all his life, and he didn’t think anyone ever would, either. But most prominent of them all, he had never wanted so much in all his days.

“What are you playing at, Potter?” Draco asked huskily, his fangs exposed in an uncertain yet indisputably aroused smirk.

Harry took a step towards him, chin raised despite his nervousness. “I want you,” he replied evenly, “I want you to take me, on my bed and I want you to give me the best bloody orgasm of my life while you’re inside of me.” His skin was flushed with his words but his voice did not so much as tremble. He tilted his head slightly, feeling the arousal rush off Draco’s body in thick, heady waves. He could still taste the vampire’s spittle on his lips. “Are you up to the challenge, Malfoy?”

A yelp left his lips as he was seized and thrown unceremoniously onto the bed. The frame gave a great creak but held out, even when Draco pounced on him with a snarl of pleasure, straddling Harry's legs as he pressed a hungry kiss to his lips. Harry arched his naked body up into the vampire’s clothed one, panting eagerly as that tongue ravished his mouth. “Oh, definitely up to it, Potter,” Draco answered heatedly, grinding back into Harry's hips as he shrugged off his shirt.

Harry's fingers glided down that slowly warming pale skin, brushing the flat of his palms across those nipples, those ribs, the vampire’s taut stomach. The muscles tightened beneath Harry's touch. “Is this your way of making me forget that I was worried out of my mind for you?” Harry asked, “that I still don’t want you to kill Alaric? By flaunting your body at me?” There was a teasing lilt in his voice, but his words were serious. He hadn’t forgotten about one of their more pressing problems. It was just that being with Draco in the most intimate way possible, right now seemed more important than anything else.

“Do I amaze you, Potter?” Draco murmured, tilting Harry's chin up and caressing the taut line of his throat with his fangs and lips. Harry's adam's apple moved under his attentions and a low, rumbling groan vibrated through his throat. “Tonight is about us, no one else.” He punctuated his
words by nipping gently at his collarbone before dipping down to blow lightly over his erect, tanned nipple. It tightened under his breath and Harry rocked up into his hips, closing his eyes as he willingly surrendered to thinking about nothing but how perfect Draco felt against his body.

“Yes,” the chosen one agreed hazily, jerking suddenly from his delirium by feeling something blunt pressed against his lips. This was his only warning before liquid trickled down his throat. He recognised the taste immediately and drank down the Temporentia Sensium before opening his eyes to gaze up at Draco. Even through the fog of hunger and lust, Draco had forced himself to remember the Temporentia Sensium, had put his, Harry’s safety before even his own pleasure, even when he was finally getting the one thing he had most likely been thinking about for weeks.

*He cares about me,* Harry thought, warmth sweeping through him at the notion. He was the most important thing to Draco, above all else. He had never been that to anyone. It felt good. He wanted Draco to feel that same specialness, wanted him to be clear once and for all how important he was to Harry, even if Harry didn't know what that truly meant. His tongue darted out to moisten his lips.

“I have never trusted anyone, cared enough for anyone, let anyone in close enough to be this intimate with me,” Harry murmured heatedly, holding Draco's gaze and bearing his soul through their locked eyes so that Draco could have no room to misinterpret him. “I've never wanted anyone so much. Needed them, I feel like I need you to…to complete me.”

Draco gave a dazed smile at that and Harry flushed darker than ever before, wrapping his legs tightly round Draco's and closing his eyes. He couldn't hold that gaze as he spoke his next words. “I…I need you. I want you. Take me, please. Make me…yours.”

There was no reply, only the soft sound of his and Draco's breathing, his own frantic heartbeat. That was until a kiss brushed his lips with feather-light gentleness. “With pleasure,” Draco purred in answer, his voice filled with all the heady, intense pleasures to come. Foreshadowing the best night of Harry Potter's life.

~To Be Continued...
One would have thought that the blissful silence of his own home during the Christmas holidays would have provided him with the ability to not only get a great deal further in his research, but also relax more. Neither were possible. Severus Snape knocked back a large gulp of whisky, before trying again to make his body relax in his chair. It went limp but remained tense with anxiety. His search for Alaric was dependant on another, another who should be arriving to visit him shortly, and his relaxation was impaired by his concern for not only Draco, but Potter as well.

They were both under so much pressure, in so much danger from various difference forces and amongst all that, had only one more chance to make their Hogwarts’ years count. And as their teacher and Draco’s confidant, it is my responsibility to aid them in all of it. He covered his face with his hands, a sign of exhaustion he could afford to indulge in when he was alone. The terrible two in question would be away from his watchful gaze for some days – could they keep themselves out of trouble that long?

Emphatically not, he mentally groaned, taking another swig of whisky. Had he really been naïve enough to believe that with Voldemort gone he could rinse his hands of all outside responsibilities? He scoffed at the notion. He would forever be burdened with safe-guarding them both. And you would not have it any other way, his mind supplied. Only you can protect them both to this high standard. You’re the only one practiced in it.

A small, oddly fond smile touched Severus’s lips then and he raised his glass in a solitary toast. “To seven years experience in babysitting the Malfoy and Potter heirs,” he said, trying to pinpoint the exact moment he had come to care for them both. He found himself unable to do so. Even as he drained the glass of alcohol.

His home at Spinner’s End was as dark and dingy as ever, but this room, his library was his only retreat from the bad memories of the house. The furniture was mahogany and everything was dressed in rich emerald and luxurious burgundy fabrics. There was a comforting fire in the hearth flickering vivaciously, causing fingers of light to caress the room with warmth. Yes, this was his
sanctuary, one that he could hide himself away in and confess his fatherly affection to Malfoy and Potter without concern for his reputation. Where he could come unravelled for a while, making up for his uptight, strict rules of living outside of these four walls.

It would have been nice to unravel with someone, he thought sometimes, but he had never been accustomed to a lover’s company, or even a friend’s and so solitude would serve him just as well. He had learned to find as much comfort in his own company as he would ever find in a lover’s arms. At least he thought so.

Suddenly, a subtle, tuneful ringing of a bell sang through from the hall. Severus set his empty crystal tumbler down, getting to his feet and making his way out into the dim hallway. It was methodically clean, of course, but bare. It wasn’t as if he ever had guests – not usually anyway, and he would never linger in the hall himself, so there was little point in dressing up. With only himself to please, there was no harm in living logically and practically as opposed to lavishly.

A quick series of cautious spells clarified that the creature the other side of the door was the one he had invited here tonight. His hand danced across his pocket as he slipped his wand inside, making sure it was a visible threat to the guest, before opening the door. An infuriatingly warm smile greeted him, a far too friendly person inviting himself over the threshold and giving his blank hall a once-over before finally letting his bright hazel eyes rest on him again.

Eyes that were alight with both mischievousness and desire. Both things Severus had no patience for from this person.

“Oh, do come in, Merritt,” Snape bit out scathingly, closing the door and hearing his multitude of security spells lock back into place. He lead the vampire into the first door on the right, his library.

“You’re in a delightful mood,” Merritt laughed jovially, sweeping through the study as if he owned it and approaching the fire. He seemed attracted to the warmth as Draco was, Snape noted. That was interesting, he would have to make a note of that. All ‘good’ vampires seemed to be drawn to the light, whereas those like Claude relished the darkness, the cold that suited their bleak, tainted hearts perfectly.

Merritt was irritating for certain, but he was in the same position as Draco, that had been obvious even before Snape had taken it upon himself to do a little ‘research’ on the man he had invited into his home. Merritt could be a useful tool in finding Alaric and also ensuring Claude was properly dead. But he had not survived years as a spy by charging in headlong without caution. He had scraped every corner to ensure he knew everything there was to know about Merritt Appleby before he had opened the door to him.
Hiding behind that warm smile and boyish handsomeness was a life and afterlife of pain and suffering. That explained his thirst for freedom now, his desire for love and passion and warm companionship, especially with an unsuitable partner. But he shall find none of them with me, Severus thought resolutely, approaching his liquor cabinet.

“Would you care for a drink?” he offered politely. His features immediately darkened at the look that crossed Merritt’s cherubic face.

“Why, professor, I thought you’d never ask—”

“An alcoholic beverage, you single-minded degenerate,” Severus snapped brusquely, pouring himself another whisky regardless. He would need his strength for tonight. Merritt was a great test to his patience.

“No thank you, Professor,” Merritt grinned, his fangs glistening seductively in the soft light. “So what exactly was the purpose of your calling me here, if not to sample the pleasures my body can offer?” He punctuated his words by slinking towards him.

Severus shuddered slightly, he had no doubt of the pleasure Merritt could offer him, no doubt either that he would enjoy the vampire immensely. What he doubted was that it was worth the trouble, however. As appealing as it was, the idea of having his own young lover (young looking at least) he was bitter and set in his ways, he doubted it could ever end in anything but heartache.

Better just to not try and not be hurt. It had taken decades for him to get over Lily Evans, after all. He could not survive that kind of pain again.

“It occurred to me that you are…trustworthy. More so than your other undead peers at least and you can be of incredible use to my cause,” Severus said, surveying the vampire carefully. That foolishly impish expression did not drop from the blond’s face. “You have never been free, never had control of your own life and so do not have the means to begin one, not yet anyway.”

Merritt cocked his head slightly, showing that Severus had piqued his interest in more than one way tonight already. “And I suppose if I fulfil my usefulness to you, you will give me the ‘means’ to begin my life anew?” the blond asked curiously.

Severus offered him a small, flicker of a smile. “You are a bright one, that is most promising.”
At that, Merritt glided across the minute space left between them, his full lips curving into a seductive grin as he scanned Severus’s face with intimate closeness. “And what is it you would have me do, professor?” the vampire asked with a coquettish tone.

Parts of him Severus had long thought dead from misuse twitched in anticipation at the blond’s closeness. He could not help but exhale heavily.

“Hmm,” Merritt purred hungrily. “Whisky, fire and passion. You’re all of my favourite flavours, Professor.”

Severus forced himself not to groan aloud with desire. There was no escaping the facts, Merritt was obscenely attractive, beautiful, even, and he, Severus, had not had sex in a very long time. And even then, that had been a paid partner…

“Do stop calling me ‘professor’, you sound like a fantasising schoolboy – you’re the same age as me in years—”

“But eighteen physically, enjoy the perks of youth and the experience of my years simultaneously, it will be pleasurable for the both of us,” Merritt urged him.

With a snarl of sexual frustration, Severus shoved the vampire away, glaring at him. “Just what is your motive? Why have you set a decrepit, bitter old potions master as your ideal partner? I am not attractive or wealthy, there is no reason for you to pick me. Do my bidding and you will be rewarded as such that you can build your life again, but beyond that, expect nothing. This is not a love story, boy, I am not your prince. Understand that now.”

A snarl ripped through the room and before Severus could react, a lean yet powerful body had pinned him to the door, two small hands pressing hard on his shoulders. Those fangs were close to his face now, that musky-sweet breath dancing across his slightly parted lips invitingly – despite the situation. Those bright hazel eyes were glowing with dangerous passion now, the boyish face strangely serious.

“I am no boy, Severus, make no mistake about that,” Merritt warned him. “I look young, I am trustworthy, yes. I am even a little immature in my speech and tastes but I am no child and you do me a great injustice in treating me as such.” He stared into Severus’s eyes for a good few moments, inhaling his scent greedily before continuing. “You are a handsome man, Professor, and rich in intelligence and morals if nothing else. Rich in power. Your preferences and scent appeals to my own selective tastes. I want you, Severus Tobias Snape, and I am in the position, for the first time in my life to pursue something I want. I don’t intend to let you go easily.”
Severus frowned upon the creature suspiciously, trying not to betray his body’s reaction to the close proximity of the fit young lad. “You barely know me, what makes you think you want me so passionately?”

It was then that the devilish grin the vampire usually wore returned. “Did you think you were the only one clever enough to do a thorough background check on someone before they deem them trustworthy, Severus?”

Severus’s eyes widened.

Merritt pushed back away from him after a final, deep inhalation of his scent, permitting him some personal space before purring, “Oh, yes. I know all there is to know about you, Severus. The good and the bad. And it only makes me want you more. I am quite smitten. I fancy you, professor.”

He was so stunned that it took Severus a good few minutes to find himself. It didn’t help that his blood was all rushing in a completely different direction to his brain right now. He would have verbally and then magically thrashed the arrogant little twit, but in reality, Merritt had only done exactly what he had done himself. He was not a hypocrite.

“Is it what you learned about me that prevents you from taking me, despite my offering myself to you on a plate, Professor?” Merritt asked then, obviously having grown a tad insecure during the silence.

Severus grit his teeth. He had learnt that Merritt’s parents were a poor sort, both dying of advanced muggle influenza due to their poor health and insufficient wealth to make up for that weakness. Merritt had been a frail, quiet but beautiful infant at the time, no more than four and had been thrown into the tumultuous foster care system and (in short) abused and misused until he turned eighteen. It was then that his beauty was noticed by Claude, and the vampire stole from his ninth foster home, making him a vampire.

A sad, joyless existence Merritt had lived, not all that different from young Potter’s except with countless abusive, neglectful families instead of just one over the years. He had broken more bones and dropped more domestic violence charges than Severus had brewed potions and yet, he was the most stunningly positive creature Severus had laid eyes on since Lily.

Lily. What would she have thought of his entertaining the notion of surrendering his icy exterior to a vampire stripling? She would probably tell you to not be such a pessimistic old coot and take a
chance before there were no more chances left to take, his mind supplied and he smiled inwardly. Yes, his old friend would be irritatingly enthusiastic to see him opening himself up to someone else.

But he would not make it that easy.

“Show me a way to find Caius Nicodemus Alaric, track him down for me and I will consider you worth my time,” Severus said smoothly, inciting a spark of hope in those deceptively youthful looking eyes.

“How about an incentive?” Merritt asked huskily, glancing pointedly at Snape’s throat.

Severus’s eyes darkened. He was tempted, he couldn’t deny that…

“Perhaps you deserve…something, to inspire you to do the best of your ability,” Severus murmured heatedly. His hands shot forwards, seizing the vampire’s shirt roughly and whirling them round, slamming the shorter man against the wall. He pinned him with his body, his hands holding Merritt’s wrist with brutal ferocity to the wall as he savaged his rose petal lips.

Merritt purred in animal-like fervour, his body arching and grinding against Snape’s with abandon, singing as if no one had ever touched him with such hunger. Severus doubted that, but perhaps no one Merritt had actually wanted had ever touched him this way. Well feel it now, Snape thought, groaning into that mouth in release of years of pent up need and desire.

His tongue lashed the vampire’s gasping mouth, his tongue and fangs, his hands reached up to tug the creature’s curly blond locks roughly until Merritt tore his head away from the kiss to cry his pleasure out to the world. There was a distinct wet sheen of pleasure to his hazel eyes when Snape released him. The potions master smirked. “If you crave more, Merritt Appleby, then prove yourself worthy,” Severus taunted him.

Merritt grinned breathlessly. “No problem. But how will you prove yourself equally worthy?” the blond teased.

Severus raised a brow, finding himself oddly amused by Merritt’s quick adaptation to his humour. He reached into the mahogany glass cabinet near the library door. It carried his most precious potions and he withdrew one of the countless vials carrying honey-coloured fluid within. “I will give you a portion of the sunlight potion I brew for Draco, enough to last you a few weeks. By
then, I expect you to have some results for me, Mr Appleby.”

That wilful smirk never died, those eyes never stopped glittering with promise. “When I return with ‘results’ I expect you to plunder my mouth and arse in concert,” Merritt beamed, before vanishing out the door, leaving Severus alone to ponder just how badly he was tempting the fates by taking a chance with such a wilful, powerful and beautiful creature. Heartache was inevitable, surely?

The question is only whether it is worth it or not, Severus thought, reminded, not for the first nor last time that night by the other, much younger vampire and human couple in a similar situation right now. If Draco and Potter would take such chances, perhaps I should not be such a coward as to hide from all opportunities, he thought, dropping back into his favourite armchair and pouring himself another drink.

* * *

The lights in the room dimmed at Harry's will and he lay naked and sprawled across the bed, his chest heaving breathlessly as he stared up at Draco, who was kneeling above him. The blond looked glorious as he stripped above him, his hair already mussed from Harry tugging frantically on it during their kiss a moment ago.

Harry couldn't see much in the dim light (that was sort of the point in his plan to minimise the embarrassment that was sure to come during his first time) but he could see enough to feel his cock harden and twitch midair. He was new to appreciating the male figure and even then, it was mostly Draco, rather than men in general, but even he could see that the vampire was every wet dream come true. A low, broken groan tumbled through his lips before he could stop it. He could just make out the glow of Draco's fanged smirk in the dark.

“It's always nice to be appreciated,” Draco mused, tossing his clothes aside until he was wearing only his black boxers before reaching for Harry's wand that lay on the bed just above Harry's sprawled arms. Rather than feel irritated at Draco reaching for his wand without permission, Harry felt his fingers tingle at the intimate gesture.

A wizard's wand was his most personal and essential possession, for another to believe he could touch it was a great statement of trust on both sides. He liked that feeling. He could trust Draco with anything, and that realisation was what had enabled him to make this giant step in their relationship. He sucked in a breath, nervous as Draco gently gestured with his wand over Harry's stomach.
A tight, invasive feeling spiralled through his insides, through his stomach and colon, right the way down until even his tight pucker twitched. He gasped in surprise. He felt, empty suddenly. Fresh.

“It clears you out inside – think of it as a mess-free magical enema,” Draco said matter-of-factly, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. Harry just blinked at him for a moment. The unpleasant possibilities concerning Draco’s generous endowments and where they were about to be shoved shortly hadn't even occurred to him. It made him feel even more nervous. He and Draco had done a fair bit, he had thought he knew everything.

“I’ll teach you it so you can do it to me when you top,” Draco said, that statement as well as the sound of his voice quite reassuring to Harry's ears. Draco was going to continue being a fair lover, he didn’t need to worry about that.

Suddenly, Draco gave his wand another flick and dozens of twinkling white fairy lights burst from the tip, floating prettily in the air above them. Harry flushed at the idea that Draco was trying to make this special for him, like he was some blushing virgin bride. But he kept his mouth shut not only to save himself embarrassment but because he appreciated the effort and thoughtfulness of Draco’s actions. And also because you do secretly want this to be special, his mind supplied. Harry swallowed hard, his fingers curling in the sheets.

The twinkling lights illuminated Draco's hair and eyes and fangs in a way that was both beautiful and daunting. This was the man that was going to make love to him in a minute and he was going to have absolutely no secrets left to hide, nowhere to turn. He was going to be completely exposed in every imaginable way. He was going to open up completely to Draco at last.

It wasn't until Draco's long fingers splayed across his chest and caressed him softly that he realised his heart was hammering frantically in the cage of his ribs. Those eyes were rich with devotion as they stared down at him. “You don't have to do this just to prove something to me, you know,” Draco assured him softly, “I know how important I am to you.”

Harry managed to shake his head slightly, wondering whether he should take his glasses off or not. He was suddenly conscious of them, since they were steaming up slightly as he panted out his breaths. “No, that's not what this is about. I want you, in…inside of me,” he managed out, his chest tightening with mortification. He was going to regret his silly, maiden-like words come morning.

“I want to open up to you completely, in the most intimate way possible. I…I want to feel you…” He grit his teeth then, unable to say anymore. His voice sounded far too breathy, far too dazed for his liking. Draco did that to him, made him lose control, made him feel silly and wonderful and free all at once.
Those fingers slid up the length of his arms, teasing his pulse fluttering at his wrists before pinning both of them to the bed, taking Harry's lips with a bruising kiss so suddenly that Harry gasped out into that mouth. His hips undulated shamefully, his skin tingled and his mind swam as he forgot how to breath. The vampire's tongue ravished his teeth, the roof of his mouth and taunted the sensitive places on his tongue and lips until his hands were curling into frantic fists where they were flattened against the bed, desperate to do something, anything to release his thrill.

When their kiss broke, a trail of spittle connected their mouths and he gazed up at sparkling eyes, hooded with lust and devilish desire. “I want to see you lose that perfect control of yours,” Draco breathed heavily, “I want to see you thrashing with ecstasy and the freedom that I bring you, while I'm buried inside you so deeply you'll never be able to deny our connection.” Harry turned his head away at that, humiliation burning in his cheeks but Draco seized one of his trapped hands, holding it to his chest over his sluggishly beating heart. “We are perfect for each other, after tonight you'll feel it right down to your bones.”

Harry tried to make light of the situation, tried to smile but it didn’t quite touch his lips. “Romantic, are you Malfoy?” he asked teasingly, nervousness reaching his words.

Draco's face remained impassive and Harry was suddenly very conscious of the fact that Draco was lying between his open legs, his taut stomach scant centimetres from his swollen erection. It jumped at the thought, eager to press against Draco's flesh. Thankfully, it didn't quite reach. His legs did tense either side of Draco's hips however. Harry forced his breathing to even out.

“Oh, very,” Draco purred, “it's hard not to be when we're joined by a bond as intimate, personal and thorough as the First bond. I will be committing myself to you as much as you to me, tonight. I will be just as defenceless under your gaze as you will be under mine. There will be nothing to hide.”

“And...you like that?” Harry asked uncertainly.

Draco grinned. “To finally be as close to you as physically, mentally and emotionally possible? Yes, I like it. Now,” Draco gave a final flick of Harry's wand and to Harry's horror the squat little jar of clear jelly-like substance came shooting out of his bedside drawer. The pot of lube he used to wank with. “Tut tut, such a naughty boy, Potter,” Draco said with a grin, setting Harry's wand and the lube down beside him. “I ought to punish you for your sins.”

Before Harry even had time to flush darker, Draco was on him again. Cool palms skimmed his nipples until they tightened longingly, beckoning Draco's mouth towards them. The wet muscle circled the peaks teasingly before scraping them with his fangs, just hard enough to make Harry
shudder in anticipation. He licked his lips, his hands fisti in the sheets while Draco's stroked him all over in places he had never expected to derive such maddening pleasure from. The backs of his knees, his thighs, even his hips where Draco scraped him torturously with his blunt nails. His breath was leaving him in great panting gasps now, making the vampire's lips curve into a smirk as they worshipped his chest.

“Let me chase your demons away,” Draco breathed against Harry's skin, his blond locks trailing across his sternum as his head dipped to tease his navel and the tight plains of his stomach. Harry groaned out in wanton abandon at that, at such small, tender touches sending him hurtling non-stop towards the chasm of pleasure standing open, ready to swallow him whole.

“We'll be interrupted if you are too loud,” Draco said with a little chuckle, “as much as I want to hear you, I want to give you want you want first and foremost. I want to have you.” As he spoke, he glanced up at Harry, his chin a hairsbreadth above Harry's swollen erection, which was arching eagerly up, as if desperate to feel Draco's mouth.

“I've got…permanent privacy charms,” the man panted, trying to stop his hips from jerking up into Draco's face. The muscles in his legs tightened impossibly as he fought to restrain the building pleasure, he swore something inside him would snap if Draco didn't touch him. “They are only nullified when the door is open.”

“Your werewolf will smell that—”

“It's smell proof as well,” Harry cut him off hastily, lifting himself up on his elbows so that he could look down at Draco's face unhindered. The vampire's hair had fallen into his dark eyes seductively, his fangs still visible. Those pale hands circled his thighs now and were splayed across the tops of them with possessive vigour. “I hardly wanted Remus smelling me every time I had a wank.”

“Indeed, particularly as it is quite often, I imagine,” Draco chuckled. With that, he dipped his head, nuzzling impishly into his cock, smelling him deeply. Harry groaned in mixture of humiliation and sinful pleasure. “Delicious,” Draco purred, grazing one of his fangs gently over the swollen head. A thick bead of pre-emission wept from the slit. That tongue flickered out to steal it away greedily. Harry watched with rapt attention, his mouth slightly open as Draco savoured the taste of it. Yes, he would definitely go mad before the night is out.

“I want to devour you,” Draco growled possessively, resting his cheek in the crease of Harry's thigh, mouthing the base of his erection and tight balls with maddening slow precision. “I want to swallow you whole so that no one else can ever touch you.”
Harry gave a raspy laugh, grinding his prick up into Draco's face. “N-No one ever will. No one could begin to compare…”

Draco's body was singing with pride and bliss at that, Harry could tell, he felt the blond's emotions surging inside of him with as much potency as his own pleasure. Except the two were mingling seamlessly, his satisfaction and Draco's blending until he was overwhelmed with it all, unable to escape the mind-blowing ecstasy. And Draco hadn't even touched him properly yet. The blond wasn't even fully naked!

A growl of satisfaction answered his words and vibrated through his shaft as Draco took him into his mouth at last. It was cool and wet and tight and desperate to wring every last dribble of pleasure from his bones until he was as dry as the Sahara. *Cry out for me,* he heard Draco urge him as the head of his erection slid into his throat, tightening around him. *Squirm and writhe and thrust into me until your innocence is well and truly spent.*

Harry did cry out. He reached down, smoothing Draco's locks from his face and holding them back so that he could gaze into those dark eyes, which remained riveted to his. It felt so dirty, so debauched yet so intimate to hold that gaze as that slick cavern slurped at him. He could feel those fangs but they only enhanced his pleasure nowadays. Far from concerned with what his lover was, it only heightened his pleasure, Draco's pleasure and their intimate bond. Without thinking, his free hand slid down, caressing the pale column of Draco's throat, feeling it work around his cock inside an out. He groaned again, an answering sound rumbling in Draco's throat in response, vibrating through his prick.

“S-So…so good!” Harry gasped, tightening his grasp on Draco's hair. “B-Blimey, please, I – I need to–”

“Come?” Draco asked teasingly, lifting his head off of Harry's cock for a moment to taunt him, just as one of his hands released Harry's thigh in favour of massaging his full bollocks generously. “You feel so full, Harry. It must be nearly painful…”

“Tormenting arse hole,” Harry spat without malice, “Come on, take – take your pretty little knickers off and finish what you started, alright?”

Draco chuckled again, licking up the trail of glistening pre-come that flowed from his pink tip. “Oh no, you're wound far too tight, you'll come before I go anywhere near your dainty little backside.” That edge of teasing in his voice, it made Harry a lot more comfortable, it reminded him of the playful battle for dominance that was constantly being fought in their equal relationship. It reminded him that this was his Draco. He grinned breathlessly.
“No, want to – with you inside me,” he panted, his hips moving of their own volition, humping Draco's face since his cock had been deprived of his wicked mouth.

“You'll come at least twice before the night is out,” Draco promised huskily, diving back down over Harry's hardness. Draco’s body was the same temperature as his now, warmed by his heat, and his fingers scraped hungrily at Draco’s scalp and shoulders, anything he could reach. Only Draco could drive him into this frenzy of passion, this desperation.

“F-Fuck,” Harry spluttered inelegantly, his glasses fogging up. His head slammed back into the sheets and his lower body rocked fitfully into Draco’s sucking mouth. “C-Coming!”

Yes, come for me, Harry, Draco’s voice purred in his ears, just as that throat vibrated around him. A guttural grunt left him and his bollocks tensed in Draco’s hand, seconds before he spilled his creamy climax down his lover’s throat.

With his mind still spiralling in a white abyss of ecstasy, Harry collapsed, boneless into the bed, beads of sweat scattered across his body. He was just coherent enough to register Draco licking his lips suggestively, holding himself up of Harry with strong arms to better survey him unhindered.

He looked, satisfied hovering above him, as if he had been the one that had just found completion, Harry thought. He frowned in confusion up at his lover, still unable to control his breathless chest and pounding heart. Harry-warmed fingers slid over his sweat-dampened chest, pressing gently over his heart to feel his pulse. Harry stared into those eyes, feeling the euphoria of the afterglow spread through his limbs.

“Are you relaxed, Mr Potter?” Draco murmured huskily, his handsome mouth tilted up at the corners in a subtle smirk.

Harry laughed warmly, reaching out to caress the taut muscles of Draco’s forearms lovingly as he drifted back down from his haze. “Only with you,” he replied dazedly, incoherent with bliss. The vampire flashed him a painfully human, tender smile. A breath thieving kiss smoothed over his lips. Harry felt his stabilising heart flutter in his chest. Somewhere in the struggle for lust and dominance, their union had turned tender and saccharine.

There were no vampires or firsts, no concerns or fears, there was only Draco and Harry. Everything was gloriously simple. The kiss continued, languid passes of that tongue (now bittersweet with the taste of his own come) rousing groans of rekindled arousal from his depths.
“On your knees for me,” Draco urged him, his voice thick with desire and emotion, his lips slick with their combined spittle. Harry rolled over with the assistance of those oddly warm hands, until he was lying on his belly, his shoulders against the sheets and his arse in the air. His cheeks flushed even darker, his tight ring of muscles twitched. He had been in this position a few times before, pleasured by Draco’s tongue and fingers, but that had not assuaged his embarrassment any. This was probably the most exposed position Draco ever put him in, and he could tell the vampire relished it.

The chosen one exhaled heavily, fidgeting on his knees in anticipation. A lukewarm, soft wave of breath danced across his tailbone. For a moment he thought Draco might tongue his arse again, but instead he felt a more slender, rigid digit smooth across the cleft of his arse. He shuddered. The copious lubrication was cold and oozed thickly across his sphincter.

“Mmm, that’s it, just relax and enjoy, you’ve had my fingers in you before,” Draco reminded him breathily, “you know how much you love it.”

“Braggart,” Harry scolded him good-heartedly, his fingers curling in the duvet as Draco’s forefinger began the torturously delicious teasing circles around his ring. But those taunting touches were purposeful this time, set on coercing his muscles into giving way to him, to make way for something bigger. His cock pulsed as it hung soft between his legs, desperate to be hard again. Draco’s cock would be there soon, the thought aroused him more than he’d thought it would have.

Suddenly, the long digit of Draco’s finger slid into him, breaching his walls slickly without any difficulty. Harry had felt this a few times before, had learnt just how to rock against the now curling appendage to make those little sparks of pleasure explode deep inside him. He pushed back eagerly, his cock hardening again as that deep, intense pleasure from the place within him throbbed. Throwing his head back, Harry gasped, open mouthed into the room. The fairy lights above him sparkled. Draco’s mouth massaged the curve of his arse cheek, his free hand circling Harry’s hips to cup his reawakening arousal.

“Hmm,” Harry groaned heatedly, spreading his legs a little more to accommodate both potent pleasures, begging incoherently. A second finger was sliding in beside the second now. He felt his muscles strain slightly, felt his insides squirm as those digits spread him open, spread the copious lubrication around inside him.

Whenever this had happened before the soul purpose had been to bring pleasure, now Draco’s movements were calculated, purposeful. Mortifying wet sounds narrated the intimate touches. He cried out in embarrassment, his cock fully hard and grinding into Draco’s other hand in alternation with his backward rocking into the invading fingers.
“That's it, make some noise for me, show me how much you like it, don't hold back,” Draco urged him lustfully, milking his prostrate until Harry's blood was hammering violently through every organ. His cock was heavy and hard, his arse was stretched open sinfully. He had never felt so debauched, nor so good. Draco's fingers twisted then. Harry's prick spat out a thick globule of pre-emission and he rested his body weight on his shoulders, reaching back to frantically spread his cheeks, inviting Draco deeper.

A thick snarl of pleasure rumbled across those lips. “You have no idea how sexy you look back here,” Draco murmured, “pink and hot and twitching, like you're hungry for me.”

Harry's nether regions convulsed wantonly, those words only increasing the bliss building inside him. “Not hungry,” he hissed challengingly, “famished!”

“Insatiable demon,” Draco smirked, “you're boiling up with desire for me. I can taste it. Do you want it so badly?”

“Don't you?” Harry countered, his question punctuated with a cry of frustrated passion as Draco held his walls open, squeezing a trail of lube directly inside him. He squirmed. “Bloody hell, how can you resist the man you claim to desire when he's on his knees, desperate for you to fuck him?!?” Harry cried, feeling Draco drop his now drooling prick and tug his fingers free in answer. Two hands rolled him onto his back, he barely had time to register the feel of the sheets against his sweat-dampened back before his mouth was pillaged by that tongue again.

Yes, that saliva definitely had arousing properties, he was ready to burst again already. But he wanted Draco inside him this time. As if reading his mind, Draco retreated just enough to tug his boxers off, revealing his thick, eager erection to Harry's glassy gaze. The man licked his lips unconsciously. That would be inside him in a moment. It seemed impossible.

“Believe me, I am coming to the end of my hard-won restraint,” Draco assured him, occupying his hands with caressing his and Harry's erections leisurely. He stared at Harry for a moment, seemingly devouring the way he lay dishevelled and debauched beneath him with his eyes. Then, with a voice heavy with badly repressed desire, he breathed, “How do you want to do this?”

Harry flushed. “I… I don't know really what's… What's the best one?”

Draco's expression was unreadable. “All fours keeps your channel straight for me, it gives me more control, the ability to offer shallower thrusts, but I… I thought you would want to see me, the
first time.”

Blinking stupidly, Harry said hurriedly. “Yeah, yeah I do.” He did want to see Draco, although he was apprehensive of what Draco might see of him at that precise moment of defloration. Of what his body might betray in such an intimate act. “I…well when I…I thought about it I sort of imagined…” He trailed off awkwardly, feeling a bit silly, admitting that he had fantasised about it.

Rather than laugh, however, Draco leant in. They locked gazes for a moment and then Harry realised what Draco was waiting for. Without a thought, he pushed the embarrassing image toward Draco’s mind, his cheeks burning.

Having evidently seen what he’d needed to, Draco's hands moved to slide up the backs of his thighs, pinning his legs tightly to Harry's chest. Harry gasped at the sudden movement, his cock exposed and dribbling over his stomach now under Draco's gaze. All while Draco knelt with his own eager erection resting against Harry's upturned arse. “You want me like this, Harry?” he asked.

Writhing sensuously, grinding his arse against Draco's cock, he groaned with a nod. “Yes. Hurry, I – I want–”

“Relax,” Draco hissed again lustfully, a hint of amusement in his tone as he braced himself with one hand resting against the sheets beside Harry's shoulder. The other reached down to slather lubrication over his hard, aching member. It looked almost painful. Harry licked his lips in anticipation. In just a few moments, that would be filling him. The mere thought sounded so dirty in his mind, it made his ring of muscles twitch like the lips of a hungry mouth, ravenous for a taste of the meaty, swollen gland now pressing against him.

Draco arched his hips slightly, letting out a low, deep breath, one that Harry unconsciously copied, just as the slick helmet pierced his muscles. It was everything and yet nothing like he'd expected. His sphincter burned, tightened and pinched with the minute saw-like thrusts, shallow and cautious, in, out, a little deeper every third thrust. His toes curled, gripping the sheets as his fingers flew down to Draco's thighs that were resting either side of his hips. Without realising and with blunt nails he dug his fingers in, gritting his teeth in determination not to cry out. It wasn't unbearable, he had felt stronger pains in his life, although it was far from pleasant all the same.

Unable to help himself, a sharp intake of breath left him and Draco paused, his cock resting only an inch or so within. Harry's jaw clenched in shameful embarrassment and he opened his mouth to apologise for his babyishness, but a sound of surprise shot through his lips instead.
Draco was dribbling more oil over himself and over Harry's entrance. In fact Harry was sure the vampire had used half the tub. He was grateful that the vampire had not resorted to spells or potions to help however, he didn't want either interfering with him at this moment. He wanted to know that there was no outside force at work besides him and Draco and how they felt.

The invading member was sliding inward again, resuming those little thrusts, the pinching had eased now, however and his ring and channel were swamped instead by a mere stretching discomfort of having something so large within. It didn't feel good, but it didn't hurt. He fidgeted under Draco's body, following the slow, deep breaths the vampire was setting by example. It felt rather (unromantically) like going to the loo backwards, he thought, squirming uncomfortably. But then, the hand that had been guiding Draco's cock into his entrance was placed over his heart, the long fingers drawing his attention away from the raw, uncomfortable invasion and into the blond's eyes.

“Push out when I push in,” Draco instructed softly, “it'll feel good in a moment, trust me.”

Harry smirked. “So confident, Mr Malfoy?” he challenged, but then, to ensure there was no room for misunderstanding, he added, “I trust you.”

A wily yet grateful smile played at those lips that he so loved to feel against his own. One of his hands was retracted from Draco's thigh and guided to wrap around his own wilting erection. “Stroke yourself for me,” Draco panted, sliding the rest of the way in him with a long thrust. Harry gasped, his muscles clamping down instinctively, shaking with spasms.

“Buggering sodding hell!” Harry grunted, his heart hammering beneath Draco's hand. He felt so full. For that moment he was paralysed with it. He could feel his sweltering insides rapidly heating Draco's throbbing shaft as it paused within him, giving him time to adjust.

“Big, isn't it?” Draco chuckled arrogantly, leaning down to graze Harry's jaw with his fangs teasingly.

“Size isn't everything,” Harry murmured in reply, beginning to stroke himself, tugging his foreskin back and plucking the skin just under the head the way he liked. “I'm not even fully hard,” Harry taunted him back, grateful for their usual banter to break the tense atmosphere. He felt almost overwhelmed, the situation was too intense.

Someone was above him, around him, inside of him, closer to him than anyone else. He had let someone in completely and utterly. Treacherous emotion stung the backs of his eyes at it all. It was nearly too much. Nearly, if it hadn't been Draco he had opened himself to. “Y-You have nothing to
brag about yet,” he added, challenging his vampire right back.

Draco growled playfully against his jaw, nipping him gently with his fangs and hugging his body close to Harry’s as he began to rock his hips. Harry turned his head in to breathe in the musky scent clinging to Draco’s hair, clawed at him with one hand while the other tugged on his hardness desperately. The movements over his prick were heightened by the intimacy of Draco’s body pressing against his.

Then, suddenly, stars exploded behind his vision as his thumb grazed the sensitive skin just under his head, and Draco’s shallow thrusts glided over that spot within him. His mouth opened with a sharp inhalation. That pleasure turned his stiff inner muscles into a chute of hot, silky liquid. He groaned.

“Mmmhh! Shit, Draco!” Harry groaned. His arse felt greedy now, hungry for more of that explosive pleasure deep inside that combined with the ecstasy derived from his fist squeezing his erection to drive him to madness. He was rocking back into Draco’s thrusts now, arching just the way he did when the vampire fingered him to make sure the shaft within brushed his prostate with every thrust.

Above him, Draco made a long, low, groaning sound deep in his throat, his fangs bared with the sound. Leaning back onto his heels, Draco pulled Harry’s hips up and harder against his cock, pushing himself in all the way, with Harry half in his lap. Harry tossed his head, pressing it hard into the sheets. Draco’s hands were pinning his legs hard to his chest now, folding him nearly in half and it only added to the intensity of it all.

“Bloody hell,” Draco hissed, his long fingers tightening until Harry swore his skin would bruise. He smiled breathlessly up at him. Draco had gone slow at first but now he was making love to him, fucking him in earnest. He wasn’t effeminising him as Harry feared he might, treating him like a glass vessel. There really was no ‘girl’ in the relationship, just the bottom, who was just as much of a man as the man on top. That tiny, flickering concern was blown away by a hurricane of swelling ecstasy.

“You feel so good,” Draco snarled, “No idea how…gorgeous you look, beneath me – around me!”

Harry’s slick insides clenched at those sinful words, a wet sound punctuating every thrust now. Everything was hot and wet and delicious. He swore he could feel the throbbing of Draco’s sluggish heart where their bodies were joined he wanted more. Now. Everything, every inch of Draco until there was no doubt – Draco was his. He wanted to know his mind, his body from top to toe.
The spark in his arse was sending jolts of electrifying pleasure to every nerve ending now. His cock was drooling in his grasp again, his hand hastening over it as his arse guzzled Draco greedily — *insatiably.*

“Mmmmh! Draco, *take me.* Fuck me, please!” Harry demanded, riding the surge of the now hastening thrusts. Draco’s hips slammed hard against his arse with every thrust, throwing his body back and forth with the force of their union until Harry’s eyes rolled up in the back of his head. “S-So good! All over, can feel you all over – never felt so good.”

“So tight. *So hot,*” Draco answered incoherently, his balls heavy and full and desperate to spill inside Harry for the first time. The rhythm within Harry was driving faster and harder until Harry swore his skin was on *fire* with passion. He was shuddering uncontrollably with it, his knees pressed hard into his chest by Draco’s fingers, and his heels pressed into the vampire’s naked shoulders, bracing himself as he was wracked with white hot bliss.

The head of that swollen, slick shaft was thudding hard against his sweet spot with every thrust and sending powerful aftershocks through every limb that had him crazy with desire. He fisted his cock vigorously, chasing his climax. He could feel it pounding against the veins in his loins. “W-Want to – want to come when you do!” He panted, feeling Draco’s breath dust across his collarbone. He arched his neck unconsciously. His throat ached, it felt hollow and empty, burning to be filled with Draco’s fangs as his arse had in desperation to be filled with the vampire’s cock. It was the only thing missing in his ascent to completion – he *knew* it.

As if sensing his desires, or perhaps simply summoned in by his exposed throat, Draco carried his body forward on his next thrust. He pressed his lips to the place where his heartbeat raced strongest under Harry’s flushed throat. Harry squirmed deliciously under the fluttering, butterfly kisses that danced across his skin with all the tenderness and devotion he had seen in Draco’s eyes when they had danced together all those weeks ago.

*Bite me,* he urged the vampire, longing to be connected with him in every single way at once. *Show me how much you want me.* There was a challenging tone there that Draco could never refuse. An animalistic snarl of passion vibrated against his skin, his only warning before the thrusts within sped to a frenzied pace, slamming his body maddeningly between that hard body and the bed as those fangs grazed and nipped and sucked at every part of him Draco could reach.

Blood wept from the wounds but they brought nothing but blossoming explosions of pleasure wherever they lay. His free hand sank into Draco’s locks, tugging them tightly when razor sharp canines sliced the skin just above his nipple, that wicked tongue suckling him ravenously. Harry screamed out his bliss, his eyes watering from the overwhelming surge of it. It would occur to him later that he might once have worried about Draco biting him so voraciously, but the man he was
now knew that Draco was a vampire and he, Harry adored him all the more because of it.

*It brought us together, it brings us both pleasure. I don’t give a toss about anything else,* a very quiet, muffled voice whispered at the back of his mind. Then, suddenly, when he swore his entire torso was covered in sensual bites that were ablaze with pleasure, Draco’s right hand cupped the back of his neck. His body pressed tightly to Harry's and those pearly whites sank into his throat.

Suddenly Harry could feel the sensations rocketing through Draco’s form, even the pleasure in his teeth from where they pierced Harry's skin. It was too much and yet just enough. Hot and delicious. His fist tugged his foreskin down from his cock with a final thrust and he roared out his climax into the night as it splattered over his and Draco’s bellies.

With his arse clenching, quivering with erratic spasms and making obscene, wet sounds with every move Draco made, it was only moments later that Draco followed him, retracting his fangs from the wound on Harry's throat to growl into his bloody skin. His cock throbbed, Harry felt it pulse and a torrent of wet, sticky pleasure coated his insides.

Dimly, he realised that Draco had let his legs fall, boneless either side of his hips to make him more comfortable as he drank deeply of his blood under the warm blanket of their afterglow. Harry's fingers were interlocked with the fingers of Draco’s free hand, his other hand shaking as it caressed he blond’s hair. Fingers on fingers, cheek to cheek they closed their eyes. The only sound in the room was Harry's ragged breath, his pounding heart and Draco’s soft guzzling at his neck.

They were sharing everything now. Draco’s feelings and life’s memories were rippling through him as he hung in the fog of ecstasy, and Draco, he knew was feeling his own. He had given himself to the vampire fully, willingly, completely, and their bond, both emotional and magical was surging exponentially because of it.

“Hmmm,” Draco hummed softly as he drank, and Harry smiled weakly. If there was anything he had missed from the times they’d shared memories and emotions before, he had it all now. Draco's first memory was hazy and sparkling white, conjured snowflakes the size of butterflies glided down around him as two warm bodies pressed in comfortably either side of him – Lucius and Narcissa. He saw glimpses of the owl he knew Bellatrix had forced him to kill later on, seen snippets of Draco's past lovers, his 'friends', meals with his parents, all of the good memories and the bad, until Harry was filled with a steady confidence. He was sure that he knew Draco better than any other now, just as Draco knew him. It was a nice feeling.

After a few moments of basking in emotions and memories that rolled over them as gently as a cruiser sailing a calm tide, Harry felt a familiar warning dizziness set in. He opened his mouth to remind Draco to stop, despite knowing it would end the delicious final act of their lovemaking, but before he had said a word, Draco had sealed his wound and rolled off of him onto the bed. Two
strong arms dragged Harry with him, holding him against a hard, toned chest.

Harry groaned pleasurably, the way one might when finally tumbling into bed after a long day. Resting his ear against Draco's heart, he watched as the vampire's long, pale fingers caressed his own, interlocking while his other arm cradled Harry's body to him.

The warmth Harry had given Draco's body was still there and he swore he could hear Draco purring slightly. He tugged the duvet up around them, cocooning Draco with his warmth, gifting him with a similar comfort that Draco had given to him a thousand times over. The hand against the small of his back stroked him gently. Their bodies were sticky and aching and sated and Harry could not help but smile secretly at how debauched yet perfect it all felt.

“I'm officially yours,” Harry murmured against the vampire's skin, his backside still twitching and tingling in the afterglow. “Inside and out.”

“And I yours,” Draco answered with tenderness, pressing his nose into Harry's hair and breathing him in. “You're…happy – content, I can smell it.”

“Mmm,” Harry agreed sleepily with a small nod. “Very. It was…err, you know…perfect.” Harry's flush had returned quicker than he'd expected it would after he'd embarrassed himself in so many ways with one act. He didn't know how he could be embarrassed after that, but he managed, it seemed. “Amazing,” he elaborated. “I've never felt so…and you were… I can't wait to do it again.”

“You'll not feel that way come morning,” Draco chuckled against his hair. “We really got carried away back there. I think I might've hurt you.”

“You could never hurt me,” Harry assured him, putting an end to any regret or remorse in that voice. There was no room for either after this. “It was everything I hoped it'd be and more. I'm no blushing maiden but even I know the perfect first time when I experience it. It was you and me, with no barriers or hurdles between us, and it was amazing. No regrets – alright?”

He was surprised how forceful his voice could sound even when he felt so knackered. When Draco didn't answer, he lifted his head to glare at the man, only to have a demanding mouth press against his. He melted into it, pressing himself fully into that body, trying to feel as much of him as he could as he lazily fell pliant beneath him, for once submissive to the passion of those lips. If ever Draco deserved to triumph over him, it was tonight, he had been, perfect.
“I'll never regret being the one that you gave yourself to, the one you trusted above everyone else,” Draco whispered against his lips, punctuating the promise with a final, fleeting peck before relaxing back against the sheets, stroking Harry's dark, sex-mussed locks as he rested his head on is chest again. “You make me feel all-powerful, like I can take on the world, and yet at the same time, like it doesn't matter if I win or lose, as long as we are together.”

_I couldn't agree more_, Harry thought, nodding softly into Draco's chest. His eyes were drooping now. But he knew what Draco meant, it was the exact way Draco made him feel. “And safe, and warm and…loved,” Harry mumbled, almost incoherently. Would it have been incredibly silly to admit that the best he had ever felt was lying here, floating in the glowing aftermath of their first time together, wrapped in the blond's arms? Probably. He kept quiet and instead squeezed Draco's fingers that were still clasped within his own, conveying everything he felt with that simple gesture.

A warm glowing light radiated from their joined fingers, which tingled faintly. Draco had started the subtle glow, and Harry pushed back, mating their magic so that the light glowed softly brighter. Perhaps being together had bound them tighter, fitted them together even more perfectly that before, Harry thought sleepily. He would have to test that at a later date, for at that moment, there was nothing else, nothing besides this bed and the vampire – the _man_ wrapped around him both lovingly and protectively upon it.

“Draco?” He murmured dazedly, sleep tugging at his senses. Draco made a soft noise in answer, his fingers still carding soothingly through Harry's hair. “Thank you,” Harry whispered. “For saving me.” He swore he felt a soft kiss touch his hair in answer but was so far lost to slumber that he wasn't sure whether the Draco-sounding voice inside his head was real or not as it whispered, _I love you, Harry._ Without figuring out what was dream or reality, Harry drifted in the afterglow.

Lethargic with bliss, with contentment so substantial it felt as if a warm presence were pressing him into the sheets, whispering to him that he was safe and happy at last. He smiled. Whatever troubles lay ahead, he was happy in this room, wrapped in Draco's arms which were warmed by his body heat. He nuzzled his face into the hollow of Draco's throat, his body tired but in a good way.

Draco relaxed him. He felt as if he could sleep and dream forever. His smile broadened slightly at that thought, and Draco's body pressed tighter to his as his mind drifted. Forever. _I love you_, the Draco-sounding voice whispered again. Harry had someone who he cared for, who cared for him, and they would be together, they would care for each other. Forever. With that thought, a sleep filled with pleasurable dreams took him.

~To Be Continued...
A soft, fluttering sensation was what tugged Harry towards consciousness. He didn't jerk awake, no, he drifted towards reality from a cloud of heavenly peacefulness, slowly slipping into awareness. Except reality was just as warm and soft as his dreams right now. He exhaled heavily, feeling a warm presence against his side and gentle breaths against his face that disturbed his fringe slightly.

His lashes flickered lazily, and the fuzziness of the world told him that at some point during the night, someone must have taken his glasses off for him. He was lying on his belly, the covers were drawn up over him and there were long, warm fingers feathering down his spine, just teasing the shape of his arse before gliding back up to stroke his shoulders, neck and hair. He was being caressed awake from head to tailbone.

With a leisurely squirm, he found himself smiling without any further prompting, blinking at the blurry face just inches above his own. He didn't have to see clearly to sense who it was with everything fibre of his being. He could hear, feel, smell and even taste that presence on his tongue, could tell who it was, even if the beautiful creature’s body had been made warm by lying closely entwined with him all night.

“How long have you been watching me?” Harry asked, his voice husky from sleep. The hand stroking him stalled over his neck and it remained there, the fingers lightly stroking the iridescent scar that was especially sensitive to Draco's touch this morning. Because they had consummated their bond in the most final, intimate way possible, perhaps?

“A while – since I awoke myself, I suppose,” Draco replied softly, an audible smile touching his words. “My body doesn't need as much sleep as you anyway, but I was worried I'd been too overzealous with you last night; you slept so deeply for so long.”

Harry ducked his head into Draco's chest as he allowed his body to awake naturally, breathing in
the vampire's musky scent, tinged with the metallic tint of blood and smell of sex. Sex. He'd had sex. They'd had sex. His cheeks glowed as the memories came tumbling back to him. The arms around him tightened.

“You were amazing last night,” Draco assured him, cutting through the tumult of thoughts that Harry had obviously been unwittingly sharing. “You don't need to be concerned about that.”

Harry breathed slowly. “No, I'm...I know it was...that you... It's just a bit embarrassing that's all,” he explained. “In a good way.”

Draco chuckled deliciously at that into Harry's hair, rolling him onto his back and laying atop him. The vampire pressed his lips to the hollow of Harry’s throat that was like the rest of him, adorned with bite marks. “As delicious as your innocence is, there is now nothing about each other that we have not shared, completely and utterly. There is no need to be embarrassed in front of me.”

Harry gave a small noise of agreement, tilting his head to the side to expose his throat welcomingly to Draco's mouth. He felt a bit giddy and light-headed from the blood-loss and sore from the sex, but it was all in a good way, and it had him smiling softly as he committed last night permanently to his memory. It was by far, the best night of his life.

“You are still happy,” Draco noted, pausing in his worship of Harry's throat to slide glasses onto Harry's nose. Harry stared up at Draco's face as it came into focus. It was the healthiest he had ever seen him. His skin was a faint pink colour, his eyes were almost otherworldly with their brightness and his hair was mussed from sex, hanging sexily into his face.

“Did you think I'd regret it come morning?” Harry snorted. “Why? Because of a few aches and pains? That's part of it, as I understand it; you didn't hurt me any more than a human would have during my first time.”

“Hmm,” Draco replied non-committal, leaning up off of Harry just enough to slide his hand down Harry's torso, drawing the man's eyes to the bruises and bite marks and splatters of blood covering him. “No man could have done this to you.”

“No, and no man could have satisfied me either,” Harry said confidently, wrapping his fingers around Draco's tightly and forcing them to dance over his bruises and slowly healing bite marks. The blood had dried on his skin and he must've looked a sight, but however he looked it felt wonderful. His skin tingled with sensitivity as the pads of Draco's fingertips caressed them, sending little zings of electrical pleasure straight down to his awakening arousal. A sound torn between groan and a gasp shot through his lips. His body arched and if Draco had believed he was suffering
before, he certainly could be in no doubt of his bliss now.

The vampire growled pleasurably, leaning down to whip the tip of his tongue across the wound just over Harry's right nipple. Harry grunted, his hands scraping at Draco's shoulders. “Every part of last night was perfect.” Harry said dazedly, “no one and nothing else could've satisfied me as you did. I get as much pleasure from the roughness, from the bites as you do – maybe even more.”

Finally Draco smiled, his fangs visible in it, drawn forth by their intimacy. “Impossible,” he mused. All doubt faded. “I just wanted to be sure. I can’t afford to scare you away. Now I've finally had you, it only makes me want you more.” He punctuated his words by taking Harry's lips in a languid, loving kiss. The breath was stolen from Harry's lungs by the demanding yet delicateness of it. Those fingers dived into his hair, tugging gently as the tip of that tongue circled his, slick with both of their spittle.

Harry swore his tongue was on fire, his mind drunk on Draco and what lingered of last night's euphoria. He didn't know how he had lived this long without actually feeling alive, as elated as Draco made him feel. The hairs on his body were standing on end, his skin was vibrating with ecstasy and his cock was already weeping, grinding into Draco's hungrily. His arse clenched too, greedy for more despite the dull ache within. He felt connected to Draco now, more than ever, could feel his feelings and thoughts within his mind as clearly as his own. Their bond, their magic had definitely grown exponentially after last night. But still, he could not see anything but Draco.

When at last he tore away from the thrall of that mouth, gasping for breath he stared up at him, green eyes lidded with passion. “Take me then,” he beckoned him, never once having stopped grinding his cock up against Draco's. A loving snarl rumbled in that chest and before Harry could blink, he was flipped over onto his knees, his shoulders pressed into the bed along with his head. He felt soft pressure against his lips and knew immediately what it was, opening his lips to swallow the dose of *Temporentia Sensium*, knowing what it meant.

When he was done, a hand caressed his hair dotingly but with the ghost of insistence, silently suggesting he keep his head there. Desperate for more, Harry obeyed, spreading his knees wider and pushing back as he felt Draco settle behind him. Draco's cock was wet too and sliding slickly up along the valley between his cheeks. It was still a tad sore, however and the second Harry flinched, Draco backed away.

“No, don't I'm–” But Harry's protests burst into a cry of bliss before they even finished leaving his lips. Draco's wicked tongue was on him, lapping both soothingly and hungrily at his hole. He squirmed, but two hands held him fast to the bed, the force of that tongue intensifying until it sank easily into his still stretched, open channel.

It permitted the tongue entry willingly, twitching around it and Harry groaned in both
embarrassment and pleasure now. His arse was still left gaping after last night, that was surely humiliating? And yet Draco seemed to love it. Was feasting on him with even more relish than usual, as a matter of fact.

“Hmm, I can taste me on you, inside of you. How does that feel, Harry?” Draco practically purred before diving in again, his wet muscle sliding sensuously against his walls.

Harry didn't know whether to cringe or come right there on his bed. “No, that's…!” That's dirty, he had been about to say, but that sounded too ridiculous, even for a moment like this. So he grit his teeth, riding the pleasure and throwing his trust into Draco, letting him steer their journey and just relishing in the ride. “Bloody hell, Draco!” Harry growled, extending Draco's name into a feral snarl as his balls tightened and his cock throbbed. “Inside me, now before I burst!”

Draco drew back, grinding his prick between Harry's cheeks again. Harry's hole clenched with a debauched wet sound and Harry knew exactly what had happened. Draco had not only healed him with his mouth, but lubricated him as well. He felt ready now, and grinded his hips back into the rutting, but Draco did not push inside.

Then he remembered that last night Draco had used a spell to 'clean him' inside. A magical enema, Draco had called it. Perhaps Draco was looking around for one of their wands? But before he could say anything, Draco had interlocked their fingers, reaching under Harry with their joined hands and laying both of their appendages over Harry's belly.

The other hand was bracing Draco's thrusts on Harry's slender hip and it tightened there when Harry made to push back into him again. When Harry cried out in frustration, his erection positively aching for release, he heard Draco smile. Felt the expression even without seeing it.

“I have been thinking about what else we might have gained from last night ever since I awoke,” Draco said huskily. “Shall we test my theory?” Obviously realising Harry was too far gone for verbal agreement, Draco's hand tightened around his, holding it as he forced Harry's palm to lie flat over his abdomen. Then suddenly, the golden glow from last night was shining within their joined hands once more.

Harry gasped, glancing under himself to see the light grow brighter and brighter, fading into his skin. He felt the invasive tingle of magic, the same he had felt last night only this time it felt almost…warm. Draco was joining their magic in a non-verbal spell as effortlessly as breathing and Harry's eyes widened. He knew that he would be able to do the same, if necessary and also, with no little amount of trepidation, he knew that there was nothing that could stop them, if they were together.
“Hmmm, much better than a single spell,” Draco whispered intimately into the air around them. He kept his hand on Harry's and on his belly, guiding his cock to Harry's entrance with the other. The tender ring shook with spasms. “We are meant for each other, Harry Potter, even our magic says so.” And with that, Draco snapped his hips forwards, shoving any non-sexual thoughts from Harry's mind and breaching his orifice simultaneously.

A gasp of shocking pleasure tore through Harry's lips, his cock jerked against his belly and the swollen head of Draco's own shaft grinded into his pleasure spot with expert precision. Electric ecstasy rippled through him.

With his head pressing into the sheets and his hips back, greedy for more, Harry groaned without restraint, tightening his fingers around Draco's over his stomach. He was hot all over, inside an out. It was as if his insides were liquefying. “Oh…Merlin, _Draco_, feels so…fucking…brilliant!” That impossibly thick shaft was jack-hammering into him, pounding his body vigorously as the hand that had been braced against his hip reached under to tug at a tender nipple. His body sang like a plucked harp.

_You make me feel so alive_, Harry projected mentally to Draco, unable to physically call breath enough to form words. _Strong and powerful and happy in a way that I - I never knew existed before._

_We complete each other_, Draco whispered back with urgent passion. Harry felt Draco's climax building along with his own, could taste it in the air. He dared anyone to say they were this connected to anyone else. This bond they shared, this relationship, it transcended everything.

“So hot,” Draco panted aloud, jerking Harry's throbbing length as mercilessly as he fucked him. “So slick and tight and hungry around me. I can feel you grasping at me. Feel you quivering around me.”

Harry slammed his eyes shut, the mortification only intensifying the flames devouring his body. Sweat broke out across his skin, his body ached in delicious proof of their union and every pleasurable point on his body, every bite mark, even the parts that Draco wasn't touching, was throbbing as if they were each receiving individual attention. It felt like Draco was making love to him everywhere. _I'm inside of you, Harry Potter_, Draco whispered seductively in his mind, _filling you up until you burst._

Harry snarled out his passion then, feeling his end surge upward. “S-So big,” Harry agreed, unable to make more sense than that, “so good. Come inside me again, need…want to feel you…!” The thrusts inside of him and over his cock, the pleasure sped up to inhuman speed and he turned his head a fraction, offering his throat wordlessly as he soared towards his climax.
A roar of unadulterated pleasure shot through Draco's lips, lips that sealed around his throat. Fangs broke the skin, heightening the heat with such fervency that Harry could hold back no more. His entire body shook with frantic spasms and his wet, sticky climax burst over his and Draco's hands just as his blood from the fresh wound at his neck burst in Draco's mouth and over his own shoulder.

A thick guzzling sound mixed with a growl beside his ear. Draco's cock throbbed within him harshly, spitting come inside him. Their hips still undulated together as they rode out the pleasure. Harry was still groaning a low, continuous sound in the back of his throat, a sound of sated bliss that did not stop until Draco was lying against him, both of them still and Draco still inside of him. Those arms were wrapped around him now and his chest was heaving breathlessly. His heart was hammering mentally but he was smiling, his body still twitching in aftermath within Draco's grasp.

“Hmmm,” Draco murmured against his skin, licking the wound he had just created to start sealing it. It was deeper than the other wounds he had made last night and would cause harm if left unhealed, not like the harmless mere branding ones. Harry's skin was still tingling. He liked that, for some strange reason, being covered with Draco, inside and out. He liked belonging.

“S'nice,” Harry replied dazedly, squirming slightly to relish in the feeling of Draco still buried inside his now numb backside, the feeling of his arms around him. “I-Love this…love being yours…love…” His hazy voice trailed off suddenly, his body tensing. Draco's tensed as well above him, just as a warning thud sounded against the door. Harry's eyes widened, the delightful afterglow vanishing as he realised it had never been locked. The privacy spells were still up of course, but a glance over at the old-fashioned alarm clock at his bedside told him it was well past breakfast time, nearly noon and that he would have normally been up hours ago. If Remus had gotten worried and decided to come call for him…

“Shit!” He gasped, just as another knock sounded and the door opened.

“Harry, Tonks has kept your croissants warm for you, Teddy wanted to wait for you to open presents—” Remus's voice cut short abruptly and Harry felt Draco fly off of him, rolling back onto the opposite side of the bed to Harry. Harry shot up too, glancing frantically from Draco, who seemed to be trying to make his bloody fangs retreat and Remus, who was standing frozen in the doorway. A shadow of fury and fear rippled through those usually warm eyes along with a spark of shock.

“Remus,” Harry began throatily, staring at him with humiliation burning his cheeks. “I…Draco just stopped by last night to exchange Christmas presents and one thing left to another and…”
But Remus seemed to have found his voice. “What are you…? What the devil are you playing at?!” He snarled, looking very much the werewolf at that moment, even in human form. “Y-You're…you're covered in blood! What have you let him do to you?!”

Harry stared down at his body, from throat to thigh his body was littered with light bruises, shallow bite marks and thick splashes of blood from the superficial wounds. It looked ghastly, however, now he saw himself under the light streaming in from the hallway. He looked like he had single-handedly fought a world war. Hastily, he snatched up the duvet, pulling it over himself. “It's not what it looks like,” he insisted, holding Remus's eyes imploringly. “We just sort of…you know…played it a bit rough, that's all…”

Remus breathed out sharply through flared nostrils. “A. Bit. Rough. You fool!” He snapped. “He has bitten into several of your arteries; he's claimed you like an animal. You and your bed are caked with blood! I never thought you would be as stupid as to play such dangerous games with your life, especially after everything that has happened.”

It was then that Harry noticed the splatters of blood on the duvet. It definitely looked bad to any outsider. “I was never in any pain or danger,” Harry assured him. “Draco healed the deeper wounds and I took Temporentia Sensium–”

He stopped short as Remus inhaled the air deeply, a look of repugnance on his face. “He took you last night,” Remus said blankly, quietly, just barely audible. “You're not a virgin anymore.”

Harry's face was flaming now. He ducked his head, unable to look at either of the men in the room as he answered, “yeah.” It was strange that he could tell something so personal about him just from smelling him. At his answer Remus breathed out sharply, shaking his head.

“I…we care about you Harry, and to risk losing you after everything to your own rebelling hormones is too much,” Remus snapped. He looked as if he'd like to shake Harry roughly by the shoulders and was only barely refraining. “When will you start honestly respecting your own life as earnestly as you care for mine or Hermione's or Ron's?”

“I do care about my own life – at last. And I thought I made it clear to you, Draco is a big part of that. He's as important to me as you or Ron or Hermione – he's...he's everything to me.” It sounded inadequate to describe everything the vampire made him feel, but that was the best he could describe it. And the sheer force, the belief and emotion to his statement rendered everyone in the room silent.

At last, it was Draco who broke it, his voice rough with emotion. “And I would rather die than
hurt him,” he said earnestly. Harry knew that even Remus could not doubt his sincerity. “I am bound to him, mind, heart, body and soul.”

Remus shook his head again in clear frustrated dismay. “Everything is life or death when you are eighteen,” he murmured. “I don't want to lose you Harry, I can't.”

Clutching the duvet to him slightly to preserve his dignity, Harry sat on the edge of the bed, meeting the werewolf's eyes. “You won't, not to Draco anyway. If anything, he has saved me, even from myself. I want to live again and I want to live with him, do you think you can handle that?”

That was blunter than he'd like, but he wanted Remus to understand once and for all that Draco was indispensible. Behind him, Harry felt a distinct wave of appreciation and anticipation both from Draco. Harry held his chin up resolutely, but inside he was tense. He wanted his family to accept Draco, they were both incredibly important to him and while he knew Draco would do anything to please him, his relationship with the Lupins was still new and fragile; this was the first real test it would face.

“I cannot tell you who to love and goodness knows I can't be prejudice against someone simply because of what they are,” Remus replied slowly. “But I want you to take care, the bond between a first and their vampire, particularly a first as powerful as you, Harry is unpredictable. You both wield an unimaginable power, but the magic and the blood…” He stared at them both in turn. “Both are seductive and if I see Mr Malfoy mistreating you, I will most assuredly make him pay.”

Behind Harry, Draco snorted, but Harry himself gave a small nod and an appreciative smile. Remus loved him, just as much as he loved Teddy, he thought. It felt nice, hearing that acceptance and yet that overprotective edge to his voice. He felt like he belonged in every sense of the word now. “You know me, Remus, I'm probably more moralistic and self-righteous than is tolerable, Draco will have to answer to me if he tries to take advantage.”

Remus smiled softly. “Ah yes, but the heart can make us blind to others’ faults, sometimes.”

“In Harry's case, his feelings only make him more obstinate,” Draco answered wryly.

Remus was turning towards the door now a thoughtful look in his eyes as he said, “Teddy is waiting for you to open presents. Draco is welcome for breakfast too, of course.” And with that, he closed the door behind him, leaving Harry and Draco alone once again in the bedroom. Well, almost.
Draco had said that Alba would demand attention and she seemed to have been on her best behaviour last night. Now she was fidgeting on her perch in her shining cage, staring at Harry impatiently and hooting. Harry smiled as he dropped the duvet, crossing the room to open Alba's cage. She hopped out onto the back of the chair at his desk, hooting dolefully as Harry caressed the feathers at her breast. She looked content.

Harry had forgotten how nice the companionship of a familiar was, and he hadn't realised just how much he had missed it until now. The room was silent for a few minutes as he petted her. He felt Draco's eyes on him, ravishing his body from across the room. *He likes the look of me covered with his scent and his bite marks,* Harry thought with a smirk. *He likes to watch me.*

“How do you fancy a fly, girl?” He asked Alba, spying his Christmas cards to Hagrid, Ron and Hermione left on the desk. He had been intending to send them back with Pig when the owl inevitably arrived with his cards from them, but this seemed like a better entrance for the flamboyant owl. “Want to show off your feathers?” She hopped eagerly onto his arm, holding out a graceful leg for him to tie the letter to. She was positively regal looking, keen to show off her undeniably beautiful plumage and attributes.

Moving to the window, Harry pushed the curtains open and then swung open the window itself, launching the beautiful creature into the air. She came to life in flight, soaring gracefully toward the heavens, fading quickly in the early morning mist. Staring out after her, Harry smiled distantly. The warm feeling from last night, from their second union this morning was filling him again. He could've sworn he was glowing with it. The clouds outside were white with snow about to fall, fluffy and light and the air was full of fresh hope, hope that Harry breathed in deeply. Things would be alright now, he just knew it.

Suddenly, two arms surrounded his shoulders and torso, pulling him back against a cooled body. He leant back willingly, closing his eyes and relishing in that comfort as the morning breeze whisked in through the window, kissing his skin until gooseflesh rose there. Draco's hands caressed his shoulders, his neck, his face. They were drowning willingly in each other until it was impossible to tell where one of them ended and the other began. He could feel Draco's feelings mingled with his constantly now, sense them as if they were his own.

“We'll have to practice joint magic at some point,” Harry said a few moments later when he was standing before the sink in his en-suite, watching his reflection as Draco cleaned them both with a warm, wet flannel. It was an intimate, simple moment, one he cherished so greatly that he couldn't even be unnerved by the sight of the flannel floating midair and washing him in the mirror.

“Those few tricks we did this morning...they were effortless. How much more can we do together without so much as batting an eyelid?” He was mostly wondering aloud but as Draco wrung out the bloody flannel, leaving both his and Harry's bodies spotless again, he held Harry's gaze.
“Move mountains, call on the heavens themselves, we are limitless, Harry,” Draco said. “We are invincible together. Not that we should advertise that of course, but if we were to harness it, we would never have to fear people like Alaric or Claude or Greyback again.”

Harry’s face darkened at those names and he snapped his eyes quickly back to check his reflection in the mirror in distraction. His body was free of blood but still littered with bruises and bite marks. They were sensitive, but pleasurably so and did not hurt. He would let them heal naturally, he decided. His tongue darted out to wet his lips and he continued back into the bedroom, snatching up some briefs from his dresser drawer before looking for some clothes in the wardrobe. Draco had followed him out, looking confused.

“What’s got your wand in a knot?”

Harry sighed, pulling on a light green shirt and some loose jogging bottoms as he turned to look on his vampire. “I won’t help you to kill anyone. Our joint powers may be unstoppable but I won’t help you use them to take life. And I still don’t want you to kill Alaric, I don’t want your…your respect for life to be lost, Draco.” The vampire glared and Harry pressed on quickly. “I told you, look how easily Alaric became a monster, became just like those he hated, like Claude. One sharp push and you could be like that. I don’t…I don’t want that, Draco. No one has the right to decide who lives and who dies.”

“You really are 'Saint Potter', aren't you?” Draco snapped with a roll of his eyes, folding his arms over his bare chest, obviously caring less about the fact that he was still naked before him. “There isn't always a way around killing someone, you found that when you faced Voldemort.”

At that Harry gritted his teeth, but did not deny it or feel anything more than a sharp pang at the reminder. It was already getting easier, he realised. “No, you're right there, but Alaric isn't completely irredeemable, I know he isn't,” Harry replied. “If the situation arises, I don't want you to kill him Draco, promise me you won't.”

Draco's face twisted. “Is that because you worry for my humanity or because you pity Alaric? Because it sounds remarkably like the latter.”

“It's both,” Harry said honestly. “Both reasons but also, I can’t help but think that…if it were us in that situation… I can see how either of us could turn like him out of anguish and I'd like to think someone would try to save you if anything happened to me.”
“If anything happens to you I will follow you regardless, so it is a moot point,” Draco replied dryly. Harry continued to stare at him unwaveringly and after a moment, Draco sighed. “If he is causing immediate threat to your life or the life of someone I hold dear, he is dead,” he finally agreed, “otherwise, I will try to merely...incapacitate him.”

Harry felt the tight knot of anxiety untie itself in his gut and he moved to thank Draco with his mouth rather than his words, but a soft whoosh and the flutter of wings overhead stopped him in his steps. A regal looking grey owl had just perched itself on the dresser, a chain of purest silver around its neck that glistened as it stuck out its leg. Harry motioned to retrieve the letter, but Draco got there first. “It's got to be from someone I know or else Kreacher would have intercepted it and brought it to me himself,” Harry assured him.

“As that incident with Alaric's package proved, your elf's checking system is not full-proof,” Draco said curtly, but he was eyeing the owl with a suspicious look, as if he recognised it from somewhere and was apprehensive of its presence.

His words reminded Harry of the question he had not yet asked Kreacher and he nodded. “Kreacher!” He called. Immediately, the elf appeared with a pop, bowing low, the bells now around his toes jingling merrily as he did so.

“Merry Christmas it is, Master,” Kreacher said croakily with a ragged little smile. “Kreacher is already checking that letter, he sent the owl straight up after its check, sir.” He indicated to where Draco had now opened the letter and was reading it with a peculiar look on his face. Harry frowned, but focused for the moment on Kreacher.

“Merry Christmas, Kreacher,” he replied, “Sorry to pester you, I know you're busy making Christmas dinner but I have been meaning to ask you... That last letter you checked and sent onto me at Hogwarts, did you know who it was from? It held something peculiar in.” He had to be careful what he said, he didn't want Kreacher to iron his hands or shut his ears in the oven door to punish himself if he realised how dire his mistake had been. He knew that loyal elves had a tendency to do that, and he didn't want Kreacher punishing himself when he had come such a long way from the nasty little recluse he had once been.

Those large eyes like saucers stared up at him. “Kreacher is remembering that it had the Hogwarts' insignia on it, Master, so he is not checking it. A Hogwarts bird delivered it too. Is Master...? Is Kreacher doing something wrong?”

Harry's eyes widened now. “No, no,” he insisted hastily. “Not at all, just...check everything from now on that isn't from the family or the Weasleys, Hermione, Hagrid or Draco. Yeah?” Before Kreacher could assume he had done anything wrong from that, Harry added quickly, “And would you mind telling the others downstairs that I'll be down in a minute? Just er...freshening up.”
“Yes, Master,” Kreacher said, delighting in every order he was given and bowing again before vanishing with another pop.

Grateful that he now knew what had happened, Harry turned back to Draco, but whatever he had been about to say died on his tongue when he saw the vampire's expression. “What's the matter?” he asked, approaching him quickly and taking the letter from his hands.

At a glance it was written on thick, quality paper with rich green ink and a fine hand. When Draco gave him no reply, Harry read it hastily. Then he understood the mixture of suspicion and unease etched into Draco's handsome features. It was too strange, especially given the great step their relationship had taken last night. Too convenient and…unnerving.

_Dear Mr Potter,_

_We do hereby cordially invite you to accompany our son to our home for Christmas lunch. It is a quiet, intimate affair but all guests are expected to dress smartly. We expect you at the door at two-thirty sharp._

_Regards_

_Narcissa Malfoy_

Harry had to re-read the blunt letter a few times before he could really register what it was asking him. He blinked. “Your mum has invited me to lunch at your house?” Harry said, unable to quell the sheer astonishment in his voice. “Or, has _told_ me to come, more accurately. What do your parents want to see me for?”

Draco looked just as confused as he felt, if not a little more wary. “Over the last few days we have spoken a fair amount, more than we did this summer right after I was changed,” Draco murmured, “but neither she nor Father have said a word about you, or the slanderous rubbish pasted all over the Prophet about us. I thought they were just going to pretend it wasn't happening but…” He frowned. “Mother is all decorum and ‘properness’; she keeps the peace, she would not cause us trouble. She probably only meant to please me by inviting you, but Father… Harry, I can't guarantee he'll be as eloquent.”

Harry raised his chin defiantly. “Meeting the in-laws is hardly the greatest task I will ever face,” Harry assured him. He wasn't afraid of confronting Narcissa or Lucius Malfoy, but he didn't want to end up in a confrontation with them that would make Draco unhappy. He knew more than anyone how important parents were; he didn't want to come between Draco and his. He would have to go prepared for war and ensure he kept calm and polite through whatever they threw his way. Draco deserved that and more from him. And again, this was a human trial he was facing, not a supernatural one. It was normal. He grinned.
“I have limited ‘smart’ robes though, you'll have to dress me,” Harry said, a hint of devious seduction in his words. He glided towards his vampire, not feeling as silly or as self-conscious as he would've thought sliding his arms around him and staring up into his face. Draco purred like a satisfied cat.

“I hope that that invitation was literal,” Draco smirked, tilting Harry's chin up, running the soft pad of his thumb over Harry's lips that were still bruised from his kisses. “I'll have you looking like a gentleman in no time. Not even my mother will be able to fault you,” the vampire mused.

“And you?” Harry asked with a raised brow. “Are you going down to breakfast with my family like that?” He gestured to Draco's still naked body.

“Better not, I suppose. I wouldn't want you to choke through gaping at my beauty,” Draco replied with amusement. *It will be an interesting Christmas if nothing else*, Harry thought.

*                             *                             *

Snow was falling copiously from the crisp white heavens, crunching under Harry's feet as he made his way up the long path through the elegant front gardens of Malfoy manor, Draco at his side. Long cold fingers were wrapped firmly around his on their journey through the winter wonderland. Everything was pristine and illuminated with hovering, twinkling blue lights. It was a subtle decoration but undeniably beautiful, it was a completely different estate to the one he had stepped into earlier that year to face Voldemort…

A soft squeeze of his fingers chased those dark memories away and Harry gave Draco a smile in answer. Draco could feel his emotions all the time as well now, Harry remembered. When they reached the grand doors, they swung open slowly of their own accord, evidently recognising Draco and Harry stared with wide-eyed awe at the monumental foyer as they stepped inside.

The entire room was dressed with gold and silver, reflecting off of the highly polished marble floor and an insurmountable Christmas tree stood in the arms of a long sweeping stairway. Harry tugged self-consciously at the collar of the dark emerald robes Draco had dressed him in. It was hard not to be overwhelmed by the house; it looked like the stately homes Aunt Petunia used to covet on television.

“You look more daunted than when you were last here,” Draco murmured, his voice tugging Harry back from his daze.
“It's a spectacular house,” Harry said.

Draco smiled at him lovingly. “It speaks volumes of the Malfoy ancestors that built it,” he smirked, “every stone and stair filled with the Malfoy arrogance, wealth and grandeur. It can take some getting used to if you haven't been raised here, I suppose.”

It surprised Harry that Draco understood his discomfiture, he had expected him to misunderstand and take offense. But then, Draco knew him better than anyone now, knew exactly what Harry meant by every word. Harry moved to brush Draco's lips with his own, but the second he was within reach, the soft sound of someone clearing their throat echoed through the grand room.

“I am so glad you both came, and so promptly,” Narcissa Malfoy said with quaint smile. She was on them sooner than he was prepared for and he watched her cautiously as she kissed Draco on the cheek. Then she surveyed them both, her eyes lingering a little longer on Harry before adding, “Please follow me into the dining room.” With that, she turned, leaving them no other choice but to follow.

Harry shared a glance with Draco, just as the dining room doors closed behind them.

This room was just as grand, adorned with warm autumn colours that completely overwhelmed the cold of the world outside. There was a long, polished table in the centre of the room with Christmas reefs and candles scattered between the countless silver dishes and trays, each covered with a sparkling silver cover.

At the head of the far end of the table, Harry's eyes immediately fell on Lucius, who was staring at him and Draco with narrowed eyes over his goblet of wine as Narcissa took her place at his right hand side. The two seats to his left were empty, but the two next to Narcissa were occupied by two people Harry recognised all too well. His eyes widened at the sight of them, gaping as Draco lead him to the seats on Lucius's left.

“Professor?” Harry asked dumbly, looking to Snape and what could only be described as his ‘date’. “Merritt?”

The vampire beamed at Harry, his boyish face glowing with health and happiness that was reflected peculiarly on Snape's face. As if sensing Harry saw this blatant connection, Snape hastily took a sip of his wine and Merritt chirped, “Lovely to see you, Harry. I can sense that you and Draco have already had a very merry Christmas indeed.” He waggled his brows and Harry flushed
darkly, Draco clearing his throat uncomfortably whilst coaxing Harry into the seat next to him. He himself took the one next to Lucius.

Merritt took a deep inhalation of air. “Oh yes, I can smell it. Finally gifted your cherry to your vampire, Harry?” There was an innocent teasing in his voice that reminded Harry of one of the Weasley twins.

“Try not to stir the pot like a childish toddler, Merritt,” Snape intoned distantly, still sipping his wine. Merritt gave the professor a playful smirk, but fell quiet and began toying idly with his salad fork. This, along with the flushed skin at the side of Snape's throat told Harry everything he needed to know. It was his turn to smirk. He knew better than anyone the way the skin around vampire bite marks inflamed slightly, in a way that no high collars could hide.

_Snape and Merritt are together,_ Harry thought, directing the words at Draco. _The way we are._ It was good. He couldn't think of any man that was so overdue in his share of happiness and companionship. Or a man more in need of someone with such vitality, who was such a breath of fresh air, like Merritt.

_Yes, I can smell it on them,_ Draco thought back, pouring both him and Harry a goblet of wine. _Severus smells anxious and thoughtful as always, but he is happy. I haven't ever seen that from him in all the years I've known him._

_He's finally got over mum,_ Harry thought privately to himself; just as Lucius Malfoy set his goblet down at last, speaking for the first time since they had entered the room. His voice was cold and authoritative, ringing through the large room like a god in his own temple. “While my wife has her eloquent ways and her tactful tongue, I wish to move straight to my main issue tonight so that we may move past it and enjoy our meal,” Lucius said, studying everyone in the room before allowing his gaze to fall on Harry. Beside him, Narcissa Malfoy tensed, motioning as if to protest, but it was Draco that spoke first.

“Father, I trust that Harry was not invited here to be interrogated and humiliated? I will have to stop you right there if that is the case,” Draco snapped. His voice was steel-like and Harry swallowed, touching Draco's fingers under the table in an attempt to calm him. He didn't want to be the cause of further rift between them. “And what are Severus and Merritt? Your audience?” He demanded hotly.

In his chair, clearly displeased with Draco's display of confidence, Lucius straightened, his back ramrod straight. “You misunderstand me,” Lucius replied coolly. “My intention was not to harass your paramour but to ascertain why you both fraternised with each other all over your school and ended up announcing your relationship with sordid acts.” His expression wrinkled with distaste. “I do not know which is more infuriating, your blatant display of carelessness or your disrespect for
the position you hold in that school. You know how delicate a situation the family is in, Draco, I am shocked that you would risk our only chance for redemption for a quick fondle in the showers with your--”

“Lover, Father, my partner,” Draco cut across him curtly. “Use a term of respect for he is as important to me as mother is to you.”

Harry was stunned to silence at the intimate implications of those words.

“And the delicate position we have been forced into is no one's fault but your own,” Draco continued, unleashing what seemed to be years of pent-up frustration in one foul swoop. “I shouldn't have to make up for your selfish mistakes but I am, and willingly, because you are important to me, the whole family is. But you do not have any right to judge me on enjoying myself, on living my youth, on making mistakes that don't even hold a candle to your monumental misjudgements. Those in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, Father.” The last sentence was practically a hiss, and Harry could've sworn he saw Severus smirk proudly into his goblet. This chat had been coming for many years.

And it's because of you that I finally have the strength to face it, Draco whispered in Harry's mind. Harry didn't know if that was a good thing or not.

The silence ringing through the room was so piercing that Harry felt frozen in place by it. It was suffocating and overwhelming, and Lucius Malfoy was regarding his son with horrified fury.

“Should I blame the vampire's curse for this blatant disrespect or your First?” Lucius spat, his eyes so like Draco's narrowed with loathing at Harry. At this, Harry sat up straighter, meeting his challenge head on.

“Says the father who allowed his only son to be bitten in the first place rather than face Voldemort's wrath?” Harry sneered. “You've shunned your son since he was 'tainted' in your eyes and now suddenly when you realise he's actually making quite the name for himself still you think you can dictate his life again? Draco isn't your pawn--”

“Nor is he yours,” Lucius snapped venomously. “I only desire what is best for him, for our family--”

“For you,” Harry corrected him. “And while he isn't my 'pawn' he is mine, as much as I am his.
We belong to each other, we help each other and while I wouldn't dream of coming between you and him, I won't let you use or hurt him anymore either.”

“Harry,” Draco began, but it was Narcissa that cut her son off.

“No, he is right Draco, we have failed you immensely. I never forgave myself for letting him hurt you, Draco,” she said softly, her dazzling eyes filled with haunted sadness. “I know that my withdrawing from you must have hurt you even more, but I could not bear to face you knowing that what happened to you… It was my doing. I have hidden from you, frightened of seeing what I have done to you. My boy…my sweet boy.”

Beside Harry, Draco's eyes widened. He had a feeling that this was the most they had spoken since the 'incident’. “No, mother, I am perfectly fine. Changed, but alive as ever. And too long has everyone been blaming what happened during the war on each other, it was not your fault.” He levelled his gaze at his father next. “And it is not Harry's fault either. All of this was brought about because of Voldemort, no one else, it's time we all stopped punishing ourselves and each other for what that monster did to us all. Or else he's won.”

“Wisdom beyond your years,” Merritt said softly, looking quite unperturbed by the personal argument surrounding him. Snape gave him a warning glare, but it did not silence him. “Take it from someone who never had anyone to turn to; good friends and family are too hard to come by, too precious to risk losing through misplaced blame and pride.”

This was the first time that Harry glimpsed the heartache beyond that boyish smile and he nodded in agreement, glad that Snape and Merritt now both had each other. They were deceptively similar in many ways, one of the biggest being how much they needed someone to rely on, to belong to.

Draco gave a long, needless outward breath. “I don't want us to fight, or lose each other,” he began softly. “I don't want Voldemort to win. I want to forgive and move beyond everything that has happened, live our lives to the fullest, but we can't move past it if you're going to remain bitter from what happened.”

Draco gripped Harry's hand under the table back then. “You need to accept that you made the wrong choices, Father, and that those mistakes lead us all to ruin, ruin which I must now save us from. You need to stop seeing me as a child that you can order around, stop seeing yourself as always right and accept that I am now a man. One that you're going to have to trust to do what is right. You can't expect me to fix your mess and not give me that much.”

Again Snape was surveying Draco proudly over the top of his goblet. Harry had the distinct
impression that Narcissa had invited Snape and him, Harry here to give Draco the resolve he needed to put this issue to bed at last. The woman did seem to care more for Draco than for 'family honour' and 'protocol'.

*She'd set it all ablaze for him if need be,* Harry thought, admiring the cold woman incredibly, even if he was still doubtful of the father. She looked eager to have this over, to have her family back, to be able to embrace her son again. She loved him more than anything. Lucius, however, looked as if he was having a hard time deciding which he treasured more, his pride or his child.

At last, the man found his voice. “If I do that for you, my son, it will lay to rest the past but not the present. You are a vampire, that means that it is especially important that you put decorum and appearance before all else until you have secured your position. The world cannot find out what you are until we are ready.”

Harry snorted to himself. How typical, this was Lucius Malfoy's way of getting around admitting he was wrong and all the rest. He was skimming over the subject and moving onto the next item of agenda. *Arrogant toss-pot,* he thought.

At least Draco grit his teeth impatiently. Harry wondered if his fangs were extended in frustration behind his lips. “I made some mistakes, Father, but all that they exposed to the public was what Harry means to me – and that is a secret I will gladly share. I am not ashamed of him and there is no tactful reward to be gained by keeping him a secret.”

Lucius looked as if he was going to say something particularly unpleasant, but Snape finally set his drink down. “Look past your hatred of the boy and see him with honest eyes for once, Lucius,” Snape urged him. “He is powerful and wealthy in monetary fashion as well as morals. Both, combined with his fame will help your family's rebirth immensely; do not cut your nose off just to spite your face.”

Once again, Lucius did not admit he was wrong, nor admit Harry's advantageous position in their family; instead he bolted into the next line of attack. “And how will you provide our line with heirs? How will you–”

“You assume that I even want children. If I do in the future, and if Harry wants them too, there are numerous magical and non-magical possibilities. And as to my future in general, I have my plans, father,” Draco said curtly. “I have positions in mind that I will rise to, and I will do it, raising our family name with Harry at my side. I will come to you for advice if I need it. I will not cut you or mother out of my life, I would not dream of it. This is my home and you are my family, we will face whatever comes together but you will not try to rule me as you once did and you will accept that Harry will be by my side through it all, as my equal.”
Harry was stunned and touched by the sheer force, the emotion in Draco’s statement. Even Lucius could not doubt his conviction or feelings after that. There was a long, tentative silence in which Harry wondered how the subject would be changed next. Instead of saying a word, however, Lucius sat back in his chair and snapped his fingers. Immediately, a scrawny, pointy looking house elf appeared, beginning to serve them all from the suddenly unveiled dishes, starting with Lucius himself.

It was a welcome distraction, Harry had to admit. He'd been unable to eat much at breakfast thanks to his full-body blush and the knowledge that everyone around his table at home was smiling at him knowingly. Now he was famished.

A fine Christmas roast was being dished out equally and he swore he was salivating as the elf poured gravy over his potatoes and chicken. “Thank you,” he said to the elf, which looked so appalled for a moment, until a small shake of Draco's head dismissed him.

*He's father's elf.* Draco said to Harry mentally, *he isn't used to politeness or consideration.* Harry was reminded of Dobby, who was also Lucius’s elf, he had assumed, and was glad that it at least seemed like Draco and Narcissa treated their servants differently, more civilly. They may have looked similar, but Lucius and Draco Malfoy were nothing alike. He didn't like Lucius Malfoy very much at all.

*That's the general deal with in-laws, as I'm told though,* Harry thought to himself. Besides Hermione and the Weasleys of course. But he would endure a thousand in-laws like Lucius if it meant that he got to be with Draco. Everyone came with their baggage; someone had once said to him, he supposed Lucius was Draco’s.

“So,” Lucius said when they were all at least half way through the luscious meal and Harry found it hard to believe that the man hadn't done this on purpose; sweetened everyone's mood by filling their bellies before continuing. “I suppose if you accompany Draco to our annual ball in the spring that we have arranged in honour of the ‘eighth years’ graduating, we can announce your joining the family properly.” He looked quite pleased with the thought.

“Yes, that will definitely be the announcement of the night, you on Draco’s arm. And I the laws of joining vampires to mortals is generous nowadays, you can be married right away, none of this gauche ‘boyfriend’ nonsense-”

“I’m not a token bride,” Harry ground out through clenched teeth, suddenly annoyed. “Nor a decorative ornament to be paraded through your little ‘parties’.”
Lucius narrowed his gaze at Harry again. “Draco thrives at parties; he loves the bustle of people, the dancing and the liveliness of it all. Would you deny him the chance to show you off to the world?”

Harry gritted his teeth tighter. When put that way, it was hard to refuse. He knew that it was true, that last part and he also knew that Draco would like nothing more than to show him off, that was just the way he was. *I would do it for you,* Harry whispered to Draco’s mind. Then he thought of their ‘date’ in that restaurant, that dance. *I might even enjoy it once in a while, but it won’t be every weekend and it won’t be to suit your father. It will be to suit us. I won’t let him dictate your life or mine.*

Draco nodded slightly, for Harry's eyes only. “We’ll do as any good couple do, Father and compromise,” the vampire said, evening out the tension in the room, pushing his plate away half-finished. He liked the taste of food out of habit, but it did not sate him, and nor would the wine in his goblet, which he glanced briefly to. “If after this first ball you don’t make a spectacle of Harry, maybe he will be more inclined to be on my arm at more gatherings.” It was a warning, though subtly stated to better manipulate Lucius’s response. Just as Harry suspected the man nodded in understanding at his son’s tone.

With that line of attack quashed, Harry leant forward to pour himself a glass of water this time, unintentionally flashing Merritt another shallow bite mark at his wrist. The blond smirked gleefully. “You enjoyed yourself last night as much as we did, I’d wager,” he whispered. Harry smiled back. He liked Merritt. Before he could answer though, another voice filled the room.

“Oh, Draco,” Narcissa gasped softly, drawing everyone’s attention to her. “I am so sorry I… I did not think…” She was looking plaintively at his half-finished meal, and then at Harry. Harry had the suspicion that Narcissa had seen his wounded wrist too and tugged his sleeve over it self-consciously.

“Oh, Draco,” Narcissa gasped softly, drawing everyone’s attention to her. “I am so sorry I… I did not think…” She was looking plaintively at his half-finished meal, and then at Harry. Harry had the suspicion that Narcissa had seen his wounded wrist too and tugged his sleeve over it self-consciously.

“Of course you don’t… I had read that you like to eat normally in those books about vampires but… Are you… hungry?” she asked, looking between him and Harry now, concerned for her son’s appetite yet uncertain how to voice that concern properly.

Draco laughed softly, eradicating the unease between himself and his parents a little more. “I fed last night, Mother, do not worry. Harry is more than generous.” She gave a smile that was both grateful and relieved.

*We’ll get through this,* Harry said to Draco with unwavering confidence. Just like with his ‘family’, things may take a while, but they would be alright. *Everything will be alright again,* he
promised. Draco squeezed his knee under the table. Yes, it would all be ok, even for Snape and Merritt, it seemed. He just knew it.

“If you need a little pick-me-up Draco, dearest, Harry is more than welcome to...donate to your goblet,” Narcissa assured him tactfully. Harry nearly choked on his mouthful of water. Draco was chuckling amusedly.

“Oh, no ma’am,” Merritt chirped in half-hearted protest, “I beg you, one whiff of Harry and you’ll have two frenzied vampires at your table. He is simply irresistible.”

“And simply stuffed with two helping of Christmas chicken for flavour,” Snape said dryly, helping himself to another goblet of wine.

The typical dinner with the family-in-law, Harry thought. And it had only turned out half as bad as he’d been expecting. And it looks as if it may end on a fairly good note so far, he thought. A better note to end this Christmas day on however, would be a repeat of last night and this morning up in Draco’s room. He grinned into his dessert as it appeared before him, a generous helping of flaming Christmas pudding. We haven’t christened your bed, Harry suggested to Draco as he tucked in. The fingers on his knee squeezed again, and a small smile played along those luscious lips.

Well, we can’t have that, now can we? Draco thought back.

* * *

Warmth, power spread through his weak, charred yet icy body. His sight, his smell, his sense of taste returned as his tongue and skin and muscles reformed with renewed vigour and health. His long fingers curled around the slender throat he held captive in his jaws as soon as they had completely reformed and regained their power. This was the fifth body he had drained tonight and he was only just back to normal. His jaws tightened and he sucked harshly at the last few drops of blood in the young witch, allowing her to fall carelessly to the floor only when he felt the life teetering on the edge.

Wiping his lips, he let out a sigh of contentment, stepping over her dead body. It was odd, not having the hounds lap at her remains. He was not pleased about losing them in the fire at all, or about losing the majority of his coven. He would have to recruit new guardians and children as soon as he could. At the moment, however, he had more pressing matters. Revenge, and the original plan he had held from the very beginning, whether the stupid Malfoy youngling and his First had realised it or not.
I’d wager not, he thought with a smirk. The teacher no doubt suspected something sinister, but they have been blind to the obvious from the start. He gave a wicked smile then, finally turning his attention to the twenty five or so vampires surrounding him. His remaining children, one being Osborne, and of course, their human guest. His grin broadened. Caius Alaric would get what was coming to him too as soon as he had outlived his usefulness. He must know I plan to end him; he is too much of a liability. But then the silly little once-hunter was still in mourning, obsessed with grief for Lucan, he probably looked forward to his end.

“That traitor Merritt has been snooping around after us and Alaric too, my Lord,” Osborne sneered. “I saw the teacher alone and he positively reeks of the little turn-coat. Seems he has chosen his side.”

Claude clucked his tongue thoughtfully, intrigued at how unresponsive Alaric was to being surrounded by a crowd of vampires that loathed him. He really is only driven by revenge and grief, how delightful, Claude thought, turning his attention back to Osborne, eyeing him impatiently. “And? What did your search yield to you other than Merritt’s sleeping arrangements?” he demanded.

Osborne bowed his head slightly, sufficiently cowed. “The teacher and his colleagues, they spent all of the holiday reinforcing the wards around the castle, nothing can cross the grounds now uninvited. We cannot so much as approach the gates, my Lord.”

A little put out, but no more than that, Claude gave a crooning sound, turning to the darkest corner of the room, where a small figure had been cowering the entire time, sobbing silently as she rocked back and forth. “Then we will simply have to arrange to take what we seek sooner than expected, outside the castle boundaries,” he replied, approaching the child. She was no more than fifteen, the last of her pitiable regiment.

It had been down to a sense of justice that they had chosen Merritt’s old wizarding orphanage to prey upon, not only would it allow them to recover from their wounds quicker with magical blood filling their mouths, but also, it would send a message. They had slaughtered the matrons and the magical orphans like famished wolves among sheep. He of course had saved the virgins and the powerful for himself, this girl now mute in her grief had been the most strong-willed, and yet had broken at the sight of her friends being butchered and then drained of life by his diminished coven.

Alaric had not seen this, his weak, sympathetic stomach would have turned if he had. Even as changed as he was, he was still too soft-hearted to have ever made an adequate hunter. Or vampire, his mind supplied as he drew the girl up to him by her throat, watching her tear-stained eyes widen and fix on his. She reeked of fear and dirt where she had soiled herself in terror. But she was innocent and she was magical. Not the one I long for, but tasty enough as an appetiser, he thought,
hearing the door slam suddenly, narrating Alaric’s departure from the scene just as he sank his teeth into her throat.

She quivered in his grasp, too caught by his thrall to even try to flee, or even scream. Her blood flowed over his tongue like honey, rich and delectable, but not what he truly desired. Still, she was sustenance and her death, her disappearance and the disappearance of the occupants of her entire orphanage would send the desired message. To Merritt, to the Malfoy youngling and the Hunters. They were coming and they would take no prisoners.

~To Be Continued...
With The Moon I Run

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is taken from the song ‘Closer’ by Kings of Leon.

Skileshmorte -- derived from the words 'skin' and 'flesh'. Tears away chunks of flesh. My creation. Please ask, credit me and link to my page accordingly if you use.

Hoaryahexia -- derived from 'hoary' another word for silver. A bolt of pure silver that combusts upon hitting the flesh, creating an overwhelming flash of silver. My creation. Please ask, credit me and link to my page accordingly if you use.

::chapter twenty four::

WITH THE MOON I RUN

A fresh, chilly breeze tore across the grey plans of London, carrying the last winter’s snow with it and kissing the sides of the scarlet train, which was sufficiently magic warmed for the hundreds of students within. It had not yet broken free of Kings Cross station, but time was ticking away and Harry steered himself towards the train. He didn’t have as much luggage as he did at the start of each year, but he had Alba hooting excitedly in her cage as well as his rucksack, and he and Draco were late catching the train. This combined with fighting their way through the other latecomers made for a tricky task indeed.

He had saved Remus and Tonks the trouble of taking him to the station by allowing Draco to apparate him. Of course, Draco had stayed last night and what had become their usual ‘morning routine’ had made them late. He’d even skipped breakfast in his haste. Still, even the rushed stressfulness of the morning could not eradicate the glow that has been radiating from him ever since Christmas Eve.

A smile took his lips as he hopped onto the train at last, Draco’s hand caressing his back, reassuring him of his presence. Ron and Hermione had secured one of the first carriages and it seemed no one else had found them yet, perhaps Luna, Neville and Ginny were still circulating the train?
Or perhaps the latter was still uncomfortable about seeing him with someone, with Draco, to be
precise. No one else had offered any sniping comments about being gay or similar, however, so
Hermione must’ve been right, that wasn’t one of the prejudices the wizarding world held.

_I wonder what they would think if they knew he was a vampire, and I his first_, he thought as he
greeted his best friends, sliding into the compartment and taking the seat opposite Hermione. He
heard Draco slide the door shut and take the seat next to him, after setting Alba and their bags up
on the shelf.

Harry had gotten used to the little gentlemanly acts such as that over the holidays. Draco was full
of them and what did it matter if he was allowed to do them? It made him happy, and it certainly
didn’t make Harry the ‘girl’. There wasn’t a ‘girl’; he’d finally found the truth of that over the last
few days. Everything had a shiny haze around it at the moment, he doubted anything could
puncture his elation.

“She really is a beautiful owl, Malfoy,” Hermione crooned, “she practically dazzled us when she
delivered Harry's Christmas cards. She must’ve cost you a fortune!”

Harry shot Draco a sideward glance, but the vampire merely relaxed back against the seat,
intimately close to Harry's side. “Money is no object when it comes to Harry's happiness,” he
replied simply. Ron snorted at that, but said nothing more.

“So, your letter said that you’d tell me how things went when you saw me,” Harry said, indicating
Hermione’s belly which seemed unnaturally swollen – more so than it had been last he saw her. He
frowned. “Does that mean that things did not go well?”

Hermione glanced to Ron, who could meet no one’s eyes, but curled his hand around Hermione’s
supportively. He was shielding the weakness that was undoubtedly in his eyes from view, Harry
thought, focusing instead on Hermione, who looked as if she were searching for the right words.

“It’s complicated. My parents were shocked but thrilled, they took it the best really,” Hermione
began with an unsteady smile, her free hand resting on her stomach. “Mr and Mrs Weasley… Well
Mr Weasley didn’t say anything for a long time, he looked stunned, but Mrs Weasley was caught
between excitement and scolding Ron.” She went a bit pink at that and squeezed Ron’s hand
tightly.

“She calmed down of course and just as you said, Harry, she and Mr Weasley, all of them are
thrilled. They feel we could’ve chosen better timing of course but, well…if ever anyone finished their NEWTs with top marks and had a baby simultaneously it’d be me, Ginny said. So we have their support and that feels much better.”

Harry smiled softly at that. He was glad, but the way Hermione had finished her sentence told him that that was not the whole of it. “But?” he asked, not sure he wanted to hear a ‘but’ if it had caused Ron to avoid their eyes and Hermione to stare down at her belly in apprehension. In concern. “Hermione, what’s wrong?”

Beside him, Draco tensed, as if he knew what was coming. Maybe he did? Maybe he could smell whatever was wrong? He had sensed that there was something wrong with Hermione in the first place…

“We took the opportunity of having some time away from school to visit the healers that specify in the antenatal side of things, just to see how everything was going, you know?” she continued, trying to keep her level-headed, bookish attitude and failing dismally. “The baby is perfectly healthy and alive, it’s just… Well although we were both healed by the effects of *Essenz der Fee* by Malfoy and Snape’s potion, the baby seems to have…well…”

Harry leant forward, unease rippling through him, chasing away the glow. He caught her free hand in his. “Did it hurt the baby?” he asked quietly, not wanting to know the answer.

Hermione bit her lip. “It seems that the *Essenz der Fee* has triggered a condition in the baby, an accelerated growth of sorts. The Healer said that this was normal for a child that had such a concentrated dose of *Essenz der Fee*. It is a method of saving the child, you see, in exaggerated conditions, that’s half the point of it, only…only this means that the baby will be born much sooner than expected.”

Harry nodded, he knew now why she had grown so much in the last week. He hadn’t noticed her stomach’s growth while they’d been at Hogwarts, she used concealing charms so well, but now that he hadn’t seen her in a while…

“Surely that’s bad for the baby and for you, isn’t it?” Harry asked, “Magic or no magic.”

“I’ve got some potions to take,” Hermione replied, “and I need to rest, take it easy as much as possible, but because the baby is growing so quickly and using its magic to subsidise that growth, there’s a large chance that it might be…”
The room fell silent, whatever the dreaded possibility was, no one seemed to want to say it. In the end, it was Draco that finished, “might be born a squib.”

Harry blinked. “But that…if that’s the worst thing that could happen to it, then does it really matter?” Harry asked. “As long as it’s alive and healthy-”

“Of course it doesn’t matter to us,” Hermione interrupted. “Of course but…it would matter to the baby, it would matter to it a great deal as it grew older, and there’s nothing we can do, no way we can tell until it is born. The most help I can be is to put my feet up and eat lots and I’m its mother!” She looked disgusted with herself, as if this was all her fault. Harry winced at that. It wasn’t her fault, it wasn’t it was…

Alaric did this to her, Draco whispered in his mind. Alaric has interfered in the lives of your friends, all to punish me through you.

Harry glared at him out of the corner of his eyes. I hate him for it, but we’ve discussed this and you promised not to kill him. Drop it, he warned, not wanting to get into that again, especially now. His glow had all-but faded. He had been giddy with excitement this holiday, with happiness, with Draco and the whole time his friends had been suffering with this massive burden of worry. What kind of friend was he?

Don’t you dare berate yourself for being happy, you little fool, Draco hissed at him in his mind. You know exactly what your friends would say to that. Don’t you dare regret everything we shared this last week.

I could never regret it! Harry snapped vehemently. Never. I just…I felt bad, not being there for them, alright? We’re always there for each other.

You’re here now, Draco reminded him, and you’ll be no use to them if you return to your old, self-deprecating, brooding ways. The best way you can start helping them is by allowing them not to worry about your happiness anymore.

I am happy, Harry thought, I can be happy and worry about them at the same time, can’t I?

Of course, Draco purred, leaning in subtly and caressing Harry’s hand that wasn’t holding Hermione’s with his fingers. If you have any trouble remembering how happy you are, think of one of our mouth-watering love-making sessions we have shared over the holidays. You even
christened by bed, Potter, with my parents sleeping just a few doors down – how debauched you have become.

Harry’s cheeks coloured at that breathy tone rippling through his mind, and at the memory of that evening. After the Christmas meal at Malfoy Manor, Draco had insisted that Harry stay the night – in his bedroom, much to Narcissa Malfoy’s protest. Their first night in Draco’s bedroom had been as blissful as their first night in his…

It was almost with apprehension that Harry allowed Draco to lead him by the hand up the grand stairs and along the numerous halls to his room. He thought Draco felt tense, apprehensive as well, perhaps wanting to impress Harry with his room. The door opened and closed behind them and as Harry stared around at the room in awe he was proven right by the flicker of pleasure that moved through him from Draco. Draco was the type of man that took pride in material things, he wanted Harry to like his room. An inheritance of most base instincts of the vampire, perhaps; Draco was about to seduce Harry into his bed, a bed he wanted to please his prey as well as everything else.

It was nothing and yet everything like his room back in Siddlebury Cottage. The carpet was a lush, dark green, as were the bed sheets, which looked like a combination of plush furs and silks with matching bed curtains around the mahogany four-poster. The furniture in the room, the dressers, the armoire, the desk, they all were carved from the same wood with the same subtle yet intricate swirling patterns carved into the edges. There was also a large mahogany chest at the end of the bed and a window-seat scattered with hundreds of cushions that Harry thought most humans would be happy to consider a bed in itself.

There were delicate silver and gold accents in the room of course as well, but there were personal touches, just like in Harry's room. Pictures were arranged precisely on the bedside table and on the dresser alongside various items like Draco's old prefect badge, his old slytherin tie, which now at Hogwarts was replaced with a plain black one with the Hogwarts crest. None of the eighth years were allowed to belong to a house any longer. There were personal affects like this from his youth all around the room. A robust looking mobile with owls hanging from it was even hanging in the far corner by the grand window.

It was all very tidy, nothing out of place that further proved how Draco had been hiding from the world in this room before now. That would all change from now on. He could tell by what had occurred downstairs earlier. Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy had been afraid, unsure of how to approach Draco after they had failed him, but they still loved him and now that that first step had been made, things would be better between them, better for Draco. Harry could feel it in his bones.
Stepping forward into the room, Harry inhaled the light musky scent of Draco that clung to everything in the room. His senses were spinning in heaven. Momentarily forgetting that Draco’s now vibrant silver eyes were watching his every move, Harry ran his fingers over the bed curtains, the chest, the ragged old stuffed red dragon that sat hidden at the corner of the dresser. House elves had evidently ensured that no dust settled in the room, but Harry could tell it had not been touched in a long time. He looked at the little creature, wondering what a tot-sized Draco must’ve looked like clinging to this. It must have meant a lot to him if he’d kept it all this time.

He smiled thoughtfully, realising just what it meant that someone as private and proud as Draco had invited him into his private domain. The dragon itself was testament to one thing at least, not many people, if any ever came in here. He briefly recalled a flicker of feeling, of Draco’s emotions from when he had relived Draco’s time hiding here in Voldemort’s domain – amongst the other memories he had witnessed.

The blond had locked his door, knowing that nothing could hold the Dark Lord at bay if he chose to come in. He had glanced over his private things, knowing that they could be desecrated at any moment. This place, these things were sacred to Draco and he had let Harry in, had watched him touch things without as much as thinking.

Stunned momentarily by the intensity of that realisation, Harry whirled on his heel, staring at the odd look sparkling in those grey eyes. Draco had not moved from the doorway, but he moved now, approaching Harry in silence. He still had that apprehensive look on his face but was fighting to badly mask it. Not wanting Draco to mistake his awe for something else, Harry gave him a reassuring smile, setting the stuffed dragon down exactly as it had been before running his fingers slowly in turn over every ornament and possession on the dresser.

After a long silence, after wordlessly appreciating and understanding every personal effect in the room, Harry crossed the carpet to sit on the bed of cushions that was the window seat. The curtains that matched the bed-curtains right down to the silver and gold accents within were left open and the light of the moon was streaming in through the perfectly clear glass, bathing him and the bed of cushions with silvery light that reminded Harry exactly of the colour of Draco’s eyes. Eyes that were still trained on him. Eyes that were coming closer again.

It wasn’t until Draco stopped before him, standing in between his open legs that Harry released the breath he hadn’t realised he’d been holding. That gaze was fixed on his face, that skin was milky in the ethereal light of the moon. Slowly, purposefully while still holding Harry’s gaze, Draco’s long fingers lifted to his shirt and began to undo the buttons. Harry was frozen in place by that pearly white beauty.

The shirt shuddered to the floor, followed quickly by his trousers. Harry’s breath caught in his lungs again when Draco stepped out of his silky black boxers, leaving him proud and naked, vulnerable to Harry’s gaze. He looked anything but vulnerable right now, however. He had never
looked more certain of anything in his life.

At last, that husky voice broke the silence, but not the dreamlike atmosphere that had surrounded them. “There’s no secret, no possession, no thought, no part of me that isn’t yours to see,” Draco murmured. He knelt down with one knee between Harry’s legs, the other at his side and those hands began unveiling Harry to him now. “I’ve never trusted someone enough to let them in this far before, and after what you said, what you helped happen downstairs earlier, it’s just made me realise how I feel about you, made me see things crystal clear for the first time.”

Harry was as naked as he was now but as his lips parted in speech, Draco pushed him back gently into the cushions, the moonlight covering them both completely now. Draco followed, sliding over him until Harry’s body was completely covered with his. Harry just blinked at him stupidly, dazed by him and embarrassed and happy in ways he could not put into words. He forced his reciprocating feelings towards Draco, making him understand that the feelings were mutual even if he could not say as much.

Draco smiled, reassured at this and leant down to touch their lips together, supporting his weight on his arms either side of Harry’s shoulders. The connection of their mouths was gentle and chaste, loving and Harry’s eyes fluttered shut. He craned his neck slightly to deepen that kiss, but Draco pushed back, forcing his head into the cushion and mouthing his lips sweetly. When they broke apart at last, it was only for a few centimetres, their noses and lips were still touching. Harry’s breath was dancing across Draco’s mouth as it curved to form three breathy words. “I love you,” Draco whispered.

His heart was pounding, his breath had been stolen from his lungs by that kiss, Harry thought and now he was trying to make his mouth move but no sound was coming to him. Before he could find himself, Draco sealed his lips again with his own, mouthing him just as tenderly as before while his hand slid down, caressing a tickling line from his clavicle to navel. It dived down the slender line of hair there to take his already burgeoning arousal in hand.

A groan vibrated from Harry’s lips into the kiss. His body arched forward, melting into Draco’s liquidly, like two substances impossible to keep apart. His mind was so addled with bliss of every possible kind that he didn’t even have time to protest when Draco retracted his hand, for in the few seconds it took him to realise what had happened, the blond’s body was pressed flush to his. That long, hard organ at first merely ghosted over his, before grinding down, bringing them together in hungry frottage that immediately brought Harry’s fingers up to tangle in those blond locks.

He wanted to say it back, wanted to answer him but something stopped him and before he could question that, Draco’s tongue had speared his lips and slipped inside, stroking every crevice of his moist, hot mouth, his saliva and passion driving Harry into incoherent ecstasy. He pulled Draco tighter, sliding his cock up and down against Draco’s, grinding into him hard. He swore he felt his erection ooze pre-emission, slicking their strokes. Then the tip of Draco’s substantial shaft pressed
just right under the crown of his own head and he tore his mouth away, groaning his pleasure out unrestrainedly to the world.

A low chuckle answered him, he couldn't do more than register it. He was still crying out, he was still pressing back into Draco's prick frantically. Then that mouth was passing over one of the fresh, bruised bite marks Draco had left there last night. It was so sensitive under his tongue that he felt his cock drool copiously again. “S-S-Shit - Draco - too much - too - st- can’t—” He didn't know what he was trying to say. All he knew was that it was too good, his brain was being swallowed by the ecstasy that was so hot and devastating it was like a tide of lava inside of him. Devouring him.

The very tip of that tongue was pressing teasingly into the two little sealed holes, working him into frenzy. A frenzy for more of him, all over, filling him up, everywhere and now.

"D-Draco!" he gasped out, his fingers clawing at his back. His head tossed back, and that mouth latched on in earnest, coating his skin with tingling spittle, his only warning before Draco seized him by his shoulders. That delicious mouth left his neck and he was rolled until Draco was lying on the cushions and he, Harry was lying on top of him, their cocks still connected. One of Draco's hands found his bare arse, kneading the globe of flesh and holding him fast to Draco's hips simultaneously, forcing them together harder and faster.

Harry cried out again, shivering pleasurably when another hand gripped the hair at the back of his head. His fingers curled in the sheets either side of Draco's head as his shuddering arms struggled to support himself. He could feel Draco looking up at him here, but more than that he felt in control, exposed in a way that made him cant his hips faster eagerly.

There was no need to hold back here, despite the embarrassment that was tingeing his cheeks with colour, it was exactly as Draco said. He had nothing to hide, had nothing in him that wasn't completely and utterly Draco's. Nothing that had not been touched by his possessive yet loving silvery light. Just like their bodies beneath the moonlight right now.

“Do you want to take me?” Draco asked in a barely coherent gasp in his ear. Harry's cock hardened impossibly at the thought, but his arse clenched hungrily and his limbs ached longingly.

“N-Not tonight, c-can't...can't control myself enough and...and want...want you inside of me...please...” He wanted to feel Draco too, but when his mind wasn't clouded with lust and dizzying desire, when he wasn't about to burst like an adolescent all over Draco's skin. When he wasn't so desperate to feel Draco filling him again.
“I agree,” Draco replied roughly, slamming a bruising kiss into Harry's mouth again, before holding his right hand – his wand hand out to the side. A tingle shuddered through Harry's lips where their mouths were joined in the same way that their hands had when performing joint magic that morning. Draco was calling on their bond, for the feel of their connection rather than necessity for the extra power. A squat, clear jar shot into the vampire's palm and Draco set it down, unscrewing the lid deftly and offering it to Harry.

Harry flushed all over as the kiss broke and he saw it.

“I want you to prepare yourself for me,” Draco murmured sexily. It was a very intimate, very embarrassing suggestion but Harry knew that that was exactly why Draco had made it. Swallowing hard under that gaze, he sat up on his knees, leaning forward slightly with his arse hovering over Draco's prick that brushed against his cheeks eagerly. He dipped his fingers into the slick lubricant and reached behind himself awkwardly, tentatively tracing his twitching ring of muscles. He had never touched himself back there before. His cheeks were burning in delicious mortification. He closed his eyes, unable to look at Draco watching him so intently.

With a burst of courage he pushed his middle finger into his channel. At this precise moment, Draco took his other hand, gracing the pads of each of his fingers with a pass of his lips, before grazing the very tip of a fang teasingly over the skin. Harry groaned, sliding the digit in deeper, finding himself still surprisingly limber and soft down there. The heat swallowed him. His cock jerked as a second finger joined the first, scissoring his entrance open and coating his insides with copious lubrication.

Draco was scraping his thumb now with his teeth, tugging a shuddering gasp from him that silently coerced Harry's eyes to open. Through arousal lidded eyes Harry stared down at him, embarrassed beyond words, straddling Draco's lap and squirming impatiently, his slick channel clenching around his fingers.

“You look delicious,” Draco breathed against his palm, his eyes shining with want. “I can see and feel every muscle in your body tensing with need. What do you need Harry?”

Harry groaned through clenched teeth. “Y-You. Want to be filled, want to be taken over by you. I want to feel you everywhere.” His lips were moving without his permission but he knew that the words were true. He was delirious with it all now, overwhelmed by what he felt for the man beneath him, he wanted to be as close to him as the universe permitted.

Draco tugged him down hard by the hand he held captive until their chests were pressed flush together, Harry's erection weeping a trail of clear pre-emission onto Draco's belly. When Draco spoke next, his whisper danced across Harry's slightly parted, kiss-bruised lips. “Then take it,” he said.
Tugging his fingers from his own body with a humiliatingly wet sound, Harry reached for the jar again, scooping up a thick fistful of the viscous gel and reaching between them to take Draco's cock in hand. The heavy shaft throbbed at his touch, he held Draco's gaze despite the embarrassment, delighting in that in a strange way as well as he pampered the column of flesh for a moment, making him slick at the same time. “You look beautiful,” Harry said to him, rewarded by a smile from those perfect lips, a smile that flashed those pearly white fangs. “I want you now.”

Put it in yourself, Mr Potter, Draco's voice whispered in his mind. A shudder caressed Harry's sweat-dampened body and he leant up slightly, guiding Draco's pulsing cock to his wet orifice. He didn’t have as much patience or control or restraint as Draco and he rolled his hips down, taking everything Draco was in one movement. His teeth caught his lower lip. He cried out in sheer pleasure. Somehow, despite being a virgin only last night, his body already seemed to fit Draco's as if it had been made for it.

The benefits of magical healing from your vampire lover, he thought with a breathy grin, settling his hands on Draco's chest to support himself. His passage trembled, overwhelmed with sensation and the white-hot pleasure zinging from the inescapable pressure on his pleasure spot. “So good,” he panted, closing his eyes again to drink in the feeling. “Feel so…connected…I…” He licked his lips, unable to find more accurate words than that. Draco's hands slithered across his thighs, gripping his hips in a way that told Harry he felt exactly the same way, that he understood without words before beginning to help his hips to rock gently atop him.

Sparks burst behind Harry's balls, shooting through his veins to fill every limb and appendage with heat. He allowed Draco to show him how to move at first, to show him how to find the best angle. There was no awkwardness, no shame in not knowing what he was doing exactly. It was part of the intimacy of the moment, learning it with him. Draco started to grind up into him then, started to thrust with needle-point precision into the place that made his head spin.

Harry's heart was hammering in his chest now, his lungs aching with every ragged breath and his fingers curled into Draco's chest as he started to set his own rhythm, canting his hips harder, finding the way he liked it best.

Suddenly, he tossed his head back with a cry he didn't believe himself capable of. That was it. Right there. “Oh, holy...f-fu...Draco!” He practically growled. The fingers on his hips tightened and a rumbling snarl of ecstasy sounded from his lover below. It was too much, and yet not enough. He needed to come, now.

He was canting his hips vigorously now, resting on the balls of his feet to rock back and forth faster into the upward thrusts of Draco’s body. He was impaled completely, joined with the one he had come to adore so thoroughly, and in that moment, he knew he could not live without him. That
Draco reached for his cock that bobbed with every movement they made together, grasping it in his masterful fingers and caressing his entire length with languid strokes, milking him more and more urgently with every second. The pad of that thumb swept over the damp head of his erection, pressed slightly into the dripping slit and Harry hissed in pleasure, riding Draco with increased urgency.

His muscles shook with spasms. The hand over his cock squeezed tighter, driving delirious, keening moans from the fire in his core as they raced toward oblivion. The friction. The connection. The emotions spiralling through them, both their own and their partner's, they stoked a fire so dazzling and powerful that Harry swore his skin was glowing, humming with their joined magic.

Bucking back into Draco frantically now, Harry reached down, seizing the wrist of the hand now pumping his cock hard and fast, in time with their frenzied dancing hips as if afraid it would vanish right at the integral moment. He lay flat against Draco’s body now, wanting to feel as much of him as possible, all of him and more. The hand on his cock did not stall even at the new awkward lack of space between them, it moved faster than ever, sending Harry's body undulating like a seductive snake against his vampire.

A frantic, savage snarl of unrestrained passion burst through Harry's lips, he ducked his head catching Draco’s mouth urgently like a man starved of breath. His tight channel clenched. He circled his hips wildly and he could give no other warning other than a final, drawn out cry into the mouth he was taking as his white-hot completion splashed over Draco’s still moving hand and their bellies.

Before he could even gasp in sated bliss, Harry was tossed onto his back on the pillows without the connection of their lower bodies being broken. A flash of Draco’s silver eyes were all Harry saw before the vampire wrapped his arms under Harry's armpits and up over his shoulders. Draco clutched him to him and pounded him roughly into the bed of pillow.

Harry groaned, still dangling in the afterglow of ecstasy himself, his cock still throbbing between their bodies but Draco’s snarl of possessive devotion drowned out any noise he made. The thrusts were more urgent surges now, accented by loud, wet noises of their bodies joining. Draco plunged into him with abandon and Harry's mind spiralled, his body sucked Draco in greedily despite the fact that his body was limp in the aftermath of his orgasm.

Draco pulled him close determinedly, pressing his mouth to the hollow of Harry's neck where his permanent mark lay. He nuzzled the scar lovingly, making sounds that were torn between incoherent endearments and animalistic growls. Harry gripped him back, his fingers clutching
madly as him. And just as he tugged at Draco’s haphazard locks, just as he panted into his ear, squeezing him with his slick chute, Draco rocked into him with a final urgent thrust, his body seized by an explosive climax.

Harry arched his throat frantically when he felt the oddly warm fluid splash his insides in sharp spurts. His body was shaking in earnest now, overwhelmed with emotion and pleasure. It was too much after being starved for so many years for so much as an embrace. These emotions coursing through him, the emotions he felt for Draco, the powerful feelings Draco felt for him, they were frightening in their strength, he had never known anything this powerful before.

Still gasping for breath, his sweaty chest heaving where it was trapped under Draco’s, Harry stretched his neck a little more, offering the pulsing vein to Draco. He felt the vampire’s doting lips stroked the scar, the claiming mark and felt that nose nuzzle into the curls of dark hair just under his ear, but he could sense that the fangs had retreated beyond those gums before Draco even spoke.

“As much as I relish in the taste of you, I don’t want every time we are together to revolve around blood,” Draco purred, laying a final kiss on Harry’s neck before drawing back. Harry’s sticky entrance yawned as Draco withdrew from him gently and the vampire tugged Harry to him, rolling them both onto their sides, facing each other.

Harry blinked at him, his mind still hazy. “I like it when you bite me,” he insisted exhaustedly. Draco’s thumb was caressing the sharp outline of his jaw now, and he swore his skin was still glowing, humming with their combined magic.

“I like it as well. But I’ve had more than my fill, and while I am glad we can both relish in the intimacy by vampire nature brings us, sometimes I want to just be human with you.” His silvery eyes flickered and Harry watched the vampire breathe him in again. “I enjoy it all, but we’re more than vampire and first. Sometimes I want to embrace that as well.”

Harry pressed into him, resting his head against Draco’s, his hand resting on the vampire’s chest, feeling his heart thudding slowly. He closed his eyes. “I do know what you mean, I s’pose. It’s all good, bite or no bite, it doesn’t really matter to me one way or another. It’s good because it’s you, not because of what we are…”

Harry flushed at the memory, only realising he had drifted when he saw Hermione and Ron eyeing him oddly. He cleared his throat. Draco’s presence in his life had given him an optimism he’d long
thought gone from the world. He smiled at his two best friends. “It’ll be alright,” he assured them, he just knew it, he could feel it in his bones. “He or she is going to be healthy and happy and full of power. Trust me.”

They grinned back. “I reckon you’re right, mate,” Ron replied, squeezing Hermione’s hand tighter. “You usually are, funny enough, about these things.”

After this, they passed the time in companionable quiet, bantering casually, even Draco, until they were well into the countryside, the snowy landscapes gliding by as the train sped along its tracks. When the sound of the witch with the refreshment trolley sounded from the far end of the carriage, Hermione and Ron both got up.

“She’s finally eating properly out of her own free will now, minimal nagging from me,” Ron smirked. Hermione glared at him, and looked as if she might like to reprimand him, but her scowl dissipated quickly. She was getting better at controlling her mood-swings, Harry had noted. He was glad. He was hoping his friends would be able to enjoy what was left of the pregnancy now, especially since it would be public knowledge the moment they stepped back into Hogwarts. They didn’t have to hide it anymore. That probably helped them to feel like this was less like a mistake and more like a miracle.

As if on cue, the second his friends vanished, Harry’s stomach grumbled loudly. Draco laughed beside him. “I’ll fetch you something – you were in such a rush this morning you didn’t eat so much as a slice of toast,” the vampire said, gliding to his feet and half-heartedly releasing Harry’s hand.

Harry frowned. “Well we don’t all have vampire speed to help us get ready in the morning,” he said teasingly.

“You didn’t even have time to dress properly in your robes,” Draco said, gesturing to Harry’s trousers and t-shirt that he had practically jumped into that morning.

“Well I’ll change while you’re all raiding the food trolley,” Harry protested, liking the light banter between them, the ease of which they had settled into this full relationship. It was nice. It was like they had always been together. He liked it a lot. A kiss shocked him from his daze and he watched Draco draw back from his lips, heading through the compartment door.

“I’ll be back with your sustenance,” he chuckled, before vanishing out of sight.
Feeling like he was glowing again, Harry slid the compartment door shut and pulled down the blind over the window. Then he tugged his robes out of his rucksack where he had shoved them unceremoniously and began to undress quickly. Kreacher had hastily cast an anti-creasing charm on the fabric as he had crammed them into his bag, so they looked perfectly fine as he laid them out on the seat and stripped to his trousers (which were at least black and would do fine to wear under his robes) and lifted his shirt to pull on. The moment he touched it, however, the carriage door slid open again.

Hermione and Ron stood frozen in the doorway. For a moment Harry was confused by the horrified looks on their faces, but then as he looked down at himself, he realised. The bruises, the bite marks from his and Draco’s first coupling had yet to fade. Hastily he tugged on his shirt and distracted himself by doing up his tie, but the damage had already been done.

The door slid shut again and Ron and Hermione were moving towards him. “My gosh,” Hermione gasped. Harry raised his eyes to her and saw her hand covering her mouth, her eyes shining. “Harry, I suspected but I had hoped I was wrong, I…” her breath quivered as it left her lips. “Oh, Harry…”

“What the bloody hell is going on?” Ron snarled darkly. “What the hell is this?” He charged towards Harry, wrenching his collar roughly from his throat to expose the harshest of blue-red marks Draco had created there. Harry shoved him back roughly, angrily.

“Get off me!” he snarled, stepping away, out of their reach until his back was pressed flush against the compartment window. “Don’t jump to conclusions, you don’t know – it isn’t what it looks like!”

“It’s exactly what it looks like!” Hermione snapped, turning quickly and flicking her wand at the compartment door, silently casting what Harry knew to be a privacy charm. “Draco Malfoy is a vampire, I’ve suspected it since we came back to Hogwarts. Did you really think I wouldn’t research that scar on your neck and for ways to get rid of it for you? I had been trying to convince myself for months that I was wrong, but I was right, wasn’t I? He’s a vampire, he has been since that night you both killed Voldemort together?”

Harry flinched inwardly at that final statement, but nothing more. “I can’t tell you everything, it’s his secret to tell. Voldemort decided that his punishment was to be bitten, to be made a vampire and that my end would be by him devouring me. Draco didn’t kill me, instead we killed Voldemort together. He saved me.”

Ron’s eyes were hard with disbelief, with doubt but Hermione’s didn’t miss a trick. “And there’s more isn’t there? What is it? That can’t be the only reason you’ve…you’ve been drawn together. You still seemed to want nothing to do with him when we returned in September. So tell us, Harry, confess to all the lies at once.”
Harry didn’t like the accusation in her tone, but like with Remus, he could understand their concern, their anger if they were seeing him without understanding. It was only because they cared about him. He was trying frantically to remember that even as his blood boiled.

“He bit me in the dungeon, he drank from me but because he took control of himself and didn’t kill me, it bound us together instead,” he paused, pulling on his robes and raising his chin defiantly at them. He was still uncertain, but he wasn’t as lost and confused as before. There was nothing they could say that could change his mind about Draco, he had moved beyond that point.

“It’s hard to explain,” he continued. “Essentially, Draco can’t drink anyone else’s blood except mine. Or…well…he can but mine is the only blood that sustains him. We’re bound together. I was sort of…I was obligated to feed him at the start.” He watched Ron’s face twist with a grimace of utter disgust. Hermione simply looked stoic, as if she were calculating his every word carefully.

“We both tried to escape it and each other, but things happened, Alaric and the attack in Hogsmeade, my own…struggle to admit what had happened, what I’d gone through and…and you were right Hermione, Draco went through what I did. He understood me in ways no one else could and we were just…we were drawn together. I…I-”

“Please,” Ron bit out, “please don’t try to tell me you love him! It’s impossible! I don’t understand how he can claim to be in love with you, either. You’re essentially his bloody dinner!”

“Ron–” Hermione began, but Harry cut her off.

“You’re mouthing off about something you don’t understand,” Harry snapped defensively. “He’s a vampire, does that mean he can’t feel things just like you can? Don’t Remus or Bill have any feelings – can’t they love anyone? They’re just as ‘monstrous’ as Draco, aren’t they? Just as inhuman–?”

“Fleur and Tonks aren’t their bloody staple diet though!” Ron protested, still clearly revolted.

“We were brought together by that amongst other things but it doesn’t define what we are to each other,” Harry retorted hotly. “Or what we feel.”

“And what exactly is that?” Ron sneered.
“Ron,” Hermione snapped then, her tone so commanding that even Harry's gaze snapped to her on instinct. Her face was flushed, she still looked uneasy, concerned but she seemed to understand more than Ron did – as always.

Ron’s such a bloody hot-head, Harry thought, irritated.

“Ron,” she said again, “you’d have to be blind and deaf to miss how Draco feels about Harry. He loves him, they are lovers.” She worried her lip anxiously. “I’m worried about the…healthiness of this union, but whatever Draco is, we can’t deny how he has helped Harry, how he’s helped him to start healing after everything that happened.”

With another thoughtful pause in which Ron looked at her in disbelief, Harry saw Hermione focus on him then. “I’m not agreeing with the…” She gestured to his now hidden wounds, “and I’m still scared for you. I’m still worried, but I can’t turn a blind eye to all I’ve seen. He’s healed you, Harry, I don’t think he could’ve done that if both of you didn’t love each other.”

Harry blinked at her, the realisation slamming into him light a freight train. I love him, he thought, his entire body singing, agreeing with that notion with all his soul. I love him. His heart skipped a beat, and then the world exploded with chaos.

Suddenly, the train gave an almighty screech and slammed to a halt with such force that Harry, Ron and Hermione went flying across the compartment. Harry and Ron seized Hermione at the same time, both frantically cushioning her as they ricocheted of the walls. The train flashed dark, the lights going out and screams erupted all around them. The train groaned, leaning as if being pushed slowly onto its side and Harry reached up hastily to the cages containing Pig and Alba. He ripped them open and then hooked Crookshanks’ caged cat basket to Alba’s talons.

“Head to Hogwarts, to Professor Snape and don’t stop until you get there, he urged them both, bursting the window with a flick of his wand and sending them hurtling out into the dying afternoon. They were out of harm’s way, now he and Ron could concentrate on getting Hermione out. Then he needed to find Draco. Where was he? Why hadn’t he come running the second the pandemonium had ensued?

Trying to push that from his mind to give himself room to focus, Harry leant out of the window he had just broken, unnerved to see that the train was somehow leaning on its side. Their side of the train was raised unsteadily off the ground. A quick glance to the other side showed him a steep hill, a fatal drop for a steam engine filled with children.
Harry swallowed, looking back out the broken window again. “Ron, I’ll get down there first and catch Hermione, you two apparate to Hogsmeade and I’ll stay here and help everyone off the train.” He made sure there was no broken fragments left in the pane before hopping out, reaching up for Hermione’s hands as Ron helped her over to the window.

“There’s something not right,” he murmured, looking over his shoulder quickly. He felt something watching him, an evil presence nearby as he caught Hermione, both of them quickly joined by Ron on the grass. “There’s no way the Hogwarts Express just breaks down. It has too many protective charms on nowadays. Something’s going on.”

“Something indeed,” a hoarse, gruff voice chuckled from behind them. The trio whirled on the spot, Harry and Ron stepping slightly in front of Hermione, all three of them with their wands drawn. Fenrir Greyback stood before them, alone and ominous with a wicked smile of bloody, yellow fangs to greet them.

“Your vampire not here to save you this time, eh, kid?” the werewolf snarled. Harry sneered right back.

“He’s never too far behind me,” he threatened. “What are you doing here? Still playing Alaric’s lapdog?”

The beast glared. “You’re one to talk of lapdogs when you’re nothing more than a pliant vampire’s whore – the Malfoy brat’s concubine. My being here is down to a sense of honour, a debt that must be fulfilled, but you, Potter, you have no honour, no pride. You’re nothing, nothing but a monster’s floozy.”

Harry flicked his wand sharply and the ground beside Greyback exploded. The beast snarled, leaping to the side, his limbs prickling warningly. He could transform at any moment, Harry thought. We need to get away from him, to incapacitate him somehow. Fenrir Greyback, the werewolf reputed for eating and changing children could do a lot of damage right now. Where were the aurors? The cavalry?

“You always were too cocky, Potter,” Greyback hissed, gnashing his teeth as he dropped to all fours. The next few seconds passed in slow motion. Harry’s arm flew out and he backed into his friends as if his body would provide an adequate shield for them. Greyback leapt into the air a man, changing as he bolted towards them, and reaching them a wolf. Just as Harry raised his wand, searching his mind frantically for some spell, any spell, a familiar, animalistic roar sliced through the air.
Greyback collided with the ground with an audible *thud*, scuffing up clouds of dirt and grass, righting himself onto all fours. The slathering beast growled predatorily, but so did the being standing between him and the golden trio. Draco.

“Harry,” he ground out, “I sent a Patronus to Severus, help is coming, get yourself away from here, now – Greyback isn’t alone.” His voice sounded rough, jagged with vampire instincts and Harry moistened his suddenly dry lips, afraid of the sound of it.

“Not alone?” Hermione gasped. And though Draco said nothing, Harry could guess what he meant. Whether it was his connection with Draco and thus Draco’s vampire senses or not, or just a sixth sense but Harry could feel it rippling through him. He could *feel* what was there, surrounding them even if they couldn’t be seen. Vampires, they were surrounded by vampires.

“Get away. Harry, they'll come for you first to get to me, you *know* they will. Run!” Draco urged him, but Harry stood fast.

“I won't leave you,” he insisted sternly, a low, grumbling snarl of a laugh that sounded like a mutated mixture of beast and human slid through the muzzle of the werewolf before them. Then he lunged again.

Hermione screamed as the creature flew for them again. But Harry was prepared this time. “Expulso!” He cried, the ground just below Greyback bursting from underneath him, debris crashing into the furred body enough to knock him off course, enough to distract him so that Draco could jump him. The vampire slammed into the werewolf's back, gripping him with crushing pressure with his legs and seizing that slobbering muzzle with his hands. Blood splashed out as those fangs pierced Draco's fingers, but the blond merely winced, taking the top and lower jaw in hand and trying to force them apart. The wolf roared, bucking like an enraged bull, slamming repeatedly into the tilted train in an attempt to dislodge Draco. It groaned warningly.

“We have to get everyone out of that train,” Harry gasped, whirling on his feet to face his friends. “Gather all the eighth and seventh years and get them to apparate the younger students to Hogsmeade in groups if need be. They need to get out of here—”

“You know what's here, who Greyback is working with, why they're here, don't you?” Hermione asked hurriedly, her gaze darting between him and the train and the fighting demons not far enough away for her liking.

Harry bit his lip. “No, not really,” he answered with a half-truth, he could sense vampires, but he did not know who they were or why they were here. But he could guess. “There's no time for
pondering that either, if we stay here, we'll all die. Start evacuating the train of students. They don't know how dire the situation is – go!” he insisted.

With hesitation evident in their faces, Ron and Hermione tore themselves away from Harry's side, clambering back into the train, their raised voices crying warnings and instructions from inside.

Turning his attention back to where Draco was wrestling with the wolf, Harry gripped his wand tighter. But just at that moment, the wolf, still frantically trying to shake Draco off his back, leapt onto the roof of the train. It groaned again menacingly and Harry swore, hoisting himself up onto the sill of the broken window and using the lip as a foothold to scramble up onto the roof.

“Immobulus!” He chanted but the light that zipped from the wand missed them by a hairsbreadth.

Harry's eyes widened as he realised a second too late what the werewolf was about to do. “No!” he screamed, shooting forwards. Greyback leapt from the roof, sending both him and the entwined vampire tumbling down the steep hill that was more like a cliff-face. The train jerked with the force of his jump and Harry staggered, stumbling to his knees on the treacherously slippery surface of the icy carriage roof. Beneath him inside the train, the panicked students weren't helping, rushing frantically for the exits. He hoped they could get away. He could feel the vampires closing in now. Whatever they wanted could only be bad news.

Gripping the edge of the roof, Harry dropped down onto the snowy ground, hearing it crunch under his feet. Still locked in a battle half way down, Draco had been thrown from Greyback’s back and was side-stepping the vicious snaps of those powerful jaws. They were evenly matched this time, thanks to Harry's blood – thanks to their bond.

But then, two powerful hands seized his throat and wand arm, shaking both until Harry felt his neck creak warningly, about to snap. He would not surrender his wand. I will not! He thought, struggling fiercely, snarling like a feral beast, but then the fingers on his throat shifted, and a gruff voice he had never heard before rippled through his ears. Immediately, he fell limp in that grasp.

“Stand still boy and do nothing. You can feel my influence, you can feel it controlling you. You cannot move, cannot even speak.” He heard the grin against his ear. “Good,” the vampire said, sniffing him deeply. “You smell delicious, but I am not stupid enough to incur the wrath I would invoke if I tasted you. You'll stay right here until my master comes.”

At that moment, Harry had no doubt in his mind who that master was, and his insides trembled as his body could not.

“Now, little one,” the stranger crooned, “Call your lover's attention to you, now.”
Harry’s eyes widened. No, no, he thought desperately, but the thrall was not something he could throw off like the imperious curse. “Draco!” he screamed with everything that was in him, even though his mind cried in negation. Far below, the vampire's head snapped up to him, and Greyback took the opportunity, sinking his teeth into Draco's torso, pinning him to the ground.

Pain and fear, both Harry's and Draco's rushed through Harry's head and he winced, still screaming inside his head as he watched Greyback shake Draco like a ragdoll.

“Harry!” Draco snarled, and Harry did not know whether it was a cry for help or a cry of disdain at not being able to reach him, but Harry knew he had to go to him, had to save him regardless. His muscles bunched and he slammed his eyes shut, his jaw tensing as he pushed with all his might against the unknown vampire's will that bound him.

His wand hand clenched around his wand. The mark at his neck throbbed warningly. Whatever the vampire did, however he violated his will and mind, he could not eclipse or eradicate Draco's bond to him. He clung to those thoughts, that glowing connection he still felt rushing through his blood and gave an internal roar, throwing himself against the barriers of the influence surrounding him.

They broke, like elastic stretched too thin and his roar became an audible sound that tore at his throat. He brought his hand up and shoved his wand hard into the vampire's eye-socket. The beast howled. Harry dropped, his knees shaking from fighting off the thrall but before he could turn his wand on him, a spell shot passed his ear.

“Petrificus Totalus!” Cried a voice, and the agonised vampire that had attacked him went stiff as a board, arms frozen to his side. Harry shuffled back, narrowly avoiding becoming the beast's landing pad. The vampire slammed face-first into the shin-deep blanket of snow. Harry looked up, and Hermione and Ron were standing at the entrance of the nearest carriage door, a large group of students stuck behind them, waiting to get out.

Ron's wand arm was outstretched from where he had saved him and Harry gave him a small nod, still gasping for breath as he whirled and used the thick sheet of snow to hasten his fall as he slid down the steep hillside, tearing towards where those fangs were now lodged in his lover's throat. To where his lover lay unmoving beneath them.

Panic shot through him and he scrambled clumsily up as he reached them. “Skileshmorte!” He gasped breathlessly, and watched without emotion as a chunk of flesh burst from Greyback's side. The beast roared, flipping off Draco and tumbling to the side. Harry kept his wand trained on him even when he dropped to Draco's side, pulling the bloody mess that was his vampire into his chest,
careless of the splatters of blood that oozed through his robes. Draco made no sound as Harry held him, but Harry felt his life still there under his fingers. Our fingers, he thought, remembering the glowing sensation when they had joined hands in magic the last few times.

Still shaking from panic and shock and fear, from the aftermath of that vampire's thrall, Harry slipped his hand into one of Draco's bloody ones, aiming his wand steadily at the mass of fur and blood that was rising again for a final attack. His skin was glowing again, humming with his and Draco's power. He felt both come to him without the overwhelming fear of losing control. He wouldn't lose control this time, or ever again, he would not allow himself to. Draco's presence inside of him, Draco's magic would not allow him to. His magic was his to command, and now he felt it mingling with Draco's inside his body, brewing at his wand tip in a blinding, golden sphere.

"Hoaryaehexia!" He chanted, and the gold exploded into a torrent of unavoidable, sparkling silver that bolted for Greyback like a giant arrow. The wolf was not quick enough to avoid this. It struck his skin and then erupted in a tornado that swallowed the creature whole. Harry had only seen this spell once in a book, was not even sure what it looked like and yet it had come to him with all the ease of years of practice. His and Draco's magic had made it easier than breathing. Especially now, as he looked down at his lover, still unmoving and bloody in his lap. His breath staggered, everything fell away as he brushed his crimson-stained locks from that face.

Vampires could still die, of that he was sure, and whatever kind of death they faced, he felt Draco would be close to it if he didn't do something soon. There was only one way for Draco to recover, whether there were hundreds of students and his two best friends watching him, whether the vampires were closing in or not. But if there was any hesitancy in him in desperation for Draco's secret to be kept, it faded as the hand not wrapped in his clawed at his stained robes.

"B-Blood," Draco gasped, his voice ragged and strained, like that of a dying man. “I need…need blood.” Harry nodded. Draco knew the severity of this, Draco couldn't heal naturally, and he didn't have the time, the days it would take to recover from this without blood, not when the vampires were drawing closer and closer.

The hairs on Harry's neck stood on end. He could feel them more than ever now. He didn't have much time. Shrugging off his black robe, he tugged his shirt away from the side of his throat and awkwardly pulled Draco's dead-weight body to him. The vampire's mouth grazed his neck and his fingers hooked into Harry's shoulders weakly.

Hurry, Harry thought, pushing Draco's head to his neck insistently. Hurry!

Then, scuffling and two loud thuds signalled two bodies had dropped to their knees in the snow beside him. Harry opened his eyes, seeing Ron and Hermione there, staring at his and Draco's interlocked bodies with wide eyes. “Harry,” Hermione gasped, “Harry you can’t, not here,
“That will be nothing compared to what they will do to him if he can’t defend himself. They’re here for him, they’ll kill him and worse if they catch him,” he glanced between his friends and those gathered by the train at the top of the hill. “I can’t rely on my magic when he feeds. Hide us, please.” His voice was filled with such imploring trust, and he saw their eyes flicker, saw them reach for their wands. Whatever doubts they had, they knew Harry needed them, they would rather die than let him down.

Joining hands, his two best friends raised their wands, sending wisps of silvery blue light dancing around them, congregating in a circular sphere around them until the mist became a thick, glowing shield, hiding all four of them from view. The moment the barrier was solid enough that he could see nothing beyond it, and was nearly blinded by the vibrancy of his friends’ dual cast, Harry allowed his eyes to flutter shut.

“Draco needs this or he’ll die, they’ll kill him and then they’ll kill me and everyone here,” he murmured, reaching for the vial always kept in Draco’s pocket and downing a dose of crimson fluid without thought.

“Temporentia Sensium,” Hermione whispered, recognising it instantly. “He…he always ensures you drink that first?” She seemed reassured by the idea.

“Yes,” Harry said, seeing contemplative thoughts cross both of their faces. “And we will talk about this later but right now, you must not interrupt.” He knew how instinctual both he and Draco became when they were joined this way, he didn’t want to know how Draco might react to being ripped away from him mid-feed, everyone might get hurt. Inhaling, he pressed firmly on the back of Draco’s head. Drink, he whispered into the vampire’s mind. It’s safe, no one can see. Feed.

A low, rumbling growl vibrated against his throat and a final, preparing lap of that tongue swiped over his skin, before those fangs sank into him. His face flushed, his body undulated against Draco’s as the vampire sucked hungrily at him, his fingers tilting Harry’s head to the side and supporting it the way Draco liked it best.

Soon, Harry was limp in his embrace, was groaning softly under his breath, licking his lips as he felt those fingers card through his hair affectionately. The world faded away but came back all too soon. He all-but whined in negation as those fangs withdrew from his neck, his fingers clutching at Draco’s shoulders urgently. But those lips merely sealed the wound and then bestowed on the bite marks a doting kiss before drawing back, steadying him on his knees. Draco had been afraid to take too much, Harry could tell. He hadn’t taken enough to fully restore himself, only enough to regain some semblance of his strength.
Slowly, Draco slid to his feet, pulling Harry with him and holding him close to his chest until he was sure he could stand. Harry felt his limbs shake slightly, but he did not fall. Draco was standing before him, the great gashes across his body vanished even if the blood had not, he was ok, for now and that was all that mattered. Just as he motioned to open his lips, however, Draco spoke.

“They’re here,” he said stoically. Hermione and Ron frowned, dropping the barrier they had erected just in time for an eerie breeze to sweep over them. Suddenly, above them on the hill, the train roared, rocking off the tracks and beginning to fall, tumble downwards, about to crush the hundreds of students gathered alongside and inside it.

The next moments passed as long, drawn out chasms of time. Harry stumbled into Draco’s chest, holding that gaze as he interlocked their hands purposefully. He didn’t need to speak, or even think for Draco to understand what he intended. There was no time for protest, either. Magic rushed from their cores, meeting where their hands joined and vibrating through their skin.

A glow more fierce and powerful than sunlight bloomed. Harry seized control over the unstoppable beast that was their combined magic for the second time that day, turning his gaze (his wand long forgotten) on the train. “Mobiliarbus!” he cried, Draco’s voice chanting the word simultaneously in his mind.

Above on the hilltop, the sound of metal straining tore through the sound of screaming children. Harry's body shook, Draco’s tensed beside him and the entire Hogwarts Express lifted gently into the air, hovering a few feet off the ground. The students stopped, staring dumbly at it. A bead of sweat trickled down the side of Harry’s temple as he steadied his gaze, forcing the thread of magic between them to stabilise when he felt it strum and quiver like a plucked harp string.

Draco’s fingers tightened around his and he gave a small nod. They could do this. They would.

Slowly, steadily, inch by inch, they settled squarely back on its tracks. Even as he felt his body long to slump to the ground on exhaustion, he knew that was impossible as soon as he saw the crimson cloaked figures emerging on the horizon of the hilltop, near the front of the train, dangerously close to the bewildered, frightened students.

_They pushed the train_, Harry realised, a fleeting inane, pointless thought before the creatures surged forward and the world went mad. “We have to save them,” Harry insisted, staggering up the hill. Draco, Ron and Hermione hurried after him. Draco seized his shoulders, shaking him roughly.
“Don’t be a fool, you’re done with ploughing into trouble you can’t change, remember?” Draco insisted. “There’s nothing you can do–”

“They’re here for us, because of us!” Harry snapped.

At that moment, a shriek ripped through the winter’s air and Harry jerked his head up, just in time to see a vampire seize a girl, Daphne, Harry realised. The creature’s fangs were honing in on her throat. Harry gave Draco a quick, imploring glance and the vampire shot up the hill with a snarl of annoyance. He shoved the vampire back with renewed strength, pulling Daphne from his talons, ignoring her gasping, whimpers of gratitude and flying forwards to keep the demons from the other students. He was outnumbered, but he was fighting anyway, because Harry had asked him to, because Harry was right, they had brought this on them all.

Cracks of apparition were sounding all around, eighth and seventh years were vanishing with as many younger students as they could at once. He swore he saw some return for another cluster as he fought the demons back, the flashes of hexes and spells aiding his battle of uneven odds.

This was insane, Draco knew for a fact that the train had been imbued with just as dedicated protective charms as the school itself. How on earth had they managed to touch the scarlet engine? But then he knew. Blood, they had Harry's blood. They had used it somehow, blood was able to overpower countless protective charms, if they had mixed it into some sort of searching spell…

There was only one explanation for any of this. Claude Stanton was still alive, just as they had feared.

Still standing beside Hermione and Ron, Harry downed a few other raging beasts. The sight of bright sparks from his friends’ wands told him that they were doing the same without taking his eyes from the dozens of undead targets. His heart was still pounding against his chest, the knowledge that he had used extraordinary amounts of magic, with Draco and was not losing control was not lost on him. He was sure it was because of Draco, he knew it was. That thought was cut short, however as an agonised snarl sounded from behind him. Harry turned, just in time to see a bloody, practically shredded werewolf launching himself off his hind legs towards him.

Why wouldn’t he stay down?

“No!” Hermione screamed.
A shadow swept between him and the werewolf then and Harry knew without seeing the face beneath the red robes that it was not a friend that was coming to his aid. The vampire seized Greyback by his bloody muzzle, a glistening, silver blade shining in that other hand. A hand that was dressed in protective, black dragon-hide gloves, Harry noted, protecting the wielder from the silver even as he brought it down, twisting it in the werewolf's throat.

Greyback roared, insane with glee and fury all at once. Greyback did not feel pain, or fear, not even when his body slumped to the ground under the final, vicious twist of the knife. His fur vanished, his form reverting back to a human as he lay still and dead upon the ground. He was dead.

“I knew that Alaric could not control this beast simply with a debt owed,” the cloaked figure said in a familiar voice. Harry stiffened instantly, turning his wand on the man as slowly, it turned towards him. “Greyback longs for the kill too much to consider tactics and orders given,” the vampire continued, pushing back his hood from his pale, god-like face. Those golden eyes glowed with foreboding as they locked on Harry's green ones. “You do not look pleased to see me,” Claude chuckled darkly, “Surely you did not think that explosion your vampire and his pet teacher had planned would catch me off guard? I knew your vampire was not foolish enough to trust me. And right he was, because I do want you, Harry Potter, whether it consciously occurred to you and the youngling or not.”

Harry's brow furrowed. “If you wanted me all along then why did Greyback nearly kill me? Why didn't you just take me that night that Draco, Snape and I came to your blood shack?” He cringed at the memory of the Bloody Mary, his discomfort inciting a smile to dance across Claude Stanton's cruel mouth.

“I told you, Greyback was a liability that couldn't be controlled – hence my actions a moment ago, putting him down like the dog he is.” He paused then, surveying Harry carefully with maliciously hungry eyes as if a war weren't raging around him. “And I had to witness if the connection you shared would bring harm to you if we removed the youngling from the picture. The plans I have for you, will not work with you dead – no, not at all.”

His voice was a low, conniving, sinister whisper now and in a flash, he was directly in front of Harry. He seized his wrist with vampire speed, pressing spitefully into a vein until Harry hissed, dropping his wand on reflex. Dread swamped the pit of his stomach as he heard it sink into the snow. Beside him, Hermione and Ron started.

“No!” He cried desperately, even as Claude's other hand began a slow, revoltingly sensuous dance over the side of his throat, the side unmarked by Draco's permanent mark. Curious that everyone seemed to avoid it. “Stay! Don't come any closer!” He spluttered, the hand tightening around his neck, putting firm but not choking pressure on his wind-pipe.
How he loathed this. One of the most powerful wizards of the age and he could not defend himself from a vampire, could not raise a finger to help himself for fear of hurting Ron and Hermione in the crossfire. They were too close. He tensed in that grasp, unwilling to show weakness. His green eyes flared with hatred. "Why the hell do you want me so badly that you're willing to go to all that effort?" Harry snarled. "You looked at me like I wasn't even equal to the dirt beneath your shoe whenever I saw you."

A cruel chuckle dusted his cheeks, smelling like the very essence of cold nothingness itself. "Silly boy, I could hardly make it obvious that it was you I was after, or your youngling would have never given me chance to study you, to assure myself that getting him out of the way would not ruin everything. I was glad to see that it would not. If you die, he will follow in time, but if *he* dies..." His glance darted up to the top of the hill and the chaos that was still burning around where Harry knew Draco was.

"...you will be free of him, as human and as available as if he had never existed. I have wanted you since the moment I heard you had killed Voldemort. I watched you. I knew you were imbued with his powers as well as your own – the magic of the two most powerful wizards of the century joined in one being. And such a handsome one too." Another chuckle punctuated his words, and the leather gloved fingers, streaked with blood caressed Harry's cheek. Harry did not so much as wince, despite the terror coursing through him. He would not flinch, he would not bend or betray his weakness. He wouldn't give Claude the pleasure of it.

"Harry," Hermione gasped from somewhere to his side. "Harry, please--"

"He'll kill you!" Harry snarled. "Stay back." His voice was vigilant, unmoveable, he would not allow them to be hurt trying to aid him. Claude would kill them without pause.

"Oh, you're right, young one. I'll kill anyone that comes between us now. There is no way that I will let you go," Claude hissed. "Both of those insurmountable powers are inside your body, surging through every drop of your blood. Your blood could make any vampire all-powerful, with enough of it."

Harry realised then, that this was about power after all. He should have guessed. Claude had spoken of drinking only those who would imbue him with the greatest power, and now, he was the preferred morsel, the most beneficial. His jaw set. "As if you weren't powerful enough already? Why do you want so much bloody power?!" He snarled. The fingers around his face and throat tightened. His hands flew up to that wrist, trying to rip free of that grip, but failing.

"My coven and I are the strongest this side of the equator, but there is still one group, one force
that overpowers our own, that threatens us with far too great a danger. The Hunters – Caius Alaric's very own blood,” he stared at Harry significantly then, mentally drinking him in. He licked his lips before continuing.

“Their existence threatens us, and if me and my own increase our power, with your gracious help, of course, then we can live our lives unchallenged, unthreatened – all-powerful. I will lay the feud to rest at last and stop them from picking us off one by one, from 'punishing' us for doing what our instincts tell us to do. I will allow it no longer and you, little one are going to help me.”

Harry sneered. “Power. It’s always bloody power. Why is it always power with you all? Why does everyone crave it so much when all it brings is pain?!" He writhed in Claude's grasp, punching, scratching and gouging any inch of flesh he could find. He was whirled round suddenly then, his arms pinioned to his sides as the vampire held him flush against his torso, Harry’s back to his chest. Harry's heart and breath were both caught in his throat as Claude's fangs ghosted over his neck in the same place as before. His entire being tensed. No. Draco!

Far above then, he saw as well as felt Draco turn to face him on the hilltop, summoned by his mental agony. Draco was flying across the snow now, his fangs bared, his voice screaming in Harry's head. But Harry's head was tugged back spitefully. Hermione and Ron surged forwards, but every vampire was on them now, not the terrified students from above and all Harry could see from the position Claude held him in were flashes of white and red – the snow, the crimson bursts of blood and the vampires' cloaks. He heard Hermione shriek his name, heard Draco scream in agony.

Fangs worried his neck and magic swelled in his gut, surging up his throat like bile, choking him. It wanted to save him, he wanted to let it but those long fingers returned to his neck them, pressuring him in just the place that made his already distorted world swim with dizziness.

Harry gasped for breath, inwardly screamed for it, for Draco. When he felt his vision dying, his consciousness dwindling, the hand released him, but it was too late. He fell limp and unconscious in those cold, wretched arms, leaving those he loved to be swallowed by the sea of crimson cloaks on a bed of icy snow.

~To Be Continued…
A heavy, aching pain blossomed across Harry's skull, stemming from behind his eyes as he tumbled back into consciousness. He clenched his eye-lids, feeling them flicker weakly, trying to bring the world into focus. He could feel that his glasses were there, but his vision was blurry, his surroundings dimly lit not helping. With a pained groan, he moved to wipe his eyes with the back of his hand but met resistance. He couldn't do much more than struggle uselessly, his legs and arms would not move.

Slowly, it all became apparent to him. He wasn't shackled to a wall, what he discovered was much worse. He was suspended almost horizontally above the ground. His body jerked reflexively as the world came into focus and he saw peculiar, undoubtedly magical gold rope hanging from the ceiling, wrapped around his wrists, knees and ankles and winding under him almost like a shrewd swing supporting his entire weight. It felt wrong, very wrong. He was too vulnerable. Tugging hard at the bonds, he felt no give in them at all and snarled angrily, squirming with all his might. What was going on?

“I was wondering when you might awaken,” came a forebodingly familiar voice. Harry stilled, glaring around at the dimly lit room for the first time. His breathing caught in his throat. An imperious looking Claude Stanton was standing a few feet in front of him, the vampire called Osborne at his side and a crowd of twenty or so unnamed vampires standing around the room, all watching him with hungry eyes that shimmered like those of cats in the darkness. A shudder coursed through him. Each looked as if they were barely held in place with a strand of fracturing thread, longing to pounce and devour him whole.

_Draco_, he called mentally, willing his inner voice to reach along the bond to his vampire. _Draco_. Suddenly, the golden ropes supporting him glowed brilliantly, blindingly. He winced and felt them grow warm around him, not enough to burn but enough to make his limbs writhe anxiously. It seemed like magic and anything remotely similar was impossible in these bonds. He set his jaw, fixing his gaze on Claude, determined to show neither weakness nor fear. He would not bend for them, ever. _They won't break me_.

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Weapon

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

:: chapter twenty five ::

WEAPON
Movement at his side drew his attention sharply back to the present, and he realised as he saw Claude standing now perilously close that his legs were spread obscenely in this swing-rope prison, his feet bare and the rest of his body clad in only his black boxers and white school shirt, which had at some point been torn open so that it hung off his body uselessly. Aside from the pain in his head that was slowly ebbing away, however, and the dull pressure where the ropes held him, he felt no ache or pain. They hadn't touched him otherwise, not yet anyway.

_For now Draco, I'm unsullied_, he thought, his hands curling into fists, his muscles bunching as Claude leant closer, running his long, spider-like fingers across the inside of his thigh. Harry sneered. Claude smirked dangerously. “I was most disappointed indeed to smell how deep the youngling had finally gotten inside of you. You squandered your innocence, Harry that is most disappointing.” His smile had a hard edge that worried Harry, but he steeled his expression to keep that to himself as Claude continued.

“It would have been nice, but it is not necessary to my plan. You'll give us just as much potent power, more than enough as you are now. Especially over the years to come.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “Years? How long do you think you can keep me here? People will be looking for me, Draco, Snape, the entire wizarding world! And even without them, do you really think you can hold me? You said it yourself before, I am the two most powerful wizards of the age rolled into one, and right now you're testing my patience.” Harry’s voice was feral with fury and fear, hissing through his teeth like parseltongue and he renewed his struggles, pulling at the rope until his skin burned with pain around his wrist. “You can't cage me,” Harry warned them.

A low tide of laughter rumbled through his vampiric spectators, and Harry watched their hungry expressions flicker with derisiveness before intensifying more than ever before. “_We like them feisty, _” he thought he heard one whisper.

“Oh, but we can,” Claude promised him. “We have ways, methods that even Harry Potter cannot fight against.” With that, he came to stand next to Harry so that he was almost touching him. Harry wanted to flinch away. That wicked smile grew with malice. “We have gone to a lot of trouble to acquire you, little one, and nothing will stop us from using you to seize the power we desire – we have things that must be done after all.”

That sentence was punctuated by a _would-be_ gentle caress across his cheek. Harry snapped at it with his teeth, but Claude was too quick for him. The creature laughed. “Fight if you must, little one but do not for once think it will make any difference. You are our tool, our weapon.”

Harry’s sneer intensified. “You must be stupider than you look to think my scrawny body can feed over twenty vampires for very long,” he chuckled bitterly. “I'll shrivel up like a prune before the end of the week!”
Laughter murmured around him again and he swore the crowd of demonic shadows was encroaching closer and closer with every second. Determined not to be unnerved, to not have them breach his iron-hard mask of bravery, he kept his eyes defiantly on Claude. “You forget that before we were vampires most of us were wizards,” Claude grinned mirthlessly. “Just because we have grown in such strength that we no longer rely on silly wooden sticks that does not render us useless. Your wounds and blood can be replenished so that you can supply us for generations to come, have no fear of that, Harry Potter.”

_and your life has already been elongated by your vampire’s connection with you_, Claude’s voice continued inside his head, resounding through his skull and raping his mind of all privacy. _We will have many decades together, little one…_

The prospect of years, decades with these creatures, in this room, existing only to feed their power and not allowed to even curl up and die made his insides churn with fear. He gritted his teeth harder than ever, desperately clawing back the screams that wanted to burst from his lungs. The prospect of being used that way, of being imprisoned like that and raped of all sense of sanity and feeling, of the light his friends and Draco had spent so much effort pouring back into him was worse than ions of torture at the Dark Lord’s hand.

“Draco won’t rest until I’m found. He’ll bring the entire Ministry here if he has to, but he will never leave me here,” Harry protested.

This time, it was the creature beside Claude that Harry knew as Osborne that spoke with a mixture of loathing and desire in his electric blue gaze. He looked as if he were mentally ravishing Harry, even as his lips formed words. “You might consider what torrid fate awaits him here if he does, you fool,” he whispered darkly. “With an army fed from your blood, we are invincible. Nothing will stand in our way.”

“There is no enchantment your potent magic cannot face, with the right persuasion,” Claude added. “Even the layers of intricate enchantments on your school train could not face up to the magic just a few tiny drops of your blood contained.”

_the train_, Harry remembered. _They infused some sort of spell to break through with my blood._ So that was how they had done it. Not that it mattered now, it could not be undone. Then, with all the ferocity and suddenness of a flash of lightning, Harry remembered…

“What happened at the train after I blacked out?” he demanded hotly. _The students, my friends, Draco, what did you do to them?!”_
That hand was back again, only this time when he tried to bite the offending knuckles stroking his cheek, Claude’s other hand seized his jaw fiercely, holding his mouth slightly open in an inescapable hold. He choked with disgust when those long fingers slid inside his mouth, ghosting over his teeth and tongue with all the devotion of a lover’s caress. It repulsed him.

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“Nothing that concerns you now, little one,” Claude answered him after a moment. “Just reside yourself to your fate, child.”

Harry’s jaw strained a she fought to bite down on the offending digits inside his mouth and to his relief, they withdrew at last. A sharp tug on his hair that shocked a gasp from his lips swiftly stole that relief, however.

“Do not worry, it will not hurt, in fact you will enjoy it immensely, just as thoroughly as you do when your old master bit into you – if not more,” Claude cooed icily, his golden eyes roving Harry's body as if he were a meal that he couldn’t decide where to start on. “We are going to drive you delirious with pleasure, until you no longer care who you are or why you are here. You will be worshipped as no human boy could dare to imagine.”

At that, Harry could bear it no more; he gave the vampire a final, loathing sneer before spitting in his face. The entire room froze. “You can drink me until I’m drained dry but you will never have my pleasure or my mind, you will never have me. You’ll have to tie me up and drug my mind with influence before you can even glimpse my strength and even if you drain me you’ll never truly have it, never truly have me – Draco already has me, my strength. We’re connected in ways you can’t even dream of,” he spat mockingly, “He had me first, he has everything I am, everything I ever will be and you will never touch that. Ever.”

WHACK!

A sharp, dizzying blow slammed across his face, sending his glasses flying across the floor. His teeth rattled and his vision swam with dazzling stars. For a moment, he just laid limply in the supportive prison of the ropes, feeling the vampires draw in. Then, Claude’s cold, raspy voice rippled through his bones like a cruel, biting frost, “Now, we are through with talking.”

A hand seized his hair at the back of his head again, tugging it back until he swore his neck would break and his adam’s apple would burst out of his taut throat. He choked, he gasped for air. Then, Claude’s awful, shimmering eyes were hovering above his, commanding his attention, swallowing his view of the world ruthlessly.
“You can feel my influence spreading through you, devouring you,” Claude hissed ominously. Harry strained to tear his gaze away but found that he could not. “You feel incredibly hot, feverish with arousal. You want us to bite you, don't you, little one?”

His dead breath dusted Harry's face; he was so close that their noses were almost touching in a repulsively intimate way. Harry wanted to wince, but even that action was denied him. His body was no longer under his control; all he could do was breathe and blink languidly. And even then, Claude could take that away, if he so desired.

Virile power like that he had not tasted since Voldemort fell rushed through his bones, forcing him into a false sense of calm. It was as if Claude were pinning down his very core with icy, razor sharp talons. “You want us to sink our fangs into you, do you not?”

At that, Harry realised that the surrounding bodies were dangerously close now. Every single one had a hand on him. Was touching him. He could feel their foul breath caressing him, their fingers tracing his flesh all over, his chest, his legs his arms, each seeming to be fingering a throbbing vein through his suddenly oversensitive flesh. Everything tingled, almost burned, but not in a good way. Not in the way that Draco made his body sing.

*Draco.*

Suddenly, his trance-lidded eyes widened. His previously limp body tensed under their cold digits. Draco! No one should taste him, no one had touched him and no one ever should touch him besides Draco. No. No! He screamed inwardly. The ropes binding him sang as magic burst through his tendons. They had to get off him. He had to get away! “Get off me!” He snarled, gnashing his teeth at a nearby hand that had been touching his throat. Claude's hand that still had a grip on his hair shook him, but it did not still him.

Harry could feel the hazy mist of the vampire's influence batted away like a sharp wind shoving away smoke. He could still feel Draco's comforting coolness inside him. Even if they were separated physically, even if their minds could not reach each other, they were still joined. Nothing could sever that intimate bond. Nothing could overshadow it. Harry's jaw tightened and his body began thrashing anew. Their influence could not touch him. He was immune to it. His mind and body were only Draco's to command so intimately.

Inwardly, he smiled with victory, even if he was still trapped, they could not have him exactly as they wanted. His smile reached his lips suddenly and another backhanded, nauseating blow from Claude shook his vision. His cheek stung, ached with agony, but he still smirked. They would not break him.
“Enough, Claude,” said a familiar voice from beyond the veil of hungry bodies. Harry's mind stopped at that. What was he doing here? After everything he had seen! If he craned his neck backwards, he could see Alaric standing against the wall, his body impassive and his arms folded across his chest, but his eyes were livid. For some reason, Harry just knew that Alaric’s presence had been the only thing to defend his vulnerable body while he'd been unconscious. He didn't know how, he just knew. Still, the man hadn't exactly helped prevent his capture in the first place, had he?

He couldn't believe that someone like Alaric would team up with someone like Claude, whatever his purpose. Harry sneered violently. “Why stop them from beating me?” Harry snarled. “It's no worse than anything else you've just stood by and watched them do, is it? They tortured, slaughtered and manipulated the minds of hundreds of innocents and you still side with them? They even tortured you to control Vesper! How can you justify joining with them?”

Alaric raised his chin, his eyes flickering warningly. “I am joined with no one, siding with no one but myself. You saw what I lost when I lost Lucan, I will not rest until I have my revenge–”

“And you have it!” Harry hissed, his voice strong and faultless despite the fact that he was looking at the man almost upside down now, and the vampires were still touching him inappropriately. “Draco is separated from me, he's suffering, so why are you still here?”

“The quickest way to find your pining lover is to wait by you – he'll come for you, as you say, we've no doubt about that,” Alaric said with wavering calmness. He was nowhere near as collected as he was trying to appear. “And I will end him when he does.”

Harry flinched. “And what do you think they will do when you've outlived your usefulness?” Harry asked, indicating the vampires around him. “They'll kill you too! You're nothing to them! We're food, chattel–”

“And death is precisely what Caius Alaric longs for, once he has completed his final goal,” Claude whispered darkly close to his ear. The hair caught by that inescapable grasp was used to turn his head again so that he was forced to face the vampire lord. Harry’s face contorted with disgust, even as his face throbbed with piercing agony from the blow he had been dealt only moments before. “He hopes we will kill him once he has destroyed your youngling. And now, little one, I believe your mouth has reached the pique of its usefulness.”

Two other vampires near his head closed in, but Harry knew they had not blocked his bound body from Alaric's view. Alaric was watching them hold his head painfully still, watching them force a thick leather ball into his mouth and strap it behind his head. The thing pressed his tongue uncomfortably, made his jaw ache and sent a revolting shudder of loathsome vulnerability rushing through his limbs.
It muffled his cries of indignation as the bodies set in again, caressing his flesh with cold, fingers that he desperately tried to arch away from, to recoil from, but to no avail. He was screaming behind his gag, writhing in his bonds trying to punch or kick his way free. He was no docile doll. He would not be vulnerable for anyone but Draco – would not let anyone but Draco be so intimately familiar with his body and pleasures. Never.

His insides squirmed as if something were burrowing through him, trying to find a way out. His magic longed to burst free, to seize back his freedom and pride, but the magic imbued ropes held fast, even when Claude's lips began to caress the side of his throat. Goose pimples rose all over his body, cold sweat breaking out across his flesh. The very fine hairs all over stood on end. The hand not holding his hair spitefully caressed the side of his throat that was not occupied by that mouth, danced across the scar Draco's first bite had left.

A fierce heat burst across his scar, the one that connected him to Draco. Claude emitted a sharp hiss, his hand flinching away. It did not return there again, nor did anyone else touch him there. Was it something to do with Draco's claim? He didn't have time to think on that, only time enough to wish the rest of his body would burn and ward off the near-two dozen mouths that had all followed Claude's lead and begun smoothing over his skin, wrist, elbow, the back of his knees, his thighs, his stomach, his chest. His body was ice-cold under their vile touches. He wouldn't let them do this! They couldn't! Someone would step in, something would stop them – it had to!

Green eyes flickered shut, then clenched tightly, fighting back the stinging there. He screamed in negation through his gag, his body tense as if that would stop their fangs from piercing him. But their lips, their saliva was numbing each area they touched, the anesthetising properties of their venom was already rippling through his skin. And to his horror, he felt the aphrodisiac within it begin to tug at his senses as well.

Scrunching his eyes shut even tighter, Harry felt despair shake him. If he was so powerful, how could he be so easily subdued? How could he be overpowered by a mere twenty or so vampires? How could he let them force arousal from his own torture? His eyes opened then and he glared straight at Alaric, who had not moved an inch.

The man stared back at him unflinchingly, though his expression betrayed his self-loathing, his hatred of what he was being forced to watch. Harry thought he even saw those muscles bunch as if to help him. But Alaric did not move. If you watch them do this to me, he thought venomously, if you stand by and allow this to happen, you're no better than them. You'll become exactly what you hate! He forced those thoughts to show on his face, to ensure that the man understood clearly what was doing through his head. You'll be exactly like Claude!

Then it happened.
Pressure pushed more insistently where Claude's mouth was and his fangs were the first to pierce Harry's flesh. Harry screamed behind his gag, his throat raw, the sound muffled but still far from inaudible, his suffering, his fury carrying through the otherwise silent room, reverberating off the walls with haunting echoes. Other fangs broke his skin again. They didn't inflict pain, but they may as well have for the humiliated agony that they inspired in his chest. His hands clenched into fists, his eyes clenched again but that was all he could do to release the hatred, the fear, the pain. That, and scream.

Unbearable, unwanted heat pooled in his groin. His chest heaved, his heart was pounding, but none of it was in a good way. He wanted to die, to be torn to shreds rather than endure this. And you will endure this for decades, centuries to come, little one, Claude's wicked, malevolent voice whispered, his lips sucking greedily on his pulse. The mouths drawing blood from him was nauseating, it was like being covered in twenty-two leeches, each a voracious, wet mouth lapping at his life's-blood hungrily. Take it all, he thought, drink me dry, lose yourselves to it and finish me off.

You are far too useful for such a mistake, Claude purred in his head. We will not let you escape so easily. I force-fed you Temporentia Sensium as you slept to ensure such thing could not happen. Don't be in such a hurry to leave us, Harry. You will be ours until you die.

The despair was too much then. He growled and writhed like a man possessed in their grasp, roared until his throat was aflame and drool slid down his chin. He swore he heard the door across the room slam shut behind Alaric's exit, but could not find the will to care. How long could he endure this until Draco found him? And if these monsters were waiting here for him, did he want the blond to come?

The uncertainty and pain, the shame whirled around his insides, stirring him up like an island under attack by a hurricane. Then, he felt the vampire between his thighs, Osborne grip his treacherously hardening member in his icy, vile hand. Harry screamed anew. Those fangs hovered near his sensitive flesh for a moment, and then a near-unbearable pressure pierced the skin at the base of his cock.

Osborne locked his lips around the flesh as blood wept from the wound his fangs had created. A mortifying chuckle vibrated through each mouth attached to his body, mocking his suffering, his broken pride. The despair took him.

For years it seemed he was suspended in the murky cloud of agony and shame. Their greedy, repulsive mouths seemed to suck and suck, draw on him for an eternity, tug his life force, his energy from him. When finally Claude lifted his head from his throat and so to, did the others after this action by their leader, Harry felt almost unconscious, dazed and wretched and longing for the
blackness that teetered on the edge of his mind.

Osborne, he noted was the last to raise his lips from the now rather sore wound at the base of his most personal place and he would have screamed again, winced and turned away if he could have. But there was no energy to do much more than close his eyes, and steel his aching jaw as tears clung to his lashes like the dew-drops on roses. He was so far away from the blissful warmth he had drifted in with Draco in his bedroom, and Draco’s bedroom, even on the train. His darkened heart thudded with a flicker of warmth as he recalled the tender kisses, the moonlight, he remembered the way Draco’s bite had brought him completion, but it felt like he was too weak to even put a picture to any of it.

His body ached, throbbed as if every place he’d been bitten was bruised. A weak glance down did reveal that the cuts had been sealed, but the wounds were each vibrant purple. That was all he saw, before the blood loss made his mind spiral and unconsciousness took him.

Just as the consciousness of the chosen one dwindled, as his body went completely limp, deadweight in the obscene rope ‘swing’, the door swung open. Caius Alaric gave each vampire the once-over, cringing at the blood dusting each of their cruel lips. Strength was reverberating through each of them, Harry Potter’s magic pulsing through them like its own being. They had fed well, far too well from the Potter boy’s young, comparably small body. Potter was strong, but his body still only held so much blood.

Alaric glanced at each of them in turn, and at Potter’s unconscious body, lying in the arms of his prison grotesquely. His insides tensed with a mixture of anger, pity and loathing – the latter solely for Claude and his minions. One by one, the demons shoved past him, each licking their lips, their fangs and murmuring obscenities about how delicious the boy had tasted.

“He writhed like a bitch in heat!” He heard one mutter.

“Did you feel his power?!!”

“Tomorrow is too long to wait for another taste…”

These were just snippets of a few sentences that brushed his ears as they all walked past him as if he were invisible and through the door. Osborne gave him a malevolent sneer of a smile, one that showed bloody fangs and made sure to bash his shoulder into Alaric’s on the way out the door. When they were all gone, Claude still did not turn to face him; instead he adjusted his cloak and smoothed his long fingers back through his hair.
After a few moments of silence, Alaric turned his attention to the boy Claude was standing in front of. Potter looked deathly pale and young and covered in telltale purpling bruises. The bruises of vampires that had fed too deeply and without care. Alaric’s stomach turned. “The boy will last not two weeks much less decades if you use him so appallingly,” Alaric said, not bothering to mask his disgust.

Claude chuckled darkly then, turning to face Alaric with vehemence. His eyes were the most vibrant, inhuman gold, his skin practically glowing, radiating power. This was what one drink from Potter had given him. “If the little slut hadn’t spread his legs so quickly to Vesper’s spawn his ‘virgin’ blood would have given us just as much power with lesser quantities. He is still a spring of unrivalled power of course, and his blood satisfies the hunger just as well, but his magic does not come through as potently. We must feed frequently and deeply until the Hunters fall, after that, our ‘sessions’ can be more relaxed.”

His cruel smile broadened. “The harlot brought this on himself, and his body can make do with blood replenishing potions for now.”

Alaric tipped his head, his own eyes shining with pure hatred. This man, no this thing had caused him so much suffering, had set the chain of events that lead to Lucan’s death turning and for that he hated him more than he could ever fear him. “It surprises me that a petty, gluttonous brute such as you can bear to share such a catch,” Alaric said bitingly.

Another chuckle answered his insult. “For now it is necessary, once we have secured our power again, once your old family are dust, I will perhaps…commit him to my chambers only. He is such a prize, such a bright jewel.” The vampire punctuated his words by caressing the bruised plains of Harry's stomach, before allowing his long fingers to dance along the blood-stained, torn fabric of the boy’s underwear, where Osborne had bitten clean through the fabric. Even in unconsciousness, the boy whined behind his gag at the touch.

“Just like a spirituous puppy, he can be broken,” Claude said with twisted affection in his voice. “From how he reacted tonight sooner than I’d have imagined; he is so proud and so in love that he feels shame and despair so beautifully.” He circled around to the boy’s head then, laying his fingers on either side of his temples and grinning wickedly at Alaric.

“I think I must hurry the process along, however. He is powerful; I can’t afford to have him having any illusions of grandeur or spirituous attempts of escape. He needs to remain docile and compliant, and despair makes him both. He fights until his breath gives out, until there is no strength left in him. I will have to hurry the diminishment of that wilful strength if I hope to cage such an energetic creature.”
With a frown creasing his brow, Alaric did not realise what Claude intended to do until it was already too late. The unforgiveable. Potter’s bond with Malfoy had fought off the influence before, but now, with his body so weakened and his conscious self sealed away in exhaustion, it swept through his mind, Alaric watched it do so. No vampire would ever be able to overshadow Malfoy’s, not unless Malfoy died. At Claude’s words, all saliva dried in his throat.

“You feel my voice swamping your senses; you heed my words, see before you the illustrations of my suggestions being acted out. And when you awake, you will feel the truth of them in your bones. You will know it is the truth, will you not, little one?” He reached behind the boy’s head to unbuckle the gag and it fell to the floor uselessly, wet with saliva that was splattered shamefully down the boy’s chin.

The room was silent for a moment, and then…

“Yes,” Potter whispered dazedly, from the depths of exhausted slumber.

Dread filled Alaric.

“You Malfoy is dead, you feel it in your core, you know it with all your being. He died just after you were captured. He is not coming for you. No one is coming for you. Do you understand?”

Alaric watched as glistening tears that the boy had refused to shed during the torturous feeding spilled over his cheeks. “Draco,” Potter croaked, his voice so quiet it was nearly lost on his human ears. “Draco is…is dead.”

“No!” Alaric snarled, surging forward. He threw his full body weight into the vampire, knocking him back. Claude snarled, his fangs exposed, still stained with Potter’s blood as he whirled around, throwing Alaric against the wall and pinning him there. Gold eyes glared into his. Alaric raised his chin defiantly, refusing to feel fear. He was too revolted for that, too filled with hate to be conquered by anything less.

“Careful Caius,” Claude growled, “you forget who bound you in the Bloody Mary, not unlike this. You forget who even your precious Lucan was too afraid to face-”

“You don’t get to speak his name!” Alaric spat, even as that forearm pressed to his throat, crushing it mercilessly. “He was worth a thousand of you! And now to beat this boy you have to drain him dry and mess with his mind?! Your lowliness knows no bounds!”
A mad laugh rushed through those glistening fangs, fangs that pressed closer. “You are alive merely out of a sense of honour for the pact we made, the truce we agreed until the Malfoy youngling was dead and Potter was mine. I have been honourable and overlooked your indiscretions, your insulting presence and insolence in the name of that pact, since your side is as yet unfulfilled, but I will not remain so generous.”

The vampire leant closer still then, his metallic smelling breath dusting Alaric’s cheeks menacingly. “Curb your pitiful human morals in this house or you may find you never leave it.”

Despite the situation, Alaric gave an over-exaggerated glance around and glared back at him. This ‘house’ he spoke of was in fact a magically extended cellar, a dungeon beneath a shabby, uninhabited pub. The coven had laid low here after the fiasco with the Bloody Mary to recover, and had built their dwelling in the cellar to avoid detection while they were recovering their powers. There were no windows, nothing but endless plains of grey stone and the potent smell of damp and blood.

“Monsters like you always meet their fitting, foul ends,” Alaric hissed.

With that, Claude snarled again his fingers closing around Alaric’s throat like the talons of an eagle around its prey and he threw him across the room. Alaric’s body met with the stone of the hall just beyond the door with a crack. He groaned in pain, having no chance to right himself, only to look up through his wince of pain to see Claude stepping out into the cavernous, dim hallway with him the door to Potter’s prison shutting slowly behind him.

Those fangs were still menacingly visible as he said, “And what makes you so different from me, Caius?”

Nothing, if I let this madness continue, Alaric thought. It was nearly time to put the final phase of his plan regarding these heathens into action regardless, time to end their reign of bloodshed and torment at last. Too many people had suffered because of them, but the sight of those fangs drenched in Potter’s innocent, honourable blood stirred feelings in his gut that made him shudder. Made him realise he could not watch those fangs tear into another scrap of flesh.

As a prisoner, he had been untouched by the other vampires, since he was used as a bargaining chip for Lucan’s ‘good behaviour’ and ‘loyalty’. Claude had never been in a position to threaten him with the kind of fate the Potter boy was sure to endure. The bloody purgatory of perpetual shame and agony. Unless someone helps him, that is.
The room was filled with voices, raised with concern, with desperation, but as Severus glanced across to the fireplace where Draco sat motionless, he found it was the vampire's silence that carried above every other sound. The firelight danced across his stoic features, his body did not move, not even with breath. The moment the tide of vampires surrounding Draco and the majority of potter's trio had been levelled by the infuriated vampire, the moment he had seen the spot where Potter had been vacant, Draco had fallen prey to this catatonic state.

Severus winced as he remembered the sight that had befallen him as he had arrived on the scene of the halted Hogwarts Express. The driver and his staff seemed to have been massacred in the front cabin, leaving the train vulnerable to sabotage and the students vulnerable to the attack in the first place.

This had been planned exactly to the second, he had thought, just as he'd watched Draco collapse to his knees in the snow. None of the students had been harmed, thankfully, thanks to the help of the upper years and Draco, Potter and his friends. Draco, however, it had taken both Severus and Merritt to tug him to his feet and apparate him back to the safety of the castle.

Now He crossed the Headmistress' office, making his way to Draco as Minerva, Granger, Weasley, the Lupins, Flitwick, Sprout and Hagrid each roared at the top of their lungs the best way to save their missing hero. These were the days he missed Albus' presence the most, Severus realised. They would never help anyone if they kept screaming over each other. Rather than waste time adding his own voice to the fray, however, he, found himself more practically coming to a halt before Draco's statue-like body.

“You must snap out of this, Draco,” he murmured. His voice was barely audible, but he knew that Draco had heard it. Yet the vampire did not so much as blink. He would betray his secret soon if he did not so much as inhale, he was sitting unnaturally still. Frozen in place as no human could ever be. Not while they were alive anyway. Merciful heavens, for Draco's sake as well as everyone else's, he hoped Potter wasn't dead already. This time, when he spoke, his voice was stronger. “You hear their lost, hopeless chaos over there? They will not help Potter, only we can. Only we know enough to find him, to save him.”

Draco's eyes shone in the orange light of the undulating flames, but still he did not move.

“Draco!” He bellowed then and everything in the room stopped. Everything except for Merritt, who at that moment surged up from behind Severus, skirting him easily and dropping to his knees before Draco. He scraped his diamond-hard nail across the minute crystal vial that the snake pendant around the blond's neck held. Just enough so that both he and Draco felt the sharp hum of Potter's blood.
At that, Draco’s head shot up, an instinctive snarl tearing from his lips. Merritt answered it with a challenging growl of his own, both of their fangs gleaming in the light, their arms locked on each other, holding the other at bay. They snapped in each other's faces for a moment, while Severus looked round at those in the room. He would have to swear them to secrecy regarding Draco's condition before they left this room…

“Break from your pitiable misery and see the obvious way to move forward,” Merritt bit out. “Whether Harry is buried at the core of the earth or floating the other side of the sun, you can find him.”

“You think I didn’t try that?!” Draco roared, shoving Merritt from him and leaping to his feet. “I can't hear his thoughts, I can't even feel whether he is suffering or not. Something is blocking me–”

“But it is not death,” Merritt cut across him. “He is your First; your body would react to a final separation such as that. No, there is ancient vampire magic that you can use to find him, whether other magic is interfering or not. Don't you see? The only problem is that Claude will massacre us before we so much as glimpse Harry.”

Now the others were joining in the conversation, or at least those that had already known Draco was a vampire and hence were not still overwhelmed by that shocking revelation. “And you have an answer to that too, do you?” Ron snapped.

Severus stiffened at the red-had using that tone on his...his newly found...companion. But Merritt whirled around to face him fearlessly.

“As a matter of fact,” he said confidently, a flicker of his boyish smile cracking his tense expression. With that he turned his back on the highly strung Weasley and focused on Draco again, this time, reaching out and laying a pale hand on Draco’s equally pale one. They were joined in their curse, their beauty and their strength, but they were similar strongest in their adoration of human life – their own human’s lives in particular.

“I know exactly why Claude wants Potter, for what specific purpose,” Merritt continued. “He has always yearned for power and beauty for their own sakes but he wants Potter first and foremost to take into himself the chosen one and the dark lord’s magic, their power. He wants it to overthrow the Hunters.”

Draco’s eyes widened. “The Hunters?”
“The very vigilante, demon hunting cult that Alaric was born into,” Merritt said. “They are the only opposing force as equally powerful and equally great in number. They have been snapping at Claude’s heels for years. It was that dynamic that caused him to be so vigilant in keeping Vesper under his thumb. Therefore it is obvious was we must do.”

There was another silence then, one where Draco’s gaze narrowed. “Why would they help us? We are the very things they hunt. They will kill us before we can get a word out-”

“Alaric was from one of the most treasured families in their alliance,” Merritt cut across him insistently, “Losing him incited a change in their age-old ideas. They are able to decipher from ‘good’ and ‘bad’ vampires now, they will hear us out, they want to save the innocent, they want to finish Claude once and for all!”

“And just where are you getting this information?” Draco demanded rudely.

Merritt released his hand, stepping back to stand at Severus’s side. “I came across them when I was trying to find Alaric for Severus. They made it clear to me that they would do whatever it took to capture Claude.”

“And you’re only just telling me this now?” Draco seethed.

Merritt raised a brow. “I do not answer to you, youngling, do not take your fear for your loved one out on me when I am the only one steering you in the right direction. I have only seen you once since I met with the Hunters and forgive me if I did not wish for the first act as Severus’s lover to be ruining his beloved student’s Christmas. Would you have had me tear you away from the evening you shared with Potter to tell you such a thing? Have sense.”

It was then that Snape stepped in, clearly uncomfortable with the two of them arguing. *He must be really taken with Merritt to have even considered letting him past the iron-like boundaries he’s set around himself,* Draco thought. *When did that happen?* But then, he supposed he didn’t know exactly what had happened or exactly to what lengths Merritt had gone to in securing Severus’s faith in him. All Draco knew was he had never seen Severus so relaxed around anyone before.

*He likes him well enough; will probably fall for him quickly if the little curly haired twit doesn’t mess this up,* Draco thought, recalling his misplaced anger and frustration. He didn’t want to put Severus in the awkward situation of being caught between them. He didn’t deserve that.
Apparently seeing this retreat, Severus gave Draco a small, barely noticeable nod of thanks before he himself spoke. “Merritt will contact the Hunters, he will bring them to us within the hour and when you use the spell to find Harry, we will accompany you. We will bring Claude and his mongrels down while you get Harry out, Draco.”

The fact that Severus had just called Harry by his first name twice was not lost on him, but the important of the fact did fall far under the important of the emotions coursing through him right now. He felt…wrong without Harry by his side, without Harry within reach. He felt afraid, helpless and lost as he had never been in his life, not even as a scared boy declining Voldemort’s unwanted advances. He felt like a drowning man clawing for a lifeline, and treading nothing but water. It felt like every breath was too heavy for his lungs and coming far too quickly, yet not fast enough.

It felt like being held on the precipice of agonising death, being forced to stare down at the gaping abyss and yet not being allowed to fall.

“No,” he said slowly, soft and low, like that of a warning growl from a hound’s muzzle.

Everyone in the room considered him with varying amounts of confusion. “No?” Granger repeated carefully from across the room.

Draco gritted his teeth, his fangs grinding painfully into his gums. “I can’t sit here a moment longer while they are doing…doing Merlin only knows what to Harry. I’ve had his thoughts, his presence in my head for weeks now and I can’t bear another second in this torturous silence! I’m going after him now–!”

“You can’t stop me,” Draco all-but hissed, flouncing across the room, making a beeline for the door. As if he were the same students of their first ever lesson together, however, Draco froze when he heard Severus’s voice again, raised and stern, rigid with unarguable finality.

“You will achieve nothing if you charge in their like Potter’s white knight except getting yourself killed. You’ll be of no use to Potter without more power at your back. He is finally beginning to live again; do you really want to ruin that by forcing him to watch you die?”
There was an edge of ferocity in that voice that made Draco cringe. By the time he finally raised his head, Severus was standing before him levelling him with that commanding gaze and Merritt was opening the door.

“I will fly like the wind,” the curly-haired, boyish vampire promised, laying a shy kiss on Severus’s cheek before darting out the door.

Draco’s muscles tensed, about to shoot after him, but Severus cared about him too much and knew him just as well. “I will stun you if that is what it takes to hold you here until Merritt returns with the Hunters, Draco. Test me if you do not believe me,” the man promised darkly, his obsidian gaze locked on his every taught limb, even the tensed tendons in his neck.

Grinding his teeth until he felt the metallic sting of blood in his mouth, Draco closed his eyes against the problems that stared at him. He and Severus would have to smooth over his blatant reveal of his nature and Harry's position in all of this, to those who did not know before hand at least. He did not have time for this, nor the will. He wanted Harry, could only focus on Harry. Harry, he thought wretchedly. *Hold on for me.*

*   *   *

You wouldn’t know it was day outside just from looking, but Alaric could tell. From the watch on his wrist and the deathly silence of the vampires’ slumber. Usually their guardians, those hellish hounds would be pacing the halls, defending their territory, but the brutes had died along with countless of the most vicious of Claude’s coven in the Bloody Mary.

As it was, there was only a few vampires scattered here and there in the long, dark stone hallway, guarding the only exit, the entry to the room where their coven were sleeping and the room holding Harry. Not even a handful of them. He walked the dimly lit, echoing, dank hall, coming to a halt between all three of the vampire guardians.

Ever since Lucan fell, he had been lost, had been overwhelmed with grief and bitterness until both had twisted him into something... ugly. Something far away from the boy Lucan had held in his arms and loved. His heart ached; his very veins throbbed with longing. He had seen the way Malfoy and Potter had embraced each other, seen the way they stood by each other. And he had felt the pain Potter would be feeling the moment he awoke from his nightmarish slumber.

The anguish he had heard and pitied in Potter as they had bitten him would be nothing compared to what he would feel then, Alaric knew, because he had felt it himself. Still felt it every day of his life. And the thought that someone as good as Potter would be twisted the same way he had been
by that suffering was too much to bear.

“I never intended to let them get this far,” he said aloud quietly, rousing confusion in the eyes of the three vampires watching him cautiously from their sentries. It had been building inside him and seeing what they did to those orphans out of sheer revenge on Merritt, what they did to Potter, after seeing those tears rolling down Potter’s cheeks…

He’d had a plan all along, he’d just have to bring it into action sooner than he’d intended. At least this way it may actually save at least one life, rather than just achieve my revenge, he thought. He took a step toward the room that held Potter. Immediately, the dark-skinned guard there tensed, his unnatural red eyes glowing, his fangs bared.

“You are just as much a prisoner here as the boy,” the dark creature hissed, his coarse voice tinted with malicious amusement. “You would do well to scamper on back to the cell you were assigned, carry on pretending you will live long enough to cut that youngling’s throat for real. Pretend you will not become our in between snack when we aren’t feasting on the boy.” Those pearly white teeth were exposed in a devilish smirk now.

Alaric did not even attempt a reply. He raised his head, his eyes and jaw set hard. “You and Claude, all of you are fools if you believed one of the Hunters’ most esteemed prodigies could not handle three vampires.” It all happened in seconds then. His hand flew forward, unleashing a burst of glistening silver throwing stars that sliced through that vampire flesh like butter, pinning that powerful body to the stone wall. Steam began to rise from the wounds where the silver ate away at the body they had pierced.

Without pausing to watch the beast writhe and howl in agony, Alaric whirled on his heel. His hand shot into his worn robe, seizing his wand with practiced speed. “Hoaryaehexia!” he cried. The vampire closest to him did not have the time nor space to dodge. The magical bolt combusted as it flew through his body, the flash of silver that followed devouring the body even as the vampire stumbled back, clawing at his face in agony, knocking his last standing comrade flying as he did so.

Osborne snarled as the dying vampire’s body, convulsing with the overwhelming bursts of silver pulsing through him pinned him to the floor. He howled as the silver leaked through the dying flesh and singed his own. Despite this, he still glared up at Alaric as the once-hunter came to stand over him.

Osborne was not that much older than Merritt, he too had been hand-picked by Claude, plucked from a military training camp. Alaric always thought that Claude chose him for his steely, unfeeling nature that had carried on into his vampire afterlife. But that hardly mattered now. Osborne was just as famished for pain and slaughter as his master. It would be a pleasure killing
him.

Slowly now, he drew a thick, round cylinder from within his robes. The moment he held it out, it extended of its own accord, so that it was a gleaming silver staff almost of his own height that he plunged mercilessly into Osborne’s chest. Blood splattered from that cruel mouth that was wide with agonised screams.

Alaric screamed out his own frustration, his hatred, his suffering, letting it spill out of him. He threw his curled fist into the vampire’s face, again and again. Behind him, the dark vampire had gone deathly still, the silver stars had been dressed in enhancing magic and holy water, and the second vampire was already dead, lying uselessly atop Osborne, but Alaric had forgotten their existence for the moment.

Every anguished cry he had been holding in since he had lost Vesper was now dragging from his lips as he beat Osborne to a bloody pulp, the knuckle-dusters he had once used on the Malfoy boy gleaming with blood. It was flying from him with all the ferocity of a freight train and whether Osborne was not the main cause of all that had happened, he was certainly deserving of receiving the punishment regardless – perhaps more than Malfoy, even.

It wasn’t until his arms were trembling so hard that he couldn’t lift them that Alaric shook the bloodied knuckle-dusters off his crimson painted fist and reached forward, seizing those repulsive fangs that he had seen rip out the throats of countless innocents. And tonight, sink into one of Potter’s most sacred places.

“N-Never!” He half-gasped, his breath coming out in ragged pants. “Never again. None of you will ever hurt a living thing ever again!” A sickening crunch filled the air then as he snapped Osborne’s foul fangs clean from his mouth.

The revolting mass of blood and bubbling flesh, boiling from the silver opened its now fangless mouth, making a pathetic, garbled sound, before collapsing limp and dead on the floor. Alaric threw the fangs back at his corpse in disgust. Neither he or his comrades turned to dust, a myth, a false truth he would have known even without his hunter’s training. For he had held Lucan’s dead body in his arms, buried it with loving care after retrieving it in the chaos of the aurors and death eaters flying all over Malfoy Manor at the time of Voldemort’s downfall.

*Lucan,* he thought, aiming for the place wherever his lover’s spirit resided. *I am not the man you once knew, I have done terrible things, things I can never make amends for, but I pray that with this you will forgive me...*
Leaving the carnage he had caused behind, Alaric steeled his shaking limbs and pushed the door to Potter’s prison open, stepping inside. The room was just as poorly lit as earlier, with just a few flaming torches dotted along the walls of the windowless room. It was enough light to show clearly that Potter was still hanging limply in his gauche ‘swing’ however, though he was twitching, almost whimpering as if in pain. But Alaric knew better. His chest stung. He knew exactly what Potter was dreaming of.

Slowly, he raised his wand. “Ennervate!”

Potter’s body jerked to life. The boy groaned, no doubt at the aching pain spreading through his body from the purple bite marks that Alaric knew Claude had left to further subdue the boy. Alaric glanced at his watch then and swallowed. He had wasted time with Osborne; he needed to get Potter out quickly, before his plan put itself into action.

“Come, Potter, they’re sleeping, we have to get you out of here,” Alaric insisted, moving forwards, intending to cut the boy loose, but an explosion of golden, blinding light stilled his steps.

A piercing roar left Harry's lips, a torrent of despair surging through him as that agonising truth registered in his mind. It wasn’t a dream. Draco was dead. _Dead._ The knowledge filled his being, tearing it asunder like a crazed lion on the rampage, raking through his soul with thick, spiteful claws. He choked on his own spittle, his hands curling into fists in his bonds. Draco was dead.

He couldn’t breathe. It was like his throat was coated with ash. Yet at the same time his heart was hammering, his body shaking with palpitations of hysteria. He was not the type of person to go to pieces, not after everything he had endured. He was not the type of man to cry so openly, but this was too much. The very thing that had kept him from surrendering to his feelings for Draco in the first place had come to life.

Draco was dead. And he was crying, he was going to pieces. He was losing himself and the semi-tamed beast that was his magic was writhing frantically under his skin in that frenzy. Draco was gone. He would never feel his touch or hear his voice. His mind clawed desperately at the memories of each, madness swallowing him whole like a raging tide.

There was no enchantment his potent magic could not face, they had said it themselves, and right now his magic, swirling with despair was proving that point. It surged up, seizing the ropes that bound Harry and snapped them like brittle twigs. He dropped to his knees, screaming until it felt like his throat was tearing with the force of it, but he did not care. He embraced the pain, anything that would distract from the agony ripping through his innards at the knowledge that had just reached him, even for a millisecond.
“Potter! Potter! *Harry!*” A voice called to him through the billowing clouds of thick grief. Hands shook him roughly, a harsh slap crashed into his cheek. “Snap out of it. You have to get out of here. The plan is about to execute itself, you need to let me get you out of here!” Those arms tried to tug him upwards, yanked him unceremoniously to his feet but his legs were unsteady, shaking with the force of magic crackling. He only prayed it exploded and took his wretched world with it. Anything but force him back into a world where he had opened himself at last to someone and lost them.

Shaking his head, he snarled out another burst of agony, trying to escape the familiar voices hold. “Dead,” he gasped. “He’s dead.” He wanted to curl up on the floor and beg it to open up to swallow him whole. “Kill me, just end it. I c-can’t…I can’t do this anymore. No more. No… It’s too much!” His fingers knotted in Alaric’s robes. Yes, he realised it was Alaric now and he was sure he would help. “Kill me! You know – you’ve seen! He’s my – he’s…! He’s what Vesper was to you!”

This was not a natural grief, the vampire magic Claude had used was forceful, spiteful, it had grated against the unbreakable bond between First and vampire. The influence had demanded docile suffering, surrender, not the fiery, vengeful grief he knew Potter would naturally resort too. He and Potter were so alike after all.

That was the very reason his suffering had been so hard to watch.

Determinedly, all too conscious of the time that was slipping away from them, Alaric plucked Harry’s hands from his robes and held his wrists tightly in his, shaking him until the boy fixed glistening, wet green eyes on him. “This is not you!” He shouted, seizing a lapse in Potter’s uncharacteristic defeated cries. This is not your grief and Draco Malfoy is not dead!”

Before Potter could start shouting again, for he knew the influence would be a hard ‘truth’ to counteract, he shook the boy again so that his head snapped to the side, and gestured to the permanently marked side of his throat. “Did you not wonder why they have bitten you everywhere but here? No vampire’s claiming mark can be marred or changed or removed, or torn away. It only vanishes if the vampire dies. You felt it while they fed, Claude could not touch it, no vampire can, except the one who gave it to you.”

He could see a tiny light of the real truth burning faintly amongst the lies forced into those eyes and he stormed ahead. “Only the vampire can affect his claiming mark. Draco cannot be dead, the mark is still there.”
Harry shook his head slowly but the hands forced one of his own to his scarred throat then, pressing his fingers into the familiar sensitive subtle ridges of flesh. He shuddered. It tingled as it always had, despite the madness wreaking havoc through his being.

“Yes,” Alaric urged him, panic setting in now. Harry had to get moving. Now. “Reach through it. Those magical bonds are broken now, you can feel him. Reach for him.” He punctuated the words with another tug at the boy’s body, trying to lead him towards the open doorway. Except the doorway wasn’t empty any longer. Alaric’s grip tightened on Harry's wrist and he felt the boy tense.

The influence was fading now under the bright light of the bond now that Harry could feel it again, now that he was free of the magically smothering ropes he had been tied with. Alaric had forced him to see sense, to reach for Draco again and he could feel him now sweeping through him like a cooling breeze in a stifling summer. And he was close, Harry was sure he was nearby. He could sense it somehow. But abruptly such thoughts were shoved from his mind by a roar of fury.

Claude flew at them with vampire speed, his golden eyes flared. He batted him, Harry aside, sending him crashing into the floor. Harry scrambled to his feet, his nearly naked body throbbing with pain and he reached for a wand that was not there out of sheer habit, cursing at how useless he felt when Claude’s spider-like fingers closed around Alaric’s throat.

~To Be Continued...
“You think that the death of three of my children would not awaken me? FOOL!” Claude snarled, his fingers clenching and causing an audible crunching to sound from where he was crushing Alaric’s throat. The man now suspended off his feet gave a snarling cry, struggling with all his might. His hands shot out, clawing at Claude’s arms, his face. A fighter until the end, even if there wasn’t a feasible way out. Just like Harry.

Spying his glasses off to the side where they had fallen after Claude had struck him, Harry pushed them onto his face hastily, bringing the horrid scene into focus. Through the doorway he could see as well as smell the blood and Osborne’s mangled body. The other vampires were gathered in the room around where Claude was slowly choking the life from Alaric, all of them seeming to have forgotten him, Harry for the moment. He might’ve even been able to make a break for it, especially with nothing hampering his magic. But he couldn’t leave Alaric.

He was weak, he was drained and his body ached. Dizziness was swimming through his head making him uneasy on his feet, all thanks to the way they had used him despicably, but even without his wand, he was sure he could do something. He had to.

A harsh, wheezing gasp shot through Alaric’s clenched teeth then. Claude shook him roughly like a ragdoll, leering mockingly up at him. “You’ve been the thorn in my side from the start, Caius,” he hissed. “This all started with you batting those mournful, harlot lashes at Vesper, seducing him into the light with your…brooding innocence.” He spat the words as if they were distasteful, as if the very thought of Alaric and Vesper’s romance made him ill.

“Y-You’re wrong,” Alaric croaked, his windpipe slowly being crushed by that insurmountable physical strength. “As was I. I sought to punish the Malfoy boy for what happened to Lucan, but he was just as much a hapless pawn, merely caught up in all of this as Lucan and Potter and I were. All of this was brought about because of your desire for power, to overpower others, dominate and control them. I have been blind all of this time seeking my revenge in Malfoy. The only monster here, the only one responsible is you!”
Suddenly, Claude’s free hand shot up, seizing one of Alaric’s hands as he clawed at his face. A roar of agony tore through the air. Claude snapped the wrist with a nasty *crunch*, before dropping Alaric to the floor carelessly. Harry saw the man force himself not to curl up and cradle his wrist. No, instead the man sat up, glaring venomously at the vampire leader. And he spat at the creature’s feet.

“You’re greedy for power, Claude Stanton, so greedy that you tear apart lives to obtain more, but let me tell you, in the end, you are only powerful because you took that power from others, only as powerful as our fear makes you. Well I am not afraid anymore. Torture me, kill me, the worst thing that could happen to me has already happened – and my revenge is only minutes away…”

Harry frowned at that last statement. Alaric had said something about his plan being brought into action moments ago as well. What was he planning? What was about to happen? He was poised on the balls of his feet, trying to still his shaking legs. They’d obviously neglected to give him the blood restorative. He only hoped he could keep his feet until both he and Alaric were out of here. Somehow.

Claude surged forwards with another feral snarl. He wasn’t smiling now. Not even as he took clear delight in dragging Alaric up by his hair. When he gripped his throat this time, his clawed fingernails sank deep into his throat, tearing bloody holes in his neck. Harry saw Alaric grit his teeth to hold in the screams that longed to break free, just as the vampire leant in closer to ensure his words ghosted over Alaric’s face with repulsive intimacy.

“I am going to kill you, Caius Alaric, and I am going to cast the necessary spells to damn your soul for all eternity to walk this earth alone and apart from your precious Lucan. You think I will allow you the peace you long for? No. I will curse you to eternal solitude and despair in watching me tear apart this world, piece by piece until I am the strongest of them all. Not even your wretched hunter ancestors will stop me.”

It was in that split second, that Harry saw desperate fear in that face, but also, he saw the muscles in Claude’s wrist twitch and he bolted forwards. “No!” he screamed, flying towards them. Too late. A sharp flick of the vampire’s wrist and blood and crimson, gory matter splattered the air. Alaric tried to scream, but all that came out was a gargled agonised spurt as he fell, crashing hard to the unforgiving stone, blood gushing from his torn throat.

“No!” Harry cried again, dropping to his knees beside the fallen man. He reached frantically for the man’s throat, but his hand hovered there uselessly. The wound was too great, there was no way he could staunch the bleeding. Cursing loudly, Harry's bloody hand hovered uselessly over the wound. His heart was still pounding in his chest, his body was still shaking with weakness but he steeled himself against it all, not even sparing the time to glare at Claude as he saw the beast licking Alaric’s blood from his talons.
“Hold on,” Harry urged Alaric frantically, his voice hoarse, his insides tensed. He had to save him. Another sickening, gurgled croak left those lips. Alaric clawed at him frantically, seizing his shirt and gazing up into his eyes imploringly, as if trying to make him understand something. But Harry didn’t have the time to try and understand him.

Shakily he drew in a sharp breath. “Vulnera Sanentur!” He chanted in a raspy, unsteady hum. He called on his magic, on the very thing he had once been terrified of. He intensified his gaze on Alaric, his brows furrowed with concentration. “Vulnera Sanentur!” His hand was glowing softly, not as brightly as it had when intertwined with Draco’s, but the magic was still brewing, coming to his aid, under his control at last, instead of threatening to rip it away. He was the master of his magic, and he would use it to save Alaric!

A bloodied hand closed around his wrist, however, stopping him in his tracks. Alaric gave him a spluttered, crimson-stained smile. He was practically on his lap now. “N-No. D-Done for, not even a wizard as powerful as you can help a sinner like me to cheat death.”

Harry shook his head. “You’re not – let me, I can save you, you aren’t a sin–”

“You’re weak already,” Alaric spluttered, “use your magic to get out of here. Now, my…my revenge is… Don’t want you to get…caught up in the crossfire.”

Harry’s frown intensified. What was Alaric talking about?

Alaric clawed tightly at his shirt, practically in Harry's lap now. Awkwardly, Harry brought his arm around to hold the man’s body closer, trying to give him some semblance of comfort where he could. No one deserved to die like this, least of all someone who had already suffered as Alaric had. His eyes stung treacherously.

“I-I am… I can never be forgiven. Done too – too much evil, too many…sins…” His fingers tightened in Harry's shirt. “But I…I’m sorry, regardless. I want…want you and him–” ‘Him’ meaning Draco, Harry thought. “Want you to live, to…to love, to be t-together in peace, the way Lucan and I never got to.”

Harry held the man closer when he gave a revolting heave, blood bubbling up through his teeth and out his marred throat.
“H-Hold on!” Harry urged him, trying to raise his hand again to continue with the spell, but Alaric’s grip was inescapable and holding his fingers to his bloodied lips.

“I – I will see Lucan again,” he murmured brokenly. “I c-can…I can feel him, waiting for me…”

It was then that his eyes glazed over, his pupils dilated so that there was no rim of colour visible as he stared up at Harry with blissful wonderment, as if the pain had completely vanished at the sight of him. Or at the sight of what he thought he saw, more accurately, as Harry found out when those crimson-stained lips parted with a gasp.

“Lucan?!” Alaric cried hoarsely, his tone pleading almost, as if he didn’t dare to believe the mirage he was obviously seeing and yet longed to more than anything.

Harry swore his heart was about to crack in two when he realised what must be happening, what Alaric must be seeing. He inhaled shakily, assuming the brave façade for the dying man in his arms. He had never been much of a liar, but this sweet lie was the least he could do for this man, the best way he could think of giving him some comfort in his gruesome end to his dreadful life. Alaric hadn’t deserved any of this, whatever evil things he had done after losing Vesper, he didn’t deserve anything that had happened to him.

And this sweet lie will be the most beautiful one to ever pass my lips, Harry thought, bending his head to touch his lips to Alaric’s. Ignoring the distant metallic taste of blood, he cupped that face lovingly. He swept his thumb through the mess of blood and freely flowing tears that he felt there as he tenderly, chastely massaged that mouth with his own. He pulled back only when Alaric gave a sob into his mouth.

Alaric and Vesper were alike to him and Draco in another way, it seemed. Both iron-hard men only broke down, only surrendered to their weaknesses when in each other’s arms. Just like me and Draco, he thought, forcing a reassuring smile onto his lips as he stroked Alaric’s cheek. Those eyes were shining with tears in the dim light now. This was the boy he had seen in Alaric’s memories with Vesper, not the brutish, bitter man he, Harry had first met. This was the real Caius Alaric.

“Sshhh,” he whispered softly to the man in his arms. “There’s nothing to forgive…Caius, and I am here. I am waiting for you. Come with me. Come.”

“D-Done horrid…things,” Alaric began again, clinging to him like a lifeline in a tempest. Harry squeezed him back, resting his lips on that forehead and breathing in softly, the way he had seen Vesper breathe him in – the way Draco inhaled his, Harry's scent.
“You said it yourself; it was Claude's fault, not yours. You are forgiven, Caius, let it go. Come with me, I've been waiting for you for so long.”

Another, softer almost relieved sob left those lips then and he felt Alaric's one good arm reach up to scrape across the bare skin of his shoulders, holding him close. Harry's eyes stung more fiercely, but even if no one could see his face, he refused to let the tears fall.

“Can we go now?” Alaric croaked in a whisper that Harry felt more than he heard. Harry gave a small nod as he tried to find his voice.

“Let go now. I'm right here beside you. Let go.”

_Such a beautiful, bittersweet lie_, Harry thought. One he managed to keep going right up until the moment that Alaric's body slumped in his embrace, his heart and lungs still, his eyes closed, limbs still with death. Slowly, Harry laid the man down. Somehow, he knew that the real Vesper was waiting for Alaric.

Before anything else could happen, however, a shining, golden glow caught the corner of his eye and his head shot up. He gasped at what he saw, only just realising that the exchange with Alaric had been uninterrupted by the vampires surrounding them. And it was the golden glow that had kept them at bay. In his desperation, his dwindling magic had radiated from him, forming an impenetrable shield around him and Alaric's corpse, a barrier that Claude and his minions were now pounding against furiously.

It seemed as always, his emotions were what formed the strongest of his spells, not his concentration. It had been the same with the _Patronus_ charm at first. He would have to work with Draco to make them come at will rather than sheer need. If he ever saw him again, that is, for at that moment he had noticed the presence of the golden protection, it faded. The vampires launched forwards with savage snarls, but Claude got to him first, seizing him by the throat as he had done with Alaric until he was suspended off his feet.

With a choked gasp, Harry clawed at the hands holding him, swinging with his legs to kick out at the creature. The hand around his throat tightened, but so did Harry’s grip on it. He dug his nails in as hard as he could; summoning what little energy he had left to send a burst of power with all the ferocity of sunlight rippling through the vampire's skin. Claude dropped him with a hiss.

Harry dropped to the ground with a hard thump on his useless legs but before he could blink, the
minions were on him, binding his hands behind his back with the same rope that had tied him to the ceiling before. It stung Harry's wrists when he struggled, like the fibres had been imbued with acid, but he fought against them regardless, biting through the pain and the nauseating smell of blood and burnt flesh.

“A beautifully pitiful display, Potter,” Claude snarled, leaning down to seize his chin and tilt it up as far as Harry's neck would allow without snapping. Those bloody nails dug into his chin. “What I am more interested is the instinctual magic that surged up without even your notice. It has me hungry for another bite, as well as the urge to punish you for your insolence.”

Harry glared up at him. “Please do, drain me dry and you'll never get a drop of me. I'm already barely standing!”

Dark chuckles rippled through the stale air and those nauseating mouths were on his body again, smoothing over the same places he had been bitten before. The sore, swollen bruises throbbed warningly.

“We can take much more before you die,” Claude clarified for him. “Besides which, we evidently need to keep you as weak and subdued as possible to rein in your rebel attitude. Yes,” he punctuated that husky word by brushing his thumb over Harry's lips. Harry flinched but could not turn away, his grip was too strong. “We need you as doe-eyed and helpless as earlier, I think.”

That mouth was encroaching on the area of his throat that Claude had bit into last time; he was going to be helpless again, going to be smothered by the crowd of their bodies. But what was worse, was when Claude's free hand reached down, tugging his briefs away.

His struggles intensified, but there were too many powerful vampires holding him, he could not so much as shake off a finger as they ripped them viciously from his body. *I will not be some damsel whose body they will pillage. I won't be a victim!* Harry snarled. He was not even above being rescued now, if only someone would stop this wretched fate befalling him.

He knew now how foolish it was to want to 'be the hero' and would quite happily be rescued by anyone in the future if only he could find a way out of this. It had been bad enough that their dirty fangs had pierced his body; he would die if they sullied him 'that' way. *I could never face Draco again,* he thought. But the way that Claude's cruel lips twisted into a wicked smile against his lips told him that that was an added bonus to them.

“Oh, yes Harry Potter,” Claude breathed. “I will drive you to the point of insanity with unwanted pleasure and shame, and then you will be perfectly compliant indeed.” The beings holding his legs
hostage forced them up so that he was no longer touching the floor; so that Claude could reach back to touch the private part of him that only Draco had touched. “By the time we are through with you, you won't even remember your vampire, not even your own name. You will just exist, breathe just for us – and you'll love it.”

It was then that the world exploded. A first, a foreboding rumbling sound filled the air, making the creatures holding him stop and raise their heads. Their grip relaxed slightly, Harry looked around, just when the ceiling, the walls, the floor began to quiver, tremble and roar as if suffering an earthquake, parts of the stone crumbling away. The sound grew louder, the world roared and shook. His eyes widened as he realised, this was the plan, the ‘revenge’ Alaric had been planning, the very thing Alaric hadn't want him caught up in. It had been on a magical timer it seemed and the time was up.

Suddenly, an unbearable, deafening noise like that of coursing rapids swelled in his ears, his only warning before he heard and saw great sections of the walls blow, burst as if torn away by dynamite, rapid currents of water rushing from the chasms in the stone. It was as if the dungeon like lair had been buried on a geyser, or a dam, one that had burst. He could see it coursing through the hallway outside, twisting through the rooms, filling them quickly.

Then, piercing screams tore above the cries of the rushing water. The inescapable hands that had been hold of him released him, practically threw him from them as they leapt back, steam rising from the rising pool of water that was already up to their knees and even higher on Harry. He stumbled back away from the chaos, of their panic kicking up water over them as he went. He knew then what this was.

Back when he and Draco had snuck into Alaric’s office to try and find the *Essenz der Fee*, they had come across the receipt for gallons of holy water. Draco had jested that the man planned to drown all the vampires in the country, but it was more specific than that. He had acquired it to do just this, boil Claude and his minions alive in their own lair. Only now Harry was going to get caught in the crossfire – exactly what Alaric had tried to avoid. He wasn’t bearing seared by the sacred liquid, but he would drown in it all the same the moment it reached the ceiling.

*The door*, he thought, the water around his neck now. It was coming in fast. He had to be faster. Taking a final glance around as he watched the demons clawing at the walls, levitating themselves up above the water level, Harry took a deep breath and dove beneath the water. Now was his chance!

The water was stained with thick billows of crimson blood, he could see partly eroded legs kicking frantically, see bodies collapse face-first into the water as they all knocked each other aside in their desperation to find higher ground. He made a beeline for the open door, seeing what must have been Osborne’s body already mostly eaten away by the purified water. Those behind him were going to die like this, and he wasn’t sure even they deserved it.
But he deserved to live more and so did Draco. Draco, he thought desperately, reaching for the man mentally as he swam into the hall. To his left he could see water rushing down the momentous flight of stairs and he broke the surface to gain more air. He would’ve been wiser to try and hold his breath for longer, however. The second he took a sharp intake of air he was smothered by frantic bodies, each clawing at him frantically.

“Bite him!” He heard one gasp. “His blood will heal us, we’ll have a chance!”

He snarled, inhaling a mouth full of water, kicking and punching at anything that laid a hand on him. But they were too strong. Panic, claustrophobia was setting in. His head was barely above water, he was drowning in a tide of water and bodies, hyperventilating as he fought to keep his head above water.

“No!” he heard Claude cry through the din. “He is priceless, we need him alive! Release him!” He heard Claude fighting to reach them through the pain and the water, but before he reached them, Harry felt fangs in his wrists, in his neck, on his arms, everywhere. He screamed and then went under. The water was rushing in faster now, carrying them down in a current that threw him and the cluster of vampires against the far wall at the end of the corridor.

Pain laced through Harry's body as he was thrown against the stone, the pressure of dozens of bodies sucking hard, fiercely at him. There was no pleasure in the bite this time; the holy water was washing the venom away, eroding their fangs even as they pierced Harry's flesh. Harry screamed again, but all it achieved was sucking in another mouthful of water.

His own blood stained the water around him, agony, like fire seared his body in every place a mouth was feverishly sucking. He struggled but there were too many, pinning him to the wall along with the harsh rush of water. And he was running out of air. He was going to either drown or be drained to death. The world was already spinning from both. But which will take me? He wondered, as his body began to go cold and his vision black.

Beneath his skin, his magic hummed as if longing to be set free to save him, but starvation for oxygen and lack of blood had carried him too far toward unconsciousness. The blackness already had its insistent hands around his throat and was tugging him forward.

Suddenly, the faint humming in his skin grew more intense, his heart began pounding fiercely again, as if being revived by an electric current. His throat tingled, the side that wasn’t being attacked by foreign fangs and the place where those mouths were still frantically hanging onto him began to burn until he swore he heard them sizzling even as his consciousness dwindled.
The bodies clinging to him like starved leeches were torn away then, their screams of agony audible as they were thrown to the mercy of the holy water again were muffled from the surrounding tide, but Harry still heard them. His blood had been healing them enough to sustain them, but he knew that now, with the water up to the ceiling, they were done for. All of them.

So why had they let go? His answer came in the answer of familiar arms enclosing around him, hauling him tight to a hard, oddly hot chest. And then he felt lips on his. A mouth, parted slightly sealed his own, breathing a great, relieving breath of air into his lungs. Harry felt giddy with the relief of it, but he held it in gratefully, catching a flash of silver eyes that he had thought he would never see again.

*Draco,* he thought, his voice sounding mawkish and exhausted even in his head. He closed his arms tightly around Draco’s neck, almost forgetting where he was. That was, until he saw steam bubbling from Draco’s cheeks and throat, the very hands that held Harry so close. The holy water was burning him alive along with the others. *No!* He thought desperately. *Get out of here! Get away!*

Those arms hauled him forwards obstinately, and in his weakness, he had no choice but to allow it. His blood was still clouding up the air around them and the breath of air Draco had gifted him was running out. The water had filled the dungeon completely now. Harry could see Draco’s skin boiling, burning sickeningly as if he were at the mercy of white-hot flames instead of blessed water.

Draco was screaming in pain inside his head and Harry forced his weakened body to aid their forward strokes, half-pulling Draco towards the stairway he had glimpsed earlier. The current was fighting against them however, pushing them back and they locked their hands stubbornly, working together to push right back. Together, they were unstoppable.

The stairs were in sight, even to Harry's eyes in the darkness, the sea of searing corpses. A glance in Draco’s direction, however made his stomach churn. The very skin was burning from his body. He wasn’t going to make it. *Oh no you don’t,* Harry hissed at him mentally. *No you don’t. Don’t you die, don’t you dare die on me – I won’t allow it! Don’t you dare leave me!*

He didn’t have the strength or the concentration to conjure so much as a bubble-headed charm for himself, but he would have given Draco his last ounce of power to save him. And he did. He squeezed the hand in his grasp tighter, never stopping in their frantic fight against the current. The stairs were there, right there! His lungs shook with spasms and his body ached but he pushed, *hard,* reaching for Draco’s strength and feeding what remained of his own into that body.
Dizziness swelled again, his body felt heavy and limp and when Draco pulled him in close again, now dragging them both towards the exit, Harry saw that seared flesh knit together, heal slightly. It had taken everything he had left to make even that small difference, but it was enough to keep Draco alive until they reached the top of the stairwell.

The next thing he knew a rush of icy, unforgiving air flew over him and he gasped out in a mixture of pain and desire for breath as he was thrown flat on his back. He stared around him wildly, seeing that he was lying nearly at the top of the stone staircase, his feet dangling in the water that seemed to have stopped rising now. The rooms below, he could see were completely swamped with it, the pool lapped at this ankles where he lay, it had risen until there was not even a crack of air left between the surface and the ceiling.

There was no way that anything was alive in there, Harry thought, glancing to the side to see Draco shaking as he flicked his wand once, twice then three times to banish the holy water clinging to his skin and clothes. His face and hands were still burned but not life-threateningly so. *I'll give him some blood after I've had some replenishing potion,* he thought matter-of-factly, his mind and body in a state of dazed shock.

Still dazed, he reached out, wanting to melt into Draco’s embrace, to just collapse and forget the world, but just then, an ugly, mutilated roar ripped through the silence, just as the surface of the water broke. A gnarled, bloody hand seized Harry's ankle, trying to yank him back into the water.

Draco cursed, and shot forwards to meet Claude just as his mutilated, alien looking form rose from the water like a zombie rising from its grave. He looked terrifying. His clothed and skin had burned away, his angry-red muscles partially eroded and distended, hanging there repulsively for all to see. His face was a mottled red, gory skull and Harry swore he could see that wretched heart pounding sluggishly in that chest.

“M-Mine!” Claude howled, tugging Harry harder into the water, his lidless eyes fixed on the blood oozing from the nastiest wound on Harry's body, the spiteful bite-mark that Osborne had created at the base of his limp penis. One of the other vampires had torn it open and it was only now that Harry saw how much blood was leaking out. He snarled, trying to kick Claude away.

“Just die!” Harry screamed his throat raw. Behind him a commotion sounded, and then two sets of arms wrapped around his, hauling him back up the steps. He twisted his head to see Snape and Merritt tugging him to safety, their combined strength overwhelming Claude’s diminished power. Draco stepped between the defeated beast and Harry, an animalistic growl rumbling in his chest.

“I wish I could torture you for touching Harry, for *everything,* but there is no time – I want to have the satisfaction of ending you myself,” Draco hissed and with that, his hand shot forwards with vampire speed, sinking through the bloody mess of Claude’s chest, his fingers locking with a
sickening, squelching *crack* around something. Harry had an idea what it was.

Draco gave a humourless laugh then, staring fearlessly into the vampire’s eyes. *He loves me,* Harry thought with conviction, *after losing me like that, I suppose nothing scares him anymore, not like that, anyway.*

“How ironic,” Draco murmured darkly. “And I thought that you didn’t have a heart.” He punctuated his words by twisting his wrist sharply, ripping Claude’s heart from his chest and shoving him and it back into the watery depths.

Harry winced as he heard and saw the water corrode that truly dead body, devour it until it had faded into nothing. It was all so surreal, so terrifyingly unrealistic. He still felt dazed and weak and dizzy, so much so that when he felt Draco turn his head slightly so that he could gaze into his eyes, he nearly forgot where they were.

“Are you alright?” Draco asked him, all the venom and loathing and beastliness that had ruled him when he had finished Claude seeming to have been devoured by the holy water along with him. His voice was warm, like liquid caramel and his cooling hands caressed Harry's scraped cheek. Those eyes glistened.

Harry tried to answer, even opened his mouth but words wouldn’t form. He was so tired. Why did his body hurt so much again? Merlin, he felt so dizzy.

“Here,” came Merritt’s voice from behind him and a warm, thick cloak was draped around his icy shoulders. He tried to grasp it, tried to say thank you but again his lips moved soundlessly and it was Draco that pulled the cloak shut around him, preserving his dignity and rubbing his arms through the fabric to try and warm him with the movement. Harry gazed at him, tracing every inch of that face as if to convince himself that this was definitely not a dream. Leaning forward, as if sensing his thoughts, Draco caressed the side of his throat that no one else could touch and gave the smallest flicker of a smile.

“I’m here,” he breathed, his words dusting Harry's slightly parted lips. Harry's teeth chattered, but he didn't care. Draco was really here, really touching him, focused on bringing warmth to his frozen body. His voice was like an anaesthetic on a gaping wound and the agony coursing through him faded to a dull throb when he allowed his body to fall forwards.

He collapsed into Draco's arms. He reached up to seize fistfuls of the blond's shirt, clinging to him tightly. His eyes flickered shut and he inhaled deeply, that musky scent filling him up until the giddiness became a pleasant sort. “I'm here,” Draco repeated softly into his hair.
Harry clenched his eyes shut tighter. He wasn't going to cry, that was ridiculous, he wouldn't cry. He was alright now. Everything was going to be alright.

“There is no time for this,” Snape said then, though his tone was soft and devoid of biting derisiveness. He sounded relieved too. Relieved that he, Harry was alright. The knowledge didn't shock Harry as much as it would have before Snape had helped him to control his powers, had helped him to get rid of the horcruxes including he one inside him.

Above him, he felt Draco shift his head to look in the direction of Snape's voice over Harry's damp head. Harry pressed himself closer into Draco's body, regardless of the vampire's soaking wet clothes, of his coldness, he wanted to be close to him, as close as the physical possibilities allowed. And he didn't care who was watching. He felt Draco's hands rub his arms harder, trying to warm him more determinedly.

“You're right. We need to get out of here,” Draco agreed, wrapping one of his arms around Harry's back and under his knees, lifting him effortlessly and rising to his own feet with one simultaneous movement. Harry didn't so much as tense. I don't care about that anymore, he whispered into Draco's mind, meaning his previous need to do everything himself and never lean on another. He was beyond that now, he had grown, realised what all his friends had been telling him from the start. That everyone needed to rely on someone else at some point. He had learnt that the hard way. You can be the hero for now, he mused.

I'll do my best, Draco answered, but then, his form stiffened. There were footsteps in the hall, dozens of them and both he, Snape and Merritt stepped aside, allowing their 'back-up' that had finally caught up to see that their work had already been done. They were a mixture of men and women, each of them shrouded in crisp black cloaks with gold detailing - a crest of some sort wound into the fabric. Each of them was fairly well-built in a way that pronounced strength with the very way that they walked. Each of them eyed Draco and Merritt cautiously, before allowing their gazes to rove Harry's form and Snape.

“We understood that you weren't going to enter the building until we reached you,” the tall, tanned man at the front of the group said, still looking at each of them in turn. Draco's arms tightened around Harry when they lingered too long on him and the obvious blackened bruises that peeked from behind the folds of the robes. Harry didn't open his eyes. He's passed out with exhaustion, Draco thought, leaning his head a fraction so that Harry could feel his skin against his face even in his slumber. He was glad that the man had allowed him to lift him like this, he wasn't sure his emotions or his instincts would allow any amount of distance for a long time after nearly losing him…
“We were gathered outside the front door above,” Merritt answered. “The top floors are a dingy, abandoned old pub, we were waiting on the threshold but then we heard screams we smelt blood and…” He gave a glance to Draco. “His First was down here and he flew down to his rescue, and we couldn’t let him go alone. If we’d waited the boy would be dead – along with Alaric.” The young vampire seemed to add he last part purposefully, as if for effect. It worked, the hunters gasped.

“He is…” A woman at the man's sided began, looking uncertainly into the swamped dungeon. “Is he definitely–?”

“I saw his body when I went in to rescue Harry,” Draco said, “Claude's stench was all over him, he definitely killed him.”

The man at the front seemed to take a moment to school his features, to bite back the anger and loss, but at last he looked at Draco levelly. “Do you know what happened?”

“Only Harry will now,” Snape said, “He is the only person to survive the trap Alaric lay to finish Claude and his demons once and for all.”

The woman piped up again this time. “You can tell it was his spell?” she asked, her voice shaking with emotion and disbelief. Snape regarded the woman carefully, she looked a lot like Alaric, perhaps his mother or another female relative? Her icy blue eyes were filling with obstinate, unshed tears.

“I worked along side him as a Professor for a few weeks at Hogwarts, I recognise his magical signature. This is definitely his work,” Snape explained.

“He purchased the holy water before the start of term in preparation for this,” Draco said, “I saw the receipt in his office. He was planning this from he start, although it seems he changed his mind about killing me at the last minute.” When everyone around him looked confused, Draco raised his head distinctly, confidently, gesturing to Harry.

“Harry gifted me with the events since his capture before he drifted away just now. Alaric repented for his sins, died trying to save Harry and condemned Claude with the blame of everything that had happened before passing away in Harry’s arms.” His face twisted a little as he saw what both Harry and Alaric had suffered down there – he almost wished he could resurrect Claude and torture him anew for all he had done. Almost.
The man at the front sneered then. “I can accept that not all of you are as ruthless and blood-thirsty as Claude, are even 'good' for the most part, but I will never believe any man would willingly surrender themselves, have their mind become a shared place.”

“Neither did Harry, at first,” Draco said quietly, his eyes blazing a dark grey. “He came to accept me, all of me, everything I am, came to like my vampire gifts and appreciate what they meant for both of us. Even if he never loves me the way I love him, he is happy with me, happier than he has ever been. In spite of and because of what I am.”

The man looked as if he wanted to say something else, but the words seemed to die in his throat. He shook his head with a grunt and then he brought a wand out of his pocket, turning it on the flooded dungeon. A light flickered at the end of it, a silent spell evidently confirming what the man wanted to know. “There is nothing alive down there, not even a vampire,” he confirmed. “We will handle this from here. Now go, before the Ministry get the tip off and arrest the lot of us. It's over now, go home. We'll clear up the pieces.”

Draco wasn't sure what to make of that, but found he didn't care. It was over now, it was done all he wanted to do was to return to the castle with Harry and heal him the way he needed to be. Mind, body and soul. With a small nod, he began to head back up the corridor, Snape and Merritt leading the way. “Thank you for responding so quickly, for coming to help, even feeling about my kind as you do.”

The man stared at him with dark, unfathomable eyes, eyes that dropped to Harry again. “Everyone owes their lives to him and besides which, if losing a son taught me anything, it is that not everything is what it seems. Alaric knew that, and he died because he couldn't trust me to accept that too. I won't let him die in vain. We used to be as monstrous as the demons themselves, but we will be better from now on.”

Draco made a noise of approval, not sure what else he could say. Except, “When you arrange the funeral, invite Harry if you could, I know that he would like that,” he added, before giving them a final nod of farewell and turning to continue following Severus and Merritt up the hallway. He caressed Harry's arm with his thumb gently as the cold wintry air rushed through them the moment they stepped outside, gathering together to apparate back to the gates of Hogwarts. We're nearly home, Harry, he thought softly. Nearly home.

*                      *                      *

A warm, weighty mug of black coffee sat in Severus’s hands, the smell of the generous dash of brandy Merritt had added for him rising up with the billows of steam, warming his core even before he’d taken a sip. It had been chilling down in that dungeon in more ways than one. When Voldemort had fallen, he had hoped to leave nightmarish horrors such as tonight behind him.
At least this time had left them knitted more tightly than before, however. A stronger defence that
even a god would find hard to penetrate. He had seen what even a weakened Potter, exhausted and
beaten and drained of blood had done with his arms around Draco tonight; he doubted any magic
would be able to rival that for centuries to come.

Merritt half lay against his side, pressed into him like a needy kitten, though remained silent in the
presence of the others gathered in the room, making do with caressing the small of his back
contentedly, where no one else could see. It was a peculiar thing, being so casually intimate with
someone, relying on them for both the simplest and most monumental of things. Strange, but the
best he had felt in…all his life.

*I could very well find myself perilously attached to you,* Snape thought about his curly-haired
lover, grateful that his mind was more private than Harry’s was to Draco. He cared deeply for his
vampire companion, more than perhaps was sensible, but he was a private man, and always would
be.

Merritt, to his credit seemed to not only understand but appreciate that, just as he appreciated and
adored every one of the traits Severus had always thought others found distasteful. Not for the first
nor last time in the many years they would share together, Severus remembered just how unique a
creature Merritt was. A bubbly blond jewel, a diamond in the rough.

Their subtle closeness and unseen exchange continued as Severus surveyed those before him,
particularly Draco, who was at the centre of the small group gathered in his office.

“…Everything was destroyed and the Hunters insisted we make ourselves scarce so that they
could tidy away the ‘mess’,” Draco concluded his explanation of the evening, Weasley, Granger,
Lupin, Minerva, Filius and Hagrid. Each wore a completely different expression, but each was
tinged with concern for Potter and suspicion for Draco.

“Tidy up the evidence you mean,” Granger said uncomfortably, “not that they didn’t deserve it, all
of them. I’m just…I’m glad Harry is back. Can we see him?” She was as eager and unbearably
presumptuous as ever. Didn’t it occur to her that the last thing Harry would want after being
suffocated by voracious vampires was to be suffocated, trapped in his own sickbed?

“He’s hurt, but nothing I can’t heal,” Draco replied tactfully. “He’ll need rest. When he’s lucid
enough to do more than drink and sleep I’ll let him decide whether he’s up for visitors, I’m not
forcing him into anything right now.”
Granger frowned, but it was Weasley that piped up, lacking her sense, her knowledge that Draco was right. Severus watched as the red-head sneered. “You make it sound like seeing us will be a chore!” He declared, insulted. “We’re his family; he’ll want to see us. And what do you mean lucid? And when you say heal you surely can’t mean-”

“What does it matter what I mean so long as Harry is well again?” Draco snapped, knowing how Harry would loathe having their personal secrets spoken of like this.

“It matters if you’ll be feeding him blood,” Lupin interjected then, albeit without the tone of accusation. He had been oddly understanding, even respectful of Draco since the Christmas meal they had shared. Lupin had seen what the others had not, Severus thought. How much Draco loved their golden boy. “You have to be careful how much you give him, Draco it could-”

“Look,” Draco said rigidly. “Even if you all see me as the same selfish little twit I used to be, think of it this way. I will die if Harry does, I’ll die if I do something that Harry finds so revolting he cannot bear to let me touch him again and I’ll die if he turns into a vampire. I have a vested interest in his health and safety, you can trust in that if you are so distrusting of my character.”

Draco was tired too, Severus noted. His very bones seemed to be aching with exhaustion and the need to press tightly into the lover he had thought he had lost forever. Just when Severus was about to step in on his behalf, however, Lupin spoke again.

“I challenge anyone to say they love someone as much as you love Harry,” the werewolf said in the vampire’s defence. “I wasn’t attacking you, merely stating a point, Draco. Not everyone has had the time to watch you and Harry together as I have. To know you as a couple, you must understand their concern.”

Severus watched Draco look around at his professors and Harry's best friends. There was no anger there, even though Weasley might like to try and make it look like anger. But no, it was fear, for Harry again. They all loved the boy, that was what made such a drastic personal secret so hard to register. It might have been easier if Harry were here to defend their relationship for himself, that might make it more believable to them.

But as Draco said, he was still incapacitated, still unconscious with exhaustion. Minerva had arranged for him to rest in his own room near the Hospital Wing for now, had asked Filius to transfigure one of the unused classrooms for the time being and Draco had tucked Harry in the luxurious bed there before tearing himself away to justify his relationship to Harry's nearest and dearest.
“Look, attack me all you want, but I’m going nowhere unless Harry sends me away,” Draco said with an air of finality that not even Weasley could argue with. “This is an argument you can take up with him when he is well, right now, however, he needs to heal and rest and I am the only person who can help him do that, after all Claude and the others did to him down there in that vampire’s nest.”

Severus gave Draco a small nod when the blond turned to give him an apologetic look, before heading for the door. Weasley’s voice, however, stopped him.

“And why is that exactly, because you’re his vampire?” he demanded hotly, clearly peeved at being brushed off so easily.

Draco stopped but did not turn, his hand on the ornate door-handle. “Because I’m his lover,” he said simply, saying everything with those few words. And this time, Granger laid a hand on Weasley’s arm and shook her head when he looked like he was about to argue more. Then Draco was gone.

“Why did you stop me?!” Weasley demanded, whirling on his own partner, who was oddly calm considering her (now rather obvious) physical condition. She cradled the swell of her belly and simply regarded her fiery-haired lover quietly as he rounded on his professors.

“And you!” he snapped, seemingly unaffected by the fact that these were still his teachers. “Why didn’t any of you say anything? Don’t you care that Harry is going out with a vampire? Don’t you care that he could rip him to shreds just if he gets a bit excited?”

“I would’a thought that you of all people, Ron, would’a been able ta see the exact reason we didn’t challenge Malfoy,” Hagrid replied stiffly from where he stood, slightly hunched over, even in the high-ceilinged room. He was clearly irritated with the accusation that he didn’t care for Harry.

You’re calling him Harry, Severus’s mind whispered. He sighed to himself, resigned to his fate of forever watching over Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy, no matter how old the both of them grew.

“It is visible even to a blind man, Ronald Weasley,” Minerva continued Hagrid’s explanation. “Draco Malfoy is in love with Harry Potter; cares about him above all else, even himself. Whatever he is, whatever he may do, he will do the best by your friend. From what I hear from Remus, Malfoy has been responsible for a great deal of Potter’s healing. And there is no one in the world that deserves happiness and devotion more than him, would you argue with that?”
For the first time, Weasley looked stumped, speechless. Tiny Filius murmured into his glass of whisky in between his colleagues that watched on in silence, along with Severus as Granger squeezed Weasley’s arm again.

“It…it will take some getting used to admittedly, but I’ve seen them both, Ron, as have you. They love each other and whatever else happens, it’s their decision. They are both adults. You don’t have to like Draco, all you have to do is continue as you have been, amicably tolerating him for Harry’s sake and standing by in case he does need us if it happens to go wrong. But I…I don’t think it will, Ron, and I am sure you know that too. Draco would rather die than let anything happen to Harry.”

Grumbling something intelligible, Weasley seemed to admit defeat and it was then that Severus stood. “If that matter is settled then I advise you heed Mr Malfoy’s warning and allow him to fetch you once Potter himself has decided he is ready to see you. What happened while he was held captive was a traumatising, delicate matter and it will take him a while before he is ready to face anyone,” he said, looking pointedly at Weasley.

“Perhaps it would be wise to use the time given to you to come to terms with his and Mr Malfoy’s union, and the nature of it. The last thing Potter needs is for those he cares for to be against the one thing that will give him strength to recover quickly—”

“It is our last chance this year, after all,” Granger mumbled thoughtfully. “He has to be ready to sit his exams in just a few short months.”

At this, a small, barely visible smirk twitched at the corner of Severus’s lips. Some things would never change. “Indeed, Miss Granger. Now if all of you would be so kind as to depart from my chambers, I have a guest, as you can see.” He gestured pointedly to Merritt, who had remained part-lounging on the settee behind him. The blond smiled dazzlingly at each of them, flashing pearly white teeth, though his fangs were hidden.

“One moment, Severus,” the vampire chimed in with his sing-song voice, rising and approaching the heard of humans about to depart. He focused on Minerva in particular but shared a smile with them all. Merritt loves being around people, loves to talk to them, to aid them, Severus thought, recalling some of the tales Merritt had told him about the orphanage he had come from, the many schools he had attended (thanks to the numerous foster homes) and how he loved to make friends with everyone. It was this intimate knowledge of his new lover that allowed Severus to understand the reasoning behind the vampire’s next words.

“Professor McGonagall. I believe that you are in need of a Defence against the Dark Arts
Merritt would make an excellent teacher, Severus thought and what’s more, the man would thrive in such a position. He would feel needed, at home at last. *And close to me*, he thought, not bothering to pretend he wouldn’t be pleased to be able to see the man so frequently. It was a novel feeling, actually craving someone’s company. Especially a particular someone.

Minerva looked taken aback at first, but soon recovered herself. “I…I am indeed. Professor…that is, Mr Remus Lupin here has been offered a better paying position in a rehabilitation centre for victims of magical creatures and beings.”

Behind her, still gripping Granger’s shoulder where he had been following both her and Weasley reassuringly out of the door, Remus Lupin gave a nod and a smile. “It’s more pay than a man of my…condition could dare to hope for, but laws are changing in the favour of people such as you and I since the war, Mr Merritt. And this is close to home, to my wife and son, and Harry and it will allow me to help others who were hurt like us, victims of vampires, werewolves, all manner of creatures. The offer only came through today; I hate to leave Minerva in the lurch, but—”

“It sounds like a noble cause,” Merritt said, “And just Merritt, please. I can tell that the job will complete your life and make you a very happy man, Mr Lupin. And I can only hope I will be able to instruct the students half as well as you did. Severus tells me you had quite the admirable skill in getting students to actually pay attention to and remember the facts more than any other instructor.”

Severus tensed, determinedly not moving, not even blinking when several sets of eyes turned to him. A surprised smile touched Lupin’s scarred face.

“Truly Severus, I didn’t realise you were such a fan of my teaching methods,” Lupin mused.

Severus sipped his coffee. “Well, they were not completely without their merits,” he murmured, focusing his attention on a particularly interesting snag in the weave of the nearby tapestry. “I believe that you were all leaving? You can discuss your career with Minerva another time.”

Even when he heard the door close behind them all, he did not look up. Not until Merritt was standing before him, his boyish smile gone and replaced with a subtle, radiant adoring expression. Severus set his empty mug on the side table. The vampire stood between his slightly open legs for a moment, just staring down at him, before sliding gracefully to his knees and taking Severus’s hands in his, gracing each contour of every finger with his pliant, rose-petal lips.
“You are not peeved at me for seeking the Defence position without consulting you?” the vampire asked softly. He sat up on his heels now, sliding his torso between Severus’s legs and staring up at him with glistening hazel eyes.

“How was it that this devilish creature made him feel like a rebellious young teen again, as if he were recapturing the youth he lost to circumstance, heartache and bullying. He shook those memories away. The darkness had dissipated under Merritt’s rejuvenating light. There was no need for him to linger there any longer.

Reaching down, Severus seized Merritt’s shoulders, lifting him up, pulling him hard into his lap, against his chest, knotting his fingers in those glossy curls and smashing their lips together. He felt the powerful muscles of Merritt’s body vibrate, sing under his hands, felt them submit to him wholly, sounds of unrestrained delight echoing in his own mouth.

“I am in mortal danger of falling for your wily charms, Mr Appleby,” Severus breathed against that mouth, devouring another heated groan before rolling the vampire onto the luxurious rug beneath their feet, and covering his body with his own. I have waited years for you, and then you rush in and barge your way into my heart in a few weeks? I will never forgive you for that.”

A choked gasp left Merritt as he threw his head back, clawing at Severus’s shoulders while Severus tugged his clothing off none-too-gently, hungry to reach the flesh beneath. “Oh, Severus, punish me. *Punish me.*”

“I’ll punish you,” Severus murmured, worshipping the vampire’s arched neck, the contours of his collarbone, his taut abdomen. “I’ll punish you by making love to you every night for the rest of eternity, by keeping you all to myself.”

Merritt laughed good-naturedly, spreading his legs and kicking his trousers and boxers off in the same movement, welcoming Severus into the cradle of his slender thighs. This wasn’t like their
first time, slow and cautious, with each one of them uncertain of how to open up, to trust another so deeply. They had shared in each other’s secrets of the mind and flesh now, and although it was still new, there was room for that frantic urgency, that rush of pure need that they hadn’t allowed to rule them before.

At first they had been acquainting themselves with each other, learning each other, how to open up again. Now they were running on pure desire, the need to be as close as physically possible – now.

“Hmm, eternity, I can’t wait,” Merritt half-laughed, half-cried, just as Severus’s mouth ghosted over his already leaking erection. “Mmm, Severus so…so…need you tonight. Please, no teasing.”

Arching a dark brow, Severus weighed the desperation in his voice and sat back slightly, shrugging off his clothing fluidly. He eyed Merritt with a dark, sultry gaze that told him clearly what to do. The vampire growled, no purred in answer, writhing onto his belly with his arse up, his legs spread willingly.

“I’ve waited for decades for someone to look at me the way you do,” Merritt whispered huskily, looking over his shoulder at Severus with an unintentionally coquettish look. Severus paused with the crystal pot of lubricant solution he had summoned poised in his hand. He was as naked as Merritt now and kneeling behind him, distracted by that rich gaze.

“When I saw you, I just knew. I was drawn to you like lightning to the highest point on a low terrain. I fell for you in a matter of moments,” Merritt murmured. “How is that possible?”

“It is possible for some people, I believe,” Severus said, gathering a generous trail of clear fluid onto his fingers. “Especially two as suited as we are. A spark bursts into life in a matter of minutes; it’s the lasting devotion, the…love that takes the time to blossom.” He punctuated his words with a slow, loving caress of the pink, twitching bud of Merritt’s entrance, massaging it with all the gentleness of a first kiss.

“I have a feeling that that bloom is not long in coming,” Merritt murmured.

“I agree,” Severus replied, sliding a long, slick finger into his lover’s body. A long sound of tortured appreciation tumbled from Severus’s lips when that entrance tightened around him. Their love-making turned into a languid, loving connection of bodies then.

Severus stretched out across Merritt’s body; caressing those slender shoulders with his lips as he
pried open the vampire's willing body. “So beautiful,” Severus breathed, drinking in the continuous, groaning cry that was tumbling over his love's lips. “How did I bear all these years without your warmth?”

“My skin is room temperature,” Merritt countered breathily, only to be silenced by a passionate kiss to the side of his throat, one that mingled teeth and tongue and lips together, as if Severus were the vampire.

“Not to me,” Severus said against that flesh, before continuing to mouth it hungrily. He curled his fingers after sliding another in, with shameless wet noises. “You're perfect and you are all mine.” With a possessive growl, he drew back, slicking his own hard, long thickness with another fistful of lubrication. He smirked as Merritt glanced over his shoulder wantonly, arching his hips more determinedly, as if he couldn't wait another moment to feel their bodies joined. “I must have you now.”

“Mmmm, Severus, I want to feel you,” the vampire purred, every 's' elongated by the presence of his now fully exposed fangs. Severus leant forwards, guiding the swollen head of his uncircumcised erection to the eager, trembling ring of muscles that guarded the entrance to his lover's body. One hand steadied his shaft as he pierced the tender, slick chute while the other shot forwards. His long, talented fingers traced the shape of the vampire's lips, caught and teased the tip of his tongue, caressed his fangs – no worshipped them as his mouth did the gentle slope of those shoulders.

Their voices joined in a synchronised groan as Severus slid in to the hilt, as deep inside, as close to his lover as physically possible. This was the most powerful magic that either of them had ever encountered, stronger than Voldemort, Claude and all of their minions combined. His hardness throbbed, pulsing hungrily as his hips undulated against Merritt's in a slow yet firm rhythm that incited rumbling groans from those delectable lips.

“S-Severus,” Merritt panted, his tongue flickering against the potions master's fingers where they remained teasing his lips and sensitive teeth. “No teasing, not tonight. Need to come; I need to feel you come undone inside me.”

Severus's hand slid down to cup the arch of his taut throat, the hard plains of his chest and he tensed his legs, pounding harder, faster into that welcoming body. “Such a spoiled boy, you know that you'll get exactly what you want, don't you?” Severus panted, and then his hand dipped lower, curling around the vampire's straining, erection.

A shallow hiss left his lover, ripping through the air as he smeared the glistening pre-emission gathered at the tip over the swollen pink head. “But a little boy doesn't have one of these,” he laughed softly, freely as he hadn't in decades.
Merritt answered Severus's chuckle with his own, bowing his head into the rug and crying out shamelessly. He used his upper body to anchor himself, pushing back into those intensifying thrusts vigorously. Tonight wasn't about stamina, it was about closeness. Perhaps seeing Harry and Draco nearly lose each other has given them a need to feel each other again, to come together as if the world were about to end. The thought made Severus squeeze that flushed cock harder, stroke him with firm, quick caresses that matched their movements of their hips.

“Beautiful,” Severus praised him huskily, wanting to caress him all over and fill his arse and stroke his glorious erection at the same time but finding himself without enough limbs to do so. He felt like all of his teenage hormones were rushing through him at once. He couldn't get enough of the lithe body in his arms, couldn't get close enough. His cock was thrusting in and out of that tight chute now, pounding that spot that made his vampire cry out with unbridled bliss in a frenzy of passion.

“A-Amazing!” Merritt moaned, answering each thrust with one of his own.

Half-heartedly, Severus drew back from that body, leaning back against the settee slightly, pulling Merritt with him so that the blond straddled his thighs. “I want to see you when you come to completion,” he murmured, punctuating his words by ravaging those flushed, parted lips again.

A sharp whining groan echoed in his mouth this time, and that tongue squirmed pleasurably, pliant under his own as he caressed it teasingly, claiming every crevice of that lukewarm cavern. He caressed those mussed golden locks adoringly while his other arm circled around the slender waist to pull him up, tight to his chest, so that his drooling hardness was poised at that clenching entrance.

“Put it in yourself,” he hissed with a smirk, in between ravaging kisses, “swallow me to the hilt.”

A tortured cry filled the air. Merritt's body arched forwards as he reached behind himself, seizing Severus's slick length to steady it as he lowered himself onto it, sucking him in greedily in one fluent motion. Their kiss vibrated with sound from both of them. Their arms flew around each other with the intensity, the intimacy of this position.

The stillness was not to be borne. Severus's fingers dug into Merritt’s hips, helping him to rock back and forth, up and down in the rhythm that had his cock pulsing frantically against Merritt's sweet spot and Merritt grinding his own weeping prick against the hard muscles of Severus's stomach.
“Oh, carus, caro, love, fuck me, make me come. You're driving me insane!”

“So demanding,” Severus breathed, his lips never completely leaving Merritt’s even with the forceful jerks into that body above him. His every thrust brought Merritt even closer to his embrace. The vampire slid his fingers into his dark locks, holding him to their kiss as hot, molten pleasure melded their slick forms together. They writhed like beasts in heat, chasing their joint climax with fervent frenzy.

How lucky I am to have found you, someone who cares for me as deeply as I do them, he thought, mulling over the words he could not physically say. At least not yet. The day would come, the hands worshipping his hair and scalp reassured him of that.

Heat coiled in his body of the like only Merritt had incited in him. He gripped that lithe body so tight that his body shook with the sheer desire and ecstasy coursing through him. “Close,” he grunted out against Merritt’s lips, feeling those fangs scraping his own now, exposed from the vampire’s proximity to his own orgasm.

“Yes,” he panted, “let yourself go. Come with me filling you up until you burst.” Never had such brazen words left his lips, and never had he been so enamoured with someone and felt that devotion returned.

“Severus!” Merritt hissed sharply then, the last coherent sound before their intimate world on the rug exploded with liquid fire. Sweat slicked his muscles as they pulled taut, quivering under his skin. His hips arched upwards, punching forwards and spilling the dizzying ecstasy into Merritt’s body, which was now pressed to him urgently, trapping the vampire’s wanton cock between their bodies, throbbing in delight at the friction.

Their stomachs caught the blond’s climax as it splattered across them. At that moment, Severus tore his lips wetly from the vampire’s and tugged those damp lips to his throat. He collapsed back onto the lush carpet, dragging Merritt with him, their bodies still joined, his cock still pulsing the last spurts of his sticky desire into that body he had come to adore.

Those lush, kiss-flushed lips caressed the sensitive skin of his throat, driving Severus’s already ecstasy-ridden form into a crisp white oblivion. A gasp left him, one that shook as it whistled through his clenched teeth just as those fangs slid into him. The piercing pleasure brought with it reassuring warmth, a realisation that even though he didn’t know if this would last, didn’t know what would happen in the future this connection they shared was worth the risk.

His arms wrapped loosely around Merritt as he drifted slowly back down from the blinding bliss
into the subtle delight of the afterglow, that mouth still guzzling softly at his throat. If the heartache and chaos of the last few months, if Harry and Draco had taught him anything in enduring their trials recently, it was that every difficulty was worth fighting through. Even if the reason isn’t clear.

At that moment, the fangs retreated, and those lips healed him lovingly before Merritt curled contently into him. “Who would have thought all those years ago that I would find such a light in the darkness,” he murmured under his breath, mostly to himself, but the way Merritt nuzzled into his chest told him that the words had been heard. And reciprocated, he thought, allowing himself a private smile as the warmth of the fire licked at their sated, intertwined bodies.

* * *

Harry winced without opening his eyes as he was unduly awoken from what felt like an eternal sleep. His body ached, throbbed with pain, reminding him instantly of everything that had come to pass. His head felt heavy from unconsciousness and the deep, spiteful bite marks that littered his body stung, throbbed like fresh wasp stings. He groaned aloud, a grimace wracking his features when he stretched out, making sure before he opened his eyes that he had indeed been rescued and that he wasn’t still in that hellish place.

Relief so profound it momentarily stole his breath rushed through him when his fingers closed around soft sheets, when his heels dug into a firm but comfortable mattress. He felt the welcome warmth and pressure of sheets over his body, which was still only clothed in the cloak Merritt had draped over his shoulders.

Trusting that he was in a better place than he was when unconsciousness had taken him, Harry began to relax into the sheets again, only to feel a soft fluttering above his face. Opening his eyes, he saw two large, rich amber orbs staring down into his face; two great wings folding gently back away from him. It was a tribute to how exhausted he was that he didn’t so much as flinch, only smiled weakly up at the creature.

“Hello Alba,” he whispered softly, his throat feeling dry and coarse. How long had he been asleep for? “I’m glad you got here alright, did you get Crookshanks and Pig here safe?” She gave a soft hoot, leaning further over him from her perch on the grand headboard. Harry grinned. “Good girl. Were you watching over me?” He reached up, scratching her head as he forced himself to sit up. The world was still shaky, but he still had his glasses on and if he stayed still, it all seemed stable enough. He looked down at himself, seeing the still fresh wounds that looked as ghastly as ever. No one had healed him yet then, and by the light-headedness he felt, he was sure no one had given him a blood replenishing potion either. Where was Draco? Where was he?
For the first time since his eyes had opened, he looked around the room, making sure to keep petting a fairly needy Alba, who seemed incredibly grateful that he was alive. The room was a decent size, quite cozy and dressed in neutral browns and burnt golds. There were no portraits on the walls, no mirrors but the fire burning brightly in the hearth, filling the room with heat told him that he hadn't been here as long as it felt. *Draco wouldn't leave me alone after what happened,* he thought. *Not for long anyway.*

The bed he now sat up in matched the walls and tapestries, had thick, comfortable covers across it (and over him) and there were conservative drapes around the bed, tied back with matching, elegant burnt gold ties. The tapestries held intricate designs of lions, snakes, all of the crests of the Hogwarts' founders. He was in Hogwarts then. Safe, in theory and yet his wounds still throbbed, his body ached with the need for reassurance, with the need to be certain that the horrors still rushing through his mind, as potent as the pain in his limbs was truly over.

With his heart pounding, he stumbled out of the bed and onto his feet, pulling the cloak tight around him and making for the door. Before he had taken more than a few steps, however, it swung open and he froze on the spot. The door closed slowly behind Draco, who had paused where he stood as well at the sight of him. For a moment, they simply stared at one another, stunned in relief and amazement that they were together once again, despite everything that had happened. Then, they surged towards each other.

They reached each other with a harsh collision, slamming into each other, wrapping their arms around each other with desperation, as if they were the only things that were anchoring each other to the earth. Harry's fingers clawed at Draco's shoulders, hooking into his shirt while their lips crashed together, Draco's hands knotting in his hair and cupping the sharp angle of his jaw. They gasped into each other's mouths, crying out and groaning all at once with breathless fervour.

It felt like suddenly being able to breathe again after being starved for air.

~*To Be Continued*…~
Chapter Notes

The chapter is named for the song that was playing constantly in the background as I wrote the first scene "A Thousand Years" by Christina Perri, give it a look if you have a moment, the lyrics are beautiful and fit the scene so well.

Thank you so much to every amazing person who is reading or reviewing. I appreciate your support and hope you continue to enjoy until the end! Please leave a comment/review if you have a moment xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

::chapter twenty seven::

EVERY BREATH

Harry and Draco’s tongues battled ferociously and they collapsed to their knees together, still holding each other tightly, afraid to let go. Their lips tenderly massaged each other, their breath mingled and when Harry finally broke the connection of their mouths, he gave a shaky, hysterical gasp of a chuckle that danced across Draco’s lips. There was still only a hairsbreadth between them.

“Draco,” he gasped, his fingers curling so tightly now that his knuckles were white and trembling with the effort. “…I love you. I love you. I thought for a while that I’d…I’d never get to say it, but I do. I love you and I’m sorry I didn’t say it sooner.”

A soft, barely there chuckle dusted his mouth then, followed by a chaste kiss. He glimpsed a smile as those lips moved up, brushing aside his mussed fringe to kiss the dormant scar atop his forehead. “Finally you’ve sussed it then, your feelings?” Draco murmured softly against his skin, against the part of himself that Harry hated most for what it represented. Now it was gaining a more beautiful, pleasant feeling. He could not hate any part of him that Draco loved so honestly. And that was all of him. Draco’s love, it made all of him feel worthy, powerful, beautiful.

*He makes me feel like I’m flying without a broom,* Harry thought, his cheeks suffusing with colour.
as he realised Draco had heard the words. A soft chuckle answered his thoughts, a smile pressing against his head. “A secret romantic at heart, aren’t you, Potter?” Draco mused, leaning back so that they could look deep into each other’s eyes as he ran his long fingers through his mussed, dark locks.

“Wanker,” Harry cursed him jokingly, the insult half cut off by another single, chaste kiss.

“I love you,” Draco breathed against his mouth again. “I can’t believe I almost lost you.”

Harry’s eyes fluttered shut and he breathed Draco’s musky scent in, listening to his breathing and slow heartbeat. Just feeling him before he found his words again. “The rope they tied me up with, it cut me off from my magic, from our connection. They made me think that you were… And it felt like you were dead, it was so real. It felt like I couldn’t breathe, I… I don’t…”

*I don’t know what I’d do without you,* he finished, only to himself. Somewhere along the line he had fallen for Draco, hard, and if he lost him now, lost the person he thought he had come to love above all others, he didn’t know what would become of him.

“I know,” Draco whispered softly, his own feelings throbbing softly in Harry’s chest. The vampire knew because he had felt the same when he had seen Harry vanish. Their love, their desperation, their heartache was reciprocated. That hand caressed his hair again, though the comfort there was oddly apologetic this time.

“I’m sorry I didn’t come for you sooner,” he said, his words heavy, as if they bore a great weight and those fingers skittered down to ghost over the deep, purple wounds Claude had created in Harry's neck. Draco drew back a fraction and Harry could tell he was scanning the other deep bite marks that littered his skin. He pulled the robe around him subconsciously, glancing away. He didn’t want Draco to see him like this.

“You idiot, being the hero just once has made you start sounding like me,” he scoffed, still not meeting Draco’s eyes. “You saved me; you killed Claude, what have you got to be sorry for?”

Those grey eyes narrowed. Seizing the collar of the robe, the only thing shielding Harry's nudity from him, Draco tugged it aside, exposing just a handful of the spiteful wounds. “This,” he growled gravely.

Still partly dazed from the intensity of their reunion, merely blinked at him, before stumbling to
his feet shakily. Pulling the robe tight around his body, he returned to the bed and settled on the side of it, fiddling thoughtfully with the frayed hem of the dark robe. He needed a blood replenishing potion and a healing potion, perhaps one imbued with Draco's saliva if he even hoped to heal so many deep vampire bites. But first…

“Claude and his monsters did this to me because of my blood, because they thought they had power to gain in me. They made that mistake off their own backs, you saved me from it,” he said simply, leaving no room for argument. “You came as quickly as you could. I'm sure of it.”

Shaking his head with a sigh, Draco rose from the floor and approached Harry. “We had to wait for the Hunters. I tried to at least, but as soon as I heard you scream…” Draco's voice trailed off and he shook his head again, more forcefully as if to scatter the last echoing sounds of Harry's screams. I never want to hear that, to smell your pain like that again, Draco finished in their joined minds, reaching down to caress the side of Harry's throat that none could touch but him. He smiled softly as if glad that he had somehow protected at least a section of Harry's body from attack.

“It's because of you, because of our bond that they couldn't rape my mind, couldn't control me, you saved me, in more ways than one. How many times do I have to tell you that to make you believe me?” Harry demanded tersely.

“At least one more,” Draco replied his hand brushing the cloak gently from Harry's shoulders. “I am not used to being the hero.”

Harry didn't move this time, merely sat quite still and stared up into those glistening eyes, darkened with hunger brought about quicker than usual from the exertion of his powers. They held each other's gazes for an elongated moment where the tension between them thrummed like a plucked harp string. Then, as if drawn by magnetic force, Draco's face slowly dipped towards him. His strong arms caged him in, supporting his weight on the bed, hovering over Harry until he tumbled back onto his elbows. As soon as he did, Draco slid up along his body like a serpent, never once removing his eyes from Harry's.

It was a moment of pure instinct and emotion where no words could intrude. The intimacy rippling through the air made Harry's breaths come out a little unsteady, and those lips ghosted over his briefly, before moving down to caress the violent purpled gouge Claude had carved into his throat. Harry gasped at the electrical charge that rushed through him when Draco's tongue and lips stroked the wound with feather-light gentleness. His fingers clasped hold of the sheets, unable to physically lift any higher to grab at Draco as he wished. This wasn't about lust that needed to be slaked.

The mouth drifted away only when the wound had been healed of any throbbing pain and replaced with a pleasurable soft tingle and then floated down to kiss the next wound and the next. When both of his arms had been healed and he felt the gradually heating wetness of Draco's lips lock on
his chest, Harry's arms gave out, the tingling sensation rushing straight down to his nether-regions and he fell back flat on the bed. He tilted his head back to stare up at the canopy over the bed, his vision interspersed with swelling lights. His mouth opened and closed soundlessly a few times, before a shaky part gasp, part whine rushed through it.

“Sssh,” Draco hushed him softly, his voice husky. His long fingers ghosting down over his sides and stomach, dancing over his thighs, barely touching the skin. The wounds that had not been healed throbbed but so did the burgeoning arousal pressing urgently up into Draco's belly and his mouth worked frantically to try and form words again, to try and demand more, now. Draco hushed him again, firmly coercing his legs apart and sliding down between them when his torso was left vibrating with the healing, sensitising touch of his spittle.

“Draco,” Harry hissed when the vampire bypassed his needy erection and dipped instead to mouth the spiteful bites in his legs. The pain was dissipating as if he had been lowered slowly into a pool of healing solution, and yet every place those lips touched was feverish and sensitive, tingling deliciously from the mere flutter of Draco's breath, the minor breeze the shift in their bodies created.

When he felt the last wound on his ankle flicker into the pleasurable buzzing, Harry was sure the blond would rise back up but instead, Draco seized his healed limb and held it firmly, before doing something he never could have imagined someone would do. Not even a lover. That now hot breath drifted over his toes, his final obscure warning before Draco's tongue danced lightly across one, sending tickling spasms of pleasure up through his body He squirmed, he writhed and gasped but Draco held his ankle fast, grazing the underside of his toe with his fangs teasingly.

“W-What are you – what's–”

“I can die tomorrow and know that now I have tasted your body, have worshipped it from top to toe,” Draco murmured softly. His eyes were shimmering again with the firelight, the magical soft light from above from no source in particular. “I'll know every inch of you, and yet I will not die in peace, because I will still hunger for more. I can never be satisfied; I'll always want more of you, forever.” He punctuated his words by taunting the underside of each of his toes, nipping at the smallest one and chuckling when Harry threw his head back with a thick groan.

Harry wanted to curse, to swear aloud but more than that, he wanted to cry out to the heavens the intensity of what he was feeling, inside and out. “I love you,” he groaned his insides hot like lava, bubbling in arousal and anticipation as Draco slipped up his body again, his lips framing his fangs, hovering above his swollen organ. “I – I love you,” Harry panted again, more insistently this time, desperate for Draco to believe him, to reciprocate.

“I love you,” Draco answered, one hand sliding up Harry's healed, flushed torso and coming to rest
just over his frantically beating heart. “Don't you ever, ever make me worry about you like that again.”

“Likewise,” Harry breathed, his reply catching at the end when the air from Draco's lips fluttered over his neglected organ that he only just realised, couldn't get past half-mast thanks to the lingering ache at its base on one side. And he only remembered why when Draco stared down at him, evidently realising something was different. He remembered just as the look of barely contained fury crossed the vampire's features.

“Which one of them did this to you?” Draco demanded, his voice low and dangerous. “Which one of them, Harry?”

Not able to see the point since the culprit was dead, Harry replied regardless. “Osborne. I think he had a thing for Claude and thought it was fit punishment for occupying so much of his attention.” He tried to make light of it to banish that look from Draco's face. The vampire seemed to pause for a moment, physically freeze in order to beat the anger swelling inside him back down. Subdue it below his swelling relief that Harry was back in his arms and the impenetrable layer of warmth forged by their identical confessions. When finally his expression shimmered back to the soft one he had regarded him with as he showered his flesh with healing kisses.

Harry felt more than saw him take in a calming breath. “Did they—”

Harry sat up on his elbows to better look at him now, his nudity and Draco's proximity to him feeling as natural as breathing. He had been worried that what he had felt down in the dungeon would change this somehow, their togetherness, but it had only intensified it, had only made him more desperate in longing for Draco's touch to cleanse him of every last moment.

“You know they didn't.” Harry cut him off quickly, cupping the back of the blond's neck and tugging him up to lie against him. He bit back a wince at the pressure on his abused member, not wanting it to ruin the moment as he caressed the back of his lover's neck, stroking the hair at his nape and holding him in place simultaneously.

Raising his face to Draco's, Harry stole a final glimpse of those eyes before closing his own and breathing Draco in as he gently rubbed his face, the corner of his lips against Draco's cheek. He might have felt a little silly, like a cat scenting its master but there were no such thoughts and no feelings of stupidity when Draco was making that almost purring sound in his ear.

He smiled against that sharp jaw line, grazing the length with his mouth as he whispered, “You can smell it, you can sense it on me. They sank their rotten fangs into me but they couldn't touch
the hold you have on me, they couldn't touch us. We're unconquerable together, remember?"

A hand came up to mirror his own and cradle the back of his neck, supporting his giddy head as Draco mimicked the path of his mouth, caressing his cheek and jaw line before bringing them to rest on his lips. “I'll never let anyone hurt you ever again,” the vampire whispered into the kiss, pressing their mouths together more thoroughly to punctuate the point. Never, ever.

_Snap,_ Harry indicated his matching thoughts, tightening his grip on Draco and pulling him in close, groaning softly into him when that tongue fought its way into his mouth. He fought back. His own wet muscle lashed Draco’s hungrily, curling in pleasure when Draco's teased the tip of his with intoxicating precision before those fangs nipped the end gently. He cried out into that open mouth then, swallowing Draco's panting, incoherent words of praise and adoration.

When Draco pulled back then with a slim trail of spittle joining their mouths briefly, Harry's glazed eyes fluttered open and he scanned the disorientating, dizzy world with a growl of negation. Draco wasn't gone long, or far, however. A halo of blond hair was back in his view within an instant, pressing a cool glass vial to his lips that glinted in the softly lit room. Not for the first time, he trusted Draco completely and opened his mouth without question. It was not even a possibility that he couldn't trust Draco anymore, not even a plausible suggestion.

A hand brushed his fringe lovingly back from his scar again, a thumb brushing the faded mark gently even when the glass vial was taken away. “Blood replenishing potion,” Draco said, answering his unasked question. “I can only guess how much the greedy wankers stole from you with twenty or more of them there. You're a dish too good to resist.”

His voice was husky with emotion, but had a sharp edge of jealousy and menace for what they had done. Then, with an abrupt change of subject, he said, “I know that you got aroused when they bit you the first time, and I don't want you to feel…guilty or dirty. Their venom, my venom is like a drug, you can't resist, even Voldemort or Grindelwald themselves could not. There's nothing you could've done.”

Harry winced at the memory, knowing that Draco had read everything that had happened from his mind before he had passed out back in that grim dungeon. But for some reason, a more prominent, startling fact shone brighter than even _that_ shame. “I got hard at first but after a moment I...I resisted, I felt you, I remembered our connection even through the venom and they couldn't control me with their influence. I...I hate what they did to me, that they touched me with their rotten fangs but it could've been so much worse. They couldn't break me; they couldn't hurt me beyond a few superficial bites because of you.”

Draco blinked at him. Then he reached down to run the pad of his forefinger the length of Harry's slowly. He incited a subtle glow to flicker to life briefly, before letting it fade and smiled. “We
need to master this, to harness our joint magic once you're well again,” Draco said, “we could do so much. Literally be unstoppable. Of course, can't exactly announce our insurmountable power to the world but the Malfoy line has ways and means to protect their secrets, even now—”

“You're lucky you said 'we' and 'our' in there,” Harry said snappishly, sitting up straighter. “Because what you speak of sounds awfully like using me as a weapon just like everyone else.”

Draco frowned. “You great prat, I'm talking about you using me to help people. I couldn't give a shit what I do as long as there is prestige in it for my family and you are at my side. You've always had some noble desire to save people, now you could do that. You wanted to be an auror didn't you?”

Surprised that Draco knew that, Harry tried to remember if he'd actually ever said those words to Draco, but couldn’t remember. “I don't want to use you—”

“Using was the wrong word,” Draco cut across him. “This would be teamwork, we could work together. We could do anything we wanted together and turn this into a blessing for us both.”

“I haven't wanted to be an auror for a long time. I don't know what I want now. All I know is that whatever my future holds I want to share it with you. Anyway, I thought you didn't want me running off and saving people anymore?” Harry demanded.

“Well, in moderation,” Draco said, “So long as you still put your safety and health first, so long as you didn't go suicidal on me.”

At first Harry thought that was a bit of an exaggeration, but then he remembered the look Snape had given him when they'd returned from the forest from their first run in with Claude. He remembered how reckless and stupid he had been and he lowered his head slightly.

“I wouldn't be like that again, not now I've seen what I've seen, felt alive for the first time in years.” He paused and then added so quietly only a vampire could hear him, “Not now I have you.” Draco's finger caressed his knuckles devotedly. Harry swallowed, embarrassed at the emotion he had laid bare in his own words. He cleared his throat. “I'll think about what I want to do, but it'll take me a while to decide.”

A stunning smile played at those lips, revealing those pearly white fangs and Draco chuckled again. “Yes, you are indecisive,” he smirked.
Harry raised a brow challengingly curling his fingers into Draco's shoulders and rolling their bodies together. “Not about everything. Not about you,” he murmured in response, his voice a little rough with aroused embarrassment. Draco's hands set on his shoulders, pushing him flat to the bed.

“Not tonight,” he said, though his expression and words carried distinct half-heartedness. “You need to rest after everything that's happened.”

Harry scowled. “I'm not tired. I'm on edge, in fact. I'm not even dizzy anymore,” he protested. He tried to sit up, but Draco's grip held fast. “Seriously, that potion has already worked, all I feel right now is bloody horny.” His skin was tingling all over now, his muscles twitching and his still wounded cock filling with undeniable heat. He was hyperaware of Draco's every breath dancing across his skin. Then he realised where he felt this before.

Draco smirked, evidently having seen the thought process Harry had gone through to come to the right solution. “I used a standard blood replenishment potion filled with a minute amount of my own blood, not enough to drive you ravenous with lust like that time outside the Hospital Wing, but enough to accelerate the replenishment rate and you body's recovery—”

“And enough to make me even hornier than before?” Harry demanded without malice, his body flushed all over with desire. He fidgeted, squirmed slightly under Draco's grasp. He had been aroused when Draco was kissing him though the mood had died with their conversation. It was back again now with a flourish, making his heart and lungs pound frantically. The dizzy sensation from the blood loss was replaced with dazed lust and his fingers scraped against Draco's arms that still pinned him to the sheets. “And you're just going to make me go to bed after giving me that?”

“I wasn’t sure what so much venom could do to your body’s healing abilities,” Draco said seriously, trying to subdue the spark of lust in his eyes, and failing. “I spiked the potion with a few drops of my blood, just to make sure. Is it my fault that you were so susceptible to it?” There was a teasing hum to his tone that made Harry smirk at him challengingly, taking the advantage of his lover’s slackened grip by surging upwards, dragging Draco sharply onto his lap and assaulting that mouth brutally.

It was as if they had been apart for years and this was their homecoming, and yet it was as if they had never been away at the same time. Their bodies still sang together like an orchestra in symphony. Their voices were still whispering soft platitudes and incoherent endearments in each other’s minds until Harry thought he might burst with the intensity of it all.

“There’s no way I’m going to sleep right now, not until I’ve had you – until you’ve thoroughly exhausted me,” Harry panted against that mouth, punctuating his words with another tender kiss.
“I think I’m up to the challenge,” Draco replied with a raspy chuckle, shrugging off his clothes with vampire speed. His fingers slid into Harry's hair then, and he bowed over his lover's body, laying Harry back at the same time. “And by ‘had you’ I take it that you mean you want to take up my previous offer of my arse, hmm?”

Harry snorted. “So eloquent,” he scolded jokingly in his best impression of Draco’s voice. “My bluntness has been a bad influence on you.”

“And my forwardness a bad influence on you,” Draco replied, laying a final kiss to his flushed, pink lips before sliding down slowly. His blond forelocks tickled Harry's torso the whole torturously tickling journey and he arched up with a gasp when that hair teased the sensitive skin across his pubic bone.

Harry licked his lips as he caught sight of a glint of fangs, a warning as to how aroused Draco was already. “Oh, Merlin,” he swore breathily, “Draco…!” His still semi-erection throbbed eagerly under that wicked mouth when it lowered slowly. That Harry-warmed wetness bypassed his cock completely however and instead lapped gently at the final and most personal wound Claude and his demons had inflicted on his body. The final physical reminder.

And Draco kissed it away with such loving tenderness that that touch alone was like being made love to in itself. The loving wet muscle soothed the tender wound with subtle sweeps of saliva, before those lips mouthed the fully healed flesh. There was no pain now, just overwhelming bliss and white hot pleasure that had his body arching with a slow rhythm up into Draco's mouth, desperate to wash away any lingering ghosts of what had happened. To reacquaint themselves with each other after nearly losing each other forever.

Long fingers traced the buzzing skin of his inner thighs, coercing them to open and move up wordlessly, pushing Harry's knees tight to his sides while that mouth moved. It brushed over his taut bollocks, that tongue teasing them and those lips mouthing him alternately, a low hum from Draco vibrating through his skin. Harry's fingers curled into tight fists, his teeth clenched trying to hold in the sound of relieved ecstasy that rushed through him.

“Oh, bloody…bloody hell, so…nice,” Harry panted out, shifting up further on his elbows shakily so that he could look down and see those angelic lips suck one of his heavy balls into the cavern of his mouth. Harry gasped. It was surprisingly hot, deliciously wet and those fangs ghosted _just_ enough to tickle one of the most sensitive parts of his body maddeningly. “L-Love you!” He cried out, not for the first or last time that night, one of his hands shooting down to caress that tense jaw. The sucking intensified and through glassy eyes, Harry watched as his finger traced the shape of those lips where they were wrapped around him.
Immediately, those lust-lidded eyes snapped open and fixed on his face, smouldering with desire. That alone nearly undid him. His entire body tensed, his cock leaking pre-emission down to the place where Draco's mouth was locked on him. Then the vampire's mouth moved, drifting up with a leisurely pace, slowly chasing the pearly white trail up until the point of his tongue was lapping torturously at the swollen head of Harry's organ. All the while, Draco held his gaze. And those lips swallowed him whole.

His head flew back, pressing hard into the pillows, his jaw hung open with a groan and while his toes clawed frantically at the sheets, Harry's fingers searched the air for something, anything to ground him in this torrent of rushing pleasure. He felt Draco seize his hands, holding them both lovingly in his own, almost protectively. They squeezed him firmly, wordlessly assuring him of how much it pleased the vampire to see Harry in such wanton abandon, such careless arousal. Even though Harry didn't need words or signals to know what he felt.

Draco's feelings were roaring through him like a rampaging stallion, thundering across his senses and smothering them with the vampire's hunger, his desire, his love. Harry could feel his own cock pulsing desperately in Draco's talented mouth for both his own pleasure and that of Draco's neglected member. He could feel Draco's body as if it were his own. As if they had never been anything but one being. That mouth sucked, slurped at him sinfully with an intoxicatingly seamless up down movement of the blond's head. His tongue curled and caressed each of the throbbing veins on his underside, lashing the sensitive string of flesh that reached down from beneath his helmet that made him see stars.

*He plays my body like a finely tuned instrument he's learnt since birth,* Harry though dazedly, just before Draco's thoughts swept inside his steamed up mind.

*You feel it, don't you? It is like we're one person, I can feel both of our pleasure,* Draco's thoughts whispered. *You have no idea how stunning you look, how delicious you taste and smell. I can feel every muscle in your body singing beautifully under me.* As if to prove the point, on his neck upward motion with his head, Draco grazed his fangs with feather lightness over his dark pink tip. Harry's body trembled as his climax bubbled like a boiled potion in his belly.

“N-No, going to finish!” He gasped out hurriedly. But just at that moment, Draco released his pulsing erection with a wet sound and slid like a hungry serpent up his body. He kept his hands in Harry's even as he used them to steady himself on the bed, effectively pinning Harry's hand to the sheets. Harry rocked his hips up without thinking, desperately seeking the delicious warmth that had left him. Just as he did so, however, Draco rolled his hips back until he was almost sitting on Harry, allowing Harry's slick, turgid organ to slide sensuously along Draco's soft cleft.

“Bloody hell,” Harry cursed breathily, his eyes flickering shut for a moment. His chest heaved and his body could not help but continue the inevitable, shameless dance of grinding his eager organ faster and faster between Draco's cheeks. He could feel the entrance to the vampire's body tensing
each time he slid past it, coating it with Draco's saliva and his own pre-come. He was rutting against the soft crevice with abandon now, writhing frantically, but once again Draco's stopped him in his tracks.

“Don't finish yet, Potter,” Draco said huskily. “you don't want to burst before you get to the good part, do you?”

Harry's lashes fluttered open again and Harry licked his lips when Draco shifted, grinding his own prick into Harry's sinfully. Harry watched the hard lengths press together urgently, the pink tips peeking from their foreskins and kissing every other stroke. His own body had warmed Draco, it felt quite hot, even beside his own and he was so stunned by the potent pleasure of their bodies mating together that he didn't notice what Draco was doing with the hand that had released his.

“Hmmm, nice,” Harry murmured again, only realising that Draco's other hand was working at his backside just as the vampire ceased, shifting again and this time, grasping Harry's cock at the base, guiding it to his now slick, fully prepared passage. Harry could feel the little ring twitch against his cock head and he hissed at the heat of it as it kissed his tip. “Fuck…!”

Draco chuckled, now pinning both of Harry's hands in his free one, looking down at him with a mischievous expression tinged with devotion. It said 'I love you', even as his lips formed around the debauched, teasing words, “are you ready to lose your other virginity, Mr Potter?” Draco's pale thighs hugged his torso and Harry's fingers clawed frantically at the air in Draco's grasp as that puckered entrance sucked him in with painful slowness.

Harry gave a deep, rolling groan, his body freezing as intense pleasure rocketed through his limbs. Above him, Draco's back was arched, his muscles taut. He released Harry's erection, allowing the hand to press Harry's wrists more firmly into the bed along with its twin. Draco was a 'top' even from the bottom, it seemed, but he found that that suited him well, oddly enough. It didn't make him any less of a man and it didn't make it feel any less pleasure. _I reckon I feel more, if anything, _he thought dazedly, trying not to think too long on how his cock hardened painfully at the feeling of Draco pinning him down while spearing his tight, powerful body on it.

“S-shit!” Harry cursed just as Draco gave a purr-like gasp, having finally seated himself fully on Harry's erection. “It's…you're so…so tight and hot and… Oh, fuck I can feel your heartbeat.”

Draco chuckled breathlessly, clenching purposefully around Harry, his inner muscles slick and hungry for the pleasure Harry's body could give it. Harry knew the feeling. He swore his balls would explode if Draco didn't move soon and alleviate the pleasure boiling inside him. There could have been steam rising off his skin and he wouldn't have been surprised.
“Hmm, it's you that is making me this hot, that's making my heart beat,” Draco murmured, those eyes shining darkly in the soft orange glow from the fire and the magical illumination above. “You don't only allow me to live, you make me feel alive.”

Then he moved and Harry's breath caught. The vampire gripped Harry's wrists tighter than ever above his head, beginning to rock his hips back and forth, up and down in one smooth, seamless circular motion. Writhing beneath him, Harry gripped the duvet with his toes, digging his heels into the sheets and struggling against the spasms shaking his body to thrust up into Draco's ministrations. Draco gave a sharp grunt and his long, thick cock that had not diminished in the slightest with Harry's entry bobbed eagerly in answer.

“Forgot how good this could feel,” Draco panted, every muscle tensing visibly under his beautiful pale flesh. “Bloody hell, s'never felt this good.”

Harry's body swelled with pride as well as ecstasy now and the thought of fucking all those others from Draco's mind made his hips rise faster, thrust harder into the body above him. Draco answered every one by grinding his arse back hard into his cock, his own flushed erection arching up desperately under Harry's gaze.

“There's no competition at all,” Draco promised huskily, evidently having read his thoughts. His lips were tinged with a flustered grin. “They can't hope to compare to you.”

Harry skin burned with the most vibrant flush. He thrust frantically up into the man he loved, wondering if every time they were together would be like this, as if they were trying to memorise each other, as if they might be ripped apart at any moment.

_It won't always be like this, but it will always be amazing, just different types of amazing_, Draco whispered into his mind, craning his back to lean down and steal a breathless kiss from his lips, still grinding his hips into Harry's thrusts. _I'd like to think we'll be able to enjoy a private, more peaceful existence together without almost dying every week_, he added, even his thoughts sounding broken with gasps of pleasure. Still he sounded far too collected for Harry's liking. He was always more lucid while he, Harry was always dazed beyond comprehension. He wanted to even the score.

Breaking free of Draco's now lax grip, Harry's hands flew up and seized that body roughly, his mouth demanded entry to Draco's. He taunted that tongue with his own as he sat up, rocking Draco back and forth, harder and harder onto his swollen shaft. It jerked greedily as it pounded Draco's arse, the blond's walls clenching around him.

Then he struck that magic spot inside and the slick insides squeezed him so tight he thought the
head of his turgid hardness might pop. He was so close and Draco was groaning lowly against his mouth now, the noises mingling with his own as their lips merged together with wet, desperate kisses.

“D-Deep, so good…harder,” Draco growled against him, fighting Harry's tongue back into his mouth with desire vibrating through them both so that their bodies quivered at the intensity even as they rode each other towards the gaping precipice of their completion that was opening up.

Harry's fingers tightened on Draco's hips and he grit his teeth, white-hot ecstasy bursting behind his taut balls. He reached desperately for Draco's cock that was caught between their tensed torsos and fisted him roughly, trying to bring Draco off with him. The moment his own sticky climax surged through his cock, splashing Draco's inside as he punched his hips upward hungrily; Draco sized him by the shoulders.

With a snarl of unbridled pleasure and a flash of white fangs, Draco flipped him over onto his belly. While Harry's cock was still jerking, spitting out white spurts of creamy climax the vampire tugged his arse up and whispered an urgent spell that Harry felt loosen and moisten his unused channel. He only just realised what was about to happen before Draco thrust forward, sheathing himself in one move and pounding him ruthlessly into the sheets.

Harry groaned into the duvet, scrunching up fistfuls of material as he shoved eagerly back into the vampire's invasion of his body. Taking Draco's arse was mouth-watering, but he thought this oblivion, this delicious surrender he could experience with no other was what truly satisfied him – and Draco.

He squeezed his insides purposefully; the sparks from his prostrate zinging through his sweaty body even if his cock was softening from his messy climax. The afterglow was still buzzing through him as Draco drove them into the immeasurable cloudy heights of hazy pleasure, rocketing them upwards with a final thrust of his hips and releasing his own come into Harry's body. This time, Draco pressed down on him until they were laying flush together, Harry's back to Draco's chest, with Draco's swollen cock throbbing and pulsing inside Harry's arse still oozing pearly liquid ecstasy into him.

Their skin stuck together, melding them the rest of the way into one being and Harry felt the vampire's slightly hastened heartbeat against his back as well as that shallow breath on his neck while he panted, gasping for air at the same time. Draco's long fingers slid up where his own were knotted in the sheet and forced them to release the material by interlocking their digits together instead. The hand was slightly cooler than the rest of Draco's 'Harry warmed' body and he smiled with ragged bliss at the sight of them joined together, closing his eyes and basking in the sensations still buzzing through his skin, the pleasantness of Draco's thoughts and feelings lulling him back to reality.
“Love you,” Harry mumbled again, sated and content, washed clean of the darkness that had threatened to swallow him whole. They had come out of this relatively unscathed and alive and together. And we’ll be together forever, he thought with no lingering uncertainty now. He just knew it, because there was no way either would let the other be hurt and there was no way their power could be matched, not once they harnessed it. We will have to be careful who we flaunt that power too, though, his mind reminded him dazedly, but he would face that problem if they came to it. With Draco at his side.

It was a pleasant thought, that he now had a future ahead of him brighter than ever, full of prospects and with someone he loved more than anything, who loved him to accompany him.

He felt Draco's lips on his cheek, felt the blond nuzzling into his hair and a whispered, “I love you,” murmured against his ear in reply. He squirmed at the warmth spreading through him. It was hard to believe a short while ago he had been facing death. Draco eradicated such thoughts. The depths of the blood-soaked holy water seemed such a distant dream now. If he didn't know any better, he might have thought it was all a bad dream.

“I'm proud of you, by the way, for not giving up down there, for not letting them break you,” Draco said softly.

Harry gripped his hand tighter in answer.

“And you let someone else be the hero for a change; you've grown a lot, Harry Potter,” the vampire added with a derisive smirk.

Harry snorted. “It only took becoming a meal for Claude and his followers to make me see sense,” he muttered. Then he shook his head slightly. No, that was over now. It would take time to heal the scars of what they had done, but it was nothing he would not be able to get over with Draco and his friends and even his new family to help him. He had faced worse and with less support.

Draco withdrew from him then and shifted onto his back on the bed. He lay there, staring up at the canopy with a worryingly thoughtful expression on his face. Harry frowned, rolling to lie against his body, half on top of him and staring at his face carefully. “They hurt you badly,” Draco said quietly, not waiting for Harry to ask him what was wrong.

Harry considered his expression a moment longer before struggling to form a reply. “Pain doesn’t bother me, I’m not afraid of pain – I’ve felt worse. I… I suppose being bound like that, being
exposed like that and made helpless is what bothered me most. I still feel…” He dropped his eyes to the blond’s clavicle the moment that grey gaze turned to him. He didn’t want to meet Draco’s eyes as he finished, “That’s what scarred me deepest. That and…well seeing Alaric die like that.”

At that moment, he looked up and saw Draco’s eyes move to his lips. The blond ran the pad of his thumb smoothly over them, as if he could see the place where Harry had kissed Alaric goodbye when he had passed. Draco had seen what had happened when he had glanced into Harry’s mind after hauling him out of the swamped dungeon. He had seen and felt exactly what Harry felt at that time.

Still, Harry was relieved at the words Draco spoke next.

“I know what you did, it was noble of you, good-hearted, kind and although I do not particularly care for the man or the action, those three traits are some of the reasons that I love you,” Draco’s darkened eyes flickered then and Harry smiled awkwardly at the emotion he saw there. It would take a while to get used to such profound declarations, it seemed. He hoped he wouldn’t always flush like that when Draco said such things, or when he said them, as a matter of fact.

“He was so sad and angry and lost… I’m glad he’s at peace now,” Harry concluded. “I think I saw myself in him, you know if I were in that situation.” He ran his fingertips gently over the blond’s hard pectorals thoughtfully. He had faced the ‘illusion’ of losing Draco briefly in Claude’s grasp, he had thought for a moment that he’d lost him forever, that had made it all too clear to him how easy it would be to make the same mistakes Alaric made in grief.

“I agree, although I do not think you have it in you to hurt another for a reason such as vengeance.” Draco stopped then, frowning as if only just realising something. “You let me pin you to the bed,” he said, “you let me hold you down with my body weight and then flip you over and… how did you bare it?”

Harry looked up at his lover, confused. Then he realised what Draco meant. He relaxed slowly, laying his head on that cooling chest and wrapping his legs around Draco’s. “I’ve faced worse, really, and the moment where Claude made me think I had lost you cut far deeper than being humiliated like that, debased.” His face reddened darkly then.

“I could never be afraid of you, not after that, not after you saved me and not after going through so much to finally realise how much you mean to me. I like everything we do together, I bloody loved what we just did, so don’t start thinking ridiculous things like that again, alright?”

“Oh, I know that you enjoyed it,” Draco assured him, “Even if I couldn’t feel it I could sense it,
there is nothing to hide between us now, if you hadn’t noticed. I was just…it’s still surreal, knowing that you love me back.”

Harry spooned tighter up against Draco’s skin, closing his eyes. “The whole thing is surreal,” he murmured softly, feeling quite tired now. He had no arguments against resting now that his insatiable desire for closeness had been put to rest. He had always loathed bed-rest, but he wouldn’t put up much of a fight if he could ensnare Draco in the bed with him.

“You’re going to be alright, aren’t you?” Draco asked, his arms wrapping around Harry, his mouth against his dishevelled locks. Harry, who had been drifting off found it took him a few moments to make sense of the words. He unconsciously snuggled tighter into Draco’s embrace.

“We’ll look after each other,” Harry murmured his sleepy reply.

*                                   *                                   *   

It wasn’t until the last few days of January were ticking away into February that the sun seemed to break free of the thick billows of snow clouds that hung over Hogwarts. The dazzling bright light bathed the Hospital Wing and the three gathered inside, poring over the spread of books they had made across one of the beds – the bed which, incidentally, was occupied by Hermione.

She lay under two thick sheets, her face pale with a side tray wheeled over her swollen belly that was covered in books. Ron was sitting close at her side, his own spread made across the sheets by her leg, while Draco sat in a chair a little further away, skimming through his notes of the last few months of lessons. They were revising for the first of the upcoming exams at the end of march/beginning of April.

The only sound in the great room was Draco’s long fingers drumming on the arm of his chair. Harry had been gone for too long now. It had been the first time they had parted for any length of time since Harry had been rescued from Claude’s clutches and Draco’s innards were twisting wretchedly with nerves. They both had a long way to go before they regained their confidence and stopped being paranoid the moment they were out of each other’s sight.

The location he had disappeared to for the day did not exactly help to dissuade his anxiety.

“It’s been three hours,” Granger murmured from where she sat on her sickbed, and when Draco looked over he saw her eyes staring over one of her Ancient Runes texts.
“Three hours and forty seven minutes,” Draco corrected abruptly, looking back down at his Charms notes, which he hadn’t taken in at all since the moment Harry had left him here. They had spent the majority of their free time had been spent down here gathered around Harry's two friends, revising for the exams that were drawing nearer and nearer.

After a few fainting fits and backfired spells in the last week Granger had been committed to bed. Mostly since the last spell had had her flying half way across he room. Draco knew how worried Harry had been, and that was why he had remained here even after his departure, he felt a sense of obligation to Harry's most precious friends, even if they didn't always like each other.

He could sense how tired and weak Granger was. He hoped that the first Granger-Weasley would make its appearance soon for everyone's sake.

“I don't see why Harry had to go to that wanker's funeral anyway,” Weasley murmured under his breath without looking up from his books. Granger hissed at him, but he merely snorted at this scolding. “Well, I'm sorry, he didn't deserve to die but he was hardly my favourite person, all things considered. Why's Harry taking so long at his funeral?”

For once, Draco found himself actually agreeing with Weasley, but he already knew the answer. He knew why his good-hearted Harry had gone to pay his last respects to Caius Alaric, what he didn't know was why he was taking so long. At that moment, however, his skin buzzed in a telltale shudder, his fangs tingled where they were hidden beneath his gums just a millisecond before a swirl of magical flames billowed in the cold fireplace at the far end of the Hospital Wing.

Harry stumbled out clumsily, only just catching himself on one of the beds, saving himself from flying face first into the stone floor. He grinned embarrassedly dusting his robes off and making his way over to where his friends sat. He reached for Draco, sliding his hand lovingly along the length of his arm as he swept into place behind him, draping his arms around the blond's neck. He remained standing up, but kept his arms there, needing to feel the vampire’s presence after being away from him for the first time in weeks.

It was difficult, but he had done it, that gave him the confidence to believe that they would find the even ground of togetherness and separation they had once enjoyed. Although if he was honest, he would admit that being close to Draco often was surprisingly enjoyable. He had thought the vampire and he would drive each other mad.
“How’re you feeling?” Harry asked Hermione, his fingers tingling pleasantly when Draco dropped his notes into his lap and reached up to grasp Harry's hands where they hung about his neck. Despite the fact that they had had a few careless romantic interludes in fairly public areas, they were still a private couple, at least Harry was and Draco respected that above all else.

“If you think I would ever allow anyone to harass you like that if you were mine, you are sorely mistaken. You will live your life the way you chose and I will do everything to protect that, if you let me.” Draco had told him that once and Harry believed with all his heart now that the vampire would dedicate his life to upholding that promise if necessary. Harry wondered how their privacy would be respected once they left Hogwarts for the adult world.

_We’ll face it together; you said that yourself didn’t you?_ Draco’s mental voice whispered and Harry gave a small nod, before looking back to Ron and Hermione.

Hermione smiled at him tiredly. “Not bad, not good. I detest being confined to bed but then, I know it is a small sacrifice in comparison to what might happen if…” Her voice trailed off, and her smile broadened falsely, bravely. “Ron and I have asked Madame Pomfrey to call in a Healer tonight to discuss me delivering a little earlier than expected.”

“Tonight, if possible,” Ron interjected, looking purposefully at Harry and not Hermione, as if looking at her made it simply too real for him. “We’ve been talking with Pomfrey and we reckon the best chance for them both is to delivery as soon as possible, whether that increases the chances of the baby being a squib or not.”

Behind Draco, Harry froze at that, his limbs filling with apprehension. He desperately schooled his face not to show it. Before he could open his lips to offer any comfort, to give any opinion however, Hermione had blinked back the fear that had moments ago threatened to overwhelm her tired features and spoke with a cleared voice. “What kept you so long at the…the funeral, Harry? We were beginning to worry that the hunters had–”

“They aren’t what they used to be at all,” Harry assured them, pulling up a chair beside Draco and angling it close to the vampire so that he could drape an arm over his as he spoke. He knotted his fingers subtly in Draco’s again. “Losing Alaric, one of their most treasured, it’s opened their eyes. They hunt only the wicked now, the good vampires, werewolves…all of them are now among those that the Hunters protect. They’re a ministry recognised organisation now, rounding up rogue beasts to defend the innocent. Some Ministry officials were even at Alaric’s funeral…”

He trailed off for a moment, remembering how grand the event had been. Nowhere near as momentous as Dumbledore’s funeral but still great in its own right. Everything had been dressed in dark, luxurious grey, even it’s guests, the hunters lined up like a regiment, at least fifty of them standing solemn and silent with Harry, Merritt and a few Ministry voices near the front while
Alaric’s father himself gave a moving speech of change and loss.

For a boy who had lost himself so completely in grief, Alaric’s death had been the death of a man that changed everything. The Hunters had been a formidable force with the wrong outlook on the world, now that they had been enlightened, they along with the aurors and other workers of good would undoubtedly be able to take the lingering darkness by storm. *They won’t know what’s hit them,* Harry thought.

“I was a bit late because I got talking to Alaric’s mother and father, they wanted to hear about what happened to Alaric at the end, you know, because I was with him,” Harry continued, wondering how to phrase his next words. He kept his mind carefully closed against Draco’s invasion for the moments, not wanting him to see his words before he arranged them properly. He wasn’t sure how any of them were going to react to them.

“We got to talking about the Hunters as they are now and I… I’ve decided I want to enrol with them once we finish Hogwarts,” he finished, and then braced himself for the inevitable explosion.

“You are quite mad, aren’t you?” Draco snapped, rounding on him sharply. “You want to join them? They hunt demons, including vampires, have you forgotten what I am?”

Harry raised a brow, sitting up straighter and disentangling himself from his lover. “Hardly. Have you not listened to a word I’ve said? They’re not the same as before, they protect the good and the innocent, including good vampires and magical beings–”

“Malfoy’s onto something there mate,” Ron interjected with a frown. “How do you know it’s all the truth? They could be luring you in to–”

“I’m not a complete idiot, there’s a reason Merritt came with me, under the guise of having known Alaric and Vesper and there’s a reason he gave me this,” he punctuated that last word by holding up a small half-empty glass bottle. “Veritaserum, care of Snape. I slipped it into the drinks they served at the wake. It’s all above board; it’s all exactly as they said.”

Draco could not help but crack a smile then. “I’ve been a bad influence on you, you’ve become quite the slytherin,” he mused.

“I learn from the best,” Harry replied, tucking the bottle back in his robes. “I’ve been thinking about this, I’m not saying it for sure but I…I want to consider it. It’s the only thing that’s interested
me besides being an auror, which I don’t trust the Ministry enough to go into now. The Hunters are approved by them but they’re still independent. They help people, I want to look into it more and I want your support to do so.”

He looked at each of their sceptical faces in turn, before allowing his eyes to rest on Draco, who he stared at with concentrated pleading. He wanted to pursue this, but he wanted to be with Draco more and so his approval was important to his future.

After a while, Draco gave a great sigh. “I think you must know I’d never stop you from doing something you want to avidly, or else you’d never have asked me even,” he murmured irritably. “You can consider it, but if you go into it, it must be with a level head and a normal sense of self-preservation. If you start showing signs of your old recklessness I’ll tie you to the bed if that’s what it takes to get you out of there, understand?”

Harry’s pride bristled at that and he considered saying exactly how he felt about what Draco had just said, but he held his tongue. Draco was just worried for him after all. His over protectiveness was something he had long known about. He knew Draco well enough to realise that this was his way of agreeing. Harry grinned at him appreciatively.

“Thank you,” he replied, then looking to his friends. “What do you reckon?”

Ron shrugged. “S’long as you’re happy, mate. But keep your options open, yeah? And we’ll do some sniffing around; make sure we know all about them that there is to know.”

“Thanks, mate, knew I could count on you,” Harry said. “I won’t make the final decision until I’m sure. We still have exams to pass anyway, and whatever we want for the future, we all want to do well in those first, yeah?”

At this, Hermione pushed the wheeled tray off to the side and sat up a little straighter (with great difficulty) supporting her comparatively small bump with one hand while pushing herself up with the other. “Whatever you decide on your career though, both of you,” she said, indicating Draco as well as Harry. “Whatever happens, you’ll be together, won’t you?” Her tired eyes were dark and her endearing expression was tainted with exhaustion and sallow anxiety.

Harry’s mouth moved soundlessly for a few moments, trying to forge an answer, but eloquent as ever, Draco saved him the trouble. “Forever,” the vampire promised earnestly, his shining silver eyes filled with sincerity.
Hermione smiled honestly herself then, as if moved by their devotion. “I know and I – that is, Ron and I have been thinking no matter what you both decide to do career wise after Hogwarts, you will of course still be our closest friends…”

*Or you will be, at least,* Draco’s voice whispered in Harry’s head. *They put up with me only for you, after all.*

“And we’ve both decided that we’d like you to be godparents to the baby, when it comes,” she continued. “We’d both really loved it if you’d both accept.”

Harry’s eyes flew wide and he felt Draco’s shock vibrating through his own body. Harry gave a small gasp of surprised happiness, surging forwards and tugging both of his best friends into a fierce embrace. This offer spoke volumes about their hope for their endangered baby, for their love for him and for their acceptance of his and Draco’s relationship. No matter what they decided, just as Hermione had said.

“Shall we take that as a yes?” She spluttered, life and colour rising in her cheeks as it had not in days. But again, before Harry had opened his mouth, Draco answered for the both of them.

“We’d be honoured,” he said with reverence, rising from his chair and laying a hand on Harry’s shoulder just as Harry sat back slightly on Hermione’s bed to allow his friends breathing room. Harry glanced up at him, and saw the overwhelming gratitude on Draco’s face.

*Never before has anyone trusted me with something so precious,* Draco whispered into Harry’s mind.

Harry smirked. *The baby, it is a lovely idea–* 

*The baby and you,* Draco cut across him, holding his gaze. *This is the most profound way of giving us their blessing, you realise?* His grip tightened on Harry’s shoulder in a chaste display of how much he treasured him. *I know how much they mean to you, I am glad that we have their support. Even if the Hunters abolish the majority of evil in the world, we’ll still have the simple trials of life to face; we’ll need their support, and the support of the Lupins. I’m glad that you have them.*

*We have them,* Harry corrected him. *And each other.* He reached up and covered Draco’s hand on his shoulder with his own hand. *Now you’ll really have to help me crack on with this revision,* he thought. He was aware that Ron and Hermione were staring at them with confusion now, but since
they were among the few who knew of their true connection now, he was not too concerned about that. They had grown used to their shared silences over the last few weeks. Had accepted it. Had accepted Draco.

Draco raised a brow, confused himself it seemed and Harry grinned. *So I can pass these bloody awful exams, and start the rest of my life with you.*

~*To Be Continued...*

Chapter End Notes

ONE MORE CHAPTER AFTER THIS! COMING IN A FEW DAYS' TIME...
Night-blooming Lights

Chapter by HyperLittleNori (Shiguresan), Shiguresan

Chapter Notes

I’d like to personally thank all of you for your support over the last few months, every single person who read/reviewed this story. I will be posting a Harry/Fenrir story in the next few days (I have been wanting to try that pairing for a while as there are hardly any really good ones that are actually completed). I will update that story weekly and then after that is complete I have a new Draco/Harry story to come as well. I am so happy to have so many people support my writing and this won’t be the last you hear from me! I’m going to be so sad to see it go but I am happy to have had this journey with you all and I hope you’ll read this story again and again :)

If you want to see the soundtrack for this story please go here: http://shiguresan.livejournal.com/12090.html

Thank you again! Please read and review one last time :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

::chapter twenty eight::

NIGHT-BLOOMING LIGHTS

In all his memory, Malfoy Manor had always been a place of darkness and dread, a place that housed only recollections of the Dark Lord’s reign. Tonight eradicated any such memories. The gardens were blossoming with night-blooming jasmines that glowed in the evening dimness, dancing sparkles and tiny bluish lights hovering over the grand grounds and flowers like thousands of silent fireflies in the night. Narcissa truly had outdone herself.

The main, double doors were drawn open, allowing the lively yet sophisticated music and the warm, bright lights from within the manor to stream out onto the grounds, lighting up the finely cobbled pathway. The house itself was also decorated with neat drapes of twinkling lights, not unlike muggle fairy lights, Severus thought, feeling the hand looped in his arm tense as they touched the stone stairs leading up to the open doors.

The grand entrance hall was crowded with people, a din that seemed to stretch far into the ball
room, dining room and all the other reception rooms he knew to be on the ground floor. Lucius had obviously seen fit to make the most of this, to take advantage and of course invite every reputable witch and wizard in the world. And then a few others, he added mentally, spying a few red-heads that could only be Weasleys amongst the crowd. Their presence is no doubt at Harry's insistence, he thought, squeezing his arm around Merritt’s hand reassuringly.

“I have you,” he said simply, his few words expressing everything he felt in his heart. No one would hurt him; the vampire had nothing to fear.

With a nervous smile, Merritt caressed the finely tailored sleeve of his midnight robes that he saved for special occasions. Both of them were dressed in fine attire, dark yet Respectably so, they may have only been here on Draco and Harry’s request, but it could not hurt to express decorum and class. They were both known professors at Hogwarts, of course.

“I’m fine, Severus. Honestly, I am simply a bit…apprehensive about being in there with so many people.”

Severus led them up the stairs and into the brightly lit hall, bowing his head at Narcissa who was greeting some Bulgarian wizards at the threshold and moving on through the din towards the ballroom, where he knew Draco and Harry would be at Lucius’s mercy, being made a spectacle of to the Malfoy family’s advantage.

I almost feel sorry for Potter, marrying into such madness and eagerness for promoting the family name, he thought with mild despair, still finding it hard to believe that Lucius could be so pompous and overbearingly proud of his son for bagging Harry Potter as a partner. It couldn’t hurt that Harry had succeeded in his career so dramatically after Hogwarts. Lucius always did know how and when to choose his sides.

“Surely this can be nothing compared to facing hundreds of ill-mannered students every meal at Hogwarts?” Severus jested dryly, knowing that Merritt had still not quite recovered from his ordeal as Claude’s whipping-boy. Large, rambunctious crowds such as this had the tendency to bother him, and yet he was fine in the classroom, for some reason.

“It’s different with the students, I can hardly deduct house points or assign detention to this lot if they start, can I?” Merritt replied, but despite his nervousness, he kept his chin up, his head held high and his rich hazel eyes began to scan the dance-floor boldly, not allowing his nerves to get the better of him as he searched for sight of Harry or Draco.

“Sadly no,” Severus replied, “Although there is no doubt that the majority deserve it.”
Merritt flashed his boyish grin, leaning in to lay a chaste kiss on the man’s cheek. Before he could
draw back, two bright voices carried over the vivacious music into their ears. Both Merritt and
Severus turned to see two familiar faces and Severus gave a small, polite nod that was just as
heartfelt as Merritt’s gleaming smile.

“Thank goodness we’ve found someone civilized to talk to,” the bushy haired girl gasped, glaring
around at the surrounding people. “Lucius Malfoy seems to have invited every pompous dignitary
on the planet.”

“All the decent people, the ones we actually know are all holed up in the dining room by the
refreshments, trying to steer clear of all the bad eggs,” Ronald Weasley added, giving both of the
men a respectable nod of his own. Neither had changed much in the last few years, but the two
certainly seemed to scrub up well in their formal attire. Weasley in a rich, dark green set of rather
fancy robes and his wife in fine attire that mixed muggle, glistening evening dress with wizarding
robes stunningly.

It was quite obvious, even to those who didn’t know them as well that the Weasleys weren’t as
poor as they had been any longer. As he understood it from Harry, Ron Weasley had joined the
‘family business’ with the twins, their joke shop having grown to be a major franchise in the last
few years. It was nice to see good fortune come to good people for once.

Severus had not seen either of them this scrubbed up since their wedding that had occurred straight
after their graduation from Hogwarts. The hope and happiness from that day was still dancing in
their eyes now. He had a feeling it was a light that would never die. “Mr Weasley,” Severus
acknowledged. “Mrs Weasley, I was hoping Merritt and I would not be the only ‘decent’ people to
attend tonight. I admit it seems that our host was a bit overzealous in his desire to give his son
connections.”

At that, Ron snorted and reached out to snatch a crystal goblet off of the passing tray a house-elf
had been carrying. He downed the honey-coloured liquid like a shot of courage. “As if Draco is
ever gunna need a better connection than Harry,” he said. “Can’t get much more connected than
buggering the chosen—”

“Ron!” Hermione hissed, snatching the half-finished drink from his hand before striking the hand,
chastising him. “While it’s perfectly fine to talk in such an abrupt way in the privacy of our home
or Harry’s, and while Harry may find it hilarious to hear your…blunt way of putting things, we are
in different company in this hall.”

Ron went slightly pink and glanced around at the passing guests and those dancing by, as if
checking if any of them had heard. “I was just saying, you know, Harry is the only think Draco needs to make a name for himself. Harry doesn’t even stint on public appearances.”

“Indeed,” Severus interjected, “I found that most odd, given that I knew how fervently Harry loathed the media and public appearances. From what I gathered when they invited us to dinner last week, Draco is only permitted to ask him on so many events a year and he must pick and choose his battles.”

Hermione nodded; evidently the two had assured her and her husband of the same thing.

“Bet Harry makes sure Draco makes it up to him though,” Ron chuckled good-naturedly, making his wife flush and take a deep sip of the alcohol in the goblet she had snatched from him. As is suddenly remembering something important, she abruptly spat the liquid back in the glass. A few passers by muttered something and Merritt laughed while Severus raised a brow.

“As much as defiling Lucius’s good crystal sounds appealing,” Severus began, but Hermione quickly headed him off.

“Oh, no I…” She stepped closer, passing the goblet off to her husband, who luckily didn’t see him pass it off on another house-elf. But Severus saw the thought in her eyes before she opened her mouth. He was friendly enough with the Weasley couple, he saw them frequently enough whenever Harry and Draco had them over for their private dinners, but they would never be as comfortable with each other as they all were with Harry and Draco. And so he saved her the awkwardness of having to say it aloud.

“Congratulations, both of you,” he said quietly, allowing them a private smile. It was not as terrifying a thought as he would’ve thought a few years ago, more Weasley children. Offspring of the reputed golden trio. He barely withheld a smirk.

“Your little princess will love being an older sister, I’m certain of it, she is such a jewel,” Merritt said brightly, looking around again. He frowned. “Where is the little Miss Weasley? I’d have thought she would have been showing off her new party dress that Draco and Harry bought her?”

At this, Ron made a face. “Those two spoil her rotten with new dresses and all that whenever they have new parties. Draco’s the worst offender! Always sending her the ‘best in fashion’, a new bloody set of robes every month. S’pose she needs someone to talk fashion with, us being both rejects,” he added, earning a glare of Hermione. “Well, with my Weasley jumpers and your bookworm genes she needs a little style from somewhere. S’what godfathers are for I s’pose. Draco showers her with dresses, Harry spoils her with all the toys and trinkets he never got as a child.”
The tone darkened briefly then and Hermione looked away from her husband and around them quickly, before fixing her gaze on Merritt and Severus. “Never mind, Draco saw to putting that to justice,” she murmured for their ears only.

Severus of course knew exactly what they meant. Not long out of Hogwarts, Draco had gone against Harry’s wishes to forget what the Dursleys had done and had dragged the three of them to Siddlebury cottage and demanded they drop to their knees in apology. From what Severus remembered of Petunia Dursley (then Evans) he imagined Draco had done a considerable amount of threatening to get their co-operation, however.

“Even if Harry was furious with him for months, it’s the best thing Draco’s ever done for him, put things right with that lot,” Ron agreed, his face twisting as if he could smell something particularly unpleasant. “Harry just pushed it aside after the war, reckoned he could just forget it, but he’s seemed more at peace with himself since.”

“They deserved far worse and considering Draco’s temperament I think it’s a tribute to how much he’s grown and how much he respects Harry that he didn’t just hex them,” Hermione muttered hatefully.

“Harry should have remembered that Draco has a protective streak and a temper to match his own when he entrusted that information to him,” Severus said, “Draco gets the scheming from his slytherin ancestors. They lie in wait. Revenge is a dish best served cold, as they say.”

Draco paid for that ‘mistake’ for many months following, and in the end, though Harry had said that it was wrong for him to disregard his wishes so blatantly, he had forgiven him, realising it was the closure he had needed, one way or another. The feud did not stop them from seeing each other, nor fucking, I imagine, Severus thought crudely, knowing the boys as well as he did. Their relationship had possibly grown stronger from an outsider’s point of view.

They had even managed to (for the most part) find themselves able to be separated for a whole work day, though he imagined they would always be the kind of pair that spent more time together than others. They were inseparable and rather than driving each other mad as he would’ve thought a few years ago, even he had to admit that they couldn’t seem happier. Yet despite that, the banter, the intensity still remained. A few of his students, just like Weasley and ‘Granger’-Weasley would never change. He was glad of it.

“Harry is more the type of godfather to take her out fun places for the day really,” Hermione said to Ron then, wanting to change the subject, it seemed. “And he at least tries to reign in Draco’s need to pamper Harlene into oblivion.”
“True, he’d send her a new dress every day if he could,” Ron muttered.

Merritt was still smiling and leant further into Snape’s side, glancing up at him. They knew the humble charm of Miss Harlene Weasley well, and how well she could use that charm with her beloved godfathers. For all that, however, she was still a polite, honest little thing that seemed a perfect combination of bookishness and daring recklessness from her two parents.

At this moment, as if sensing her cue, a light, excited voice rushed at them through the crowd, an incoherent squeal of delight. Snape, as the tallest of their small group, looked over the heads of the passers-by to the middle of the dance floor, where he could see the once dance floor shy Harry Potter swirling a five-year-old tot with bouncing, vibrant red curls across the rich oak floor.

It was hard to tell who was having a better time, Harry or Harlene. Perhaps, given that this excited display was sure to annoy Lucius, who disapproved highly of Harry and Draco’s infatuation with Harlene and kept ‘subtly’ hinting that it was about time they ‘acquire’ some children of their own, Severus suspected Harry might be enjoying himself just that tad extra.

“Faster, faster!” Harlene squealed, the stunning, glittery white and pale blue dress swirling round with each twirl she gave.

“Both Harrys, at the heart of the action, as ever,” Ron smirked, craning his neck to watch as some of those dancing stopped to watch. To his surprise, most of them were cheering, cooing over scene. Even these stuffy debutants. The world really had changed; it surprised them all sometimes, even now.

Not enough to make Harry like the press as much as his lover, however. It seemed that was impossible, for the moment the Daily Prophet representatives started snapping pictures, Harry schooled his features into a strained smile and had Harlene give a little curtsey to the audience they’d garnered before dancing her back through the crowd. He must have seen them, for he was heading straight for them.

“Severus, Merritt,” he greeted them, his fake smile merging into a true one as he spied them there too. “I’m so glad you came.” He twirled Harlene back into Hermione’s arms and then stood back, gasping for breath, his cheeks coloured with vitality. “Bloody media hounds, they still snap at everything I do, you’d think they’d find some fresher news in all these years,” he said breathlessly.

“I think given who you are and what you have done, you’ll be the juiciest news for many years to
come yet, especially given your partner’s thirst for publicity,” Severus said, setting his hand on Harry's shoulder firmly. “You look well; Draco’s surprise suited you I take it?”

Harry smiled awkwardly now, blushing a little. “I still feel silly when he pampers me, don’t think I’ll ever be able to get over that, but yeah, Greece was beautiful. And of course, being a wizard, means I didn’t get anything more than that ‘sun-kissed glow’ or whatever Draco called it. I forget he’s a vampire sometimes, strutting around with me in the sun. He doesn’t tan, of course. Oh, but I was so happy to see ‘real’ sand that he bottled some for me. Do you think every time I go on holiday will feel like the first time?”

Merritt bit back a grin at the blatant opening for innuendo there and while the other two thirds of the golden trio grinned, happy for their friend, Severus was the one who spoke. “It’s possible, you have an endearing tendency to be thrilled with things others take for granted, I do believe it is one of the things Draco loves most about you.”

That was something new too, Severus Snape, speaking openly about emotions, even if they weren’t his own it was a vast improvement to the closed off creature he had been at the end of the war. Before Harry and Draco had opened his eyes, before Merritt…

Harry, still a tad breathless smiled while his flush darkened but as he opened his mouth to reply, an arm looping around his shoulder and presenting him with a glass of sparkling white wine. The tingling sensation in the scar of his neck (which just peaked out from the crisp collar of his robes) had alerted him to Draco’s proximity and so he didn’t jump, merely glanced down at the offered beverage questioningly.

Draco smiled behind Harry, circling round him to stand at his side, one hand at the small of his back while the other still offered the alcohol. “It’s the elderberry wine you like.”

“Is that the sweet one?” Harry asked, taking the glass from Draco, sipping at it. It was the right one indeed. He took a deeper sip. Draco often teased him about his ‘immature’ tastes in alcoholic beverages, almost as much as he delighted in how easily Harry got drunk. He smiled secretly to himself. A few times Draco had even said it made his blood taste sweeter, but he wasn’t sure how true that was.

“Thank you all for coming, I don’t think I’d have been able to drag Harry out of the house if I hadn’t been able to assure him you were all here,” Draco said, looking back to his lover. “You threw quite the tantrum didn’t you?”

Harry glared mutinously over his glass of wine. “Well, honestly, another party in our honour?
Your father doesn’t need much of an excuse to flaunt us around like a great bloody flag to help the Malfoy reputation.” It was a peeve of his that came up now and again, he would complain and Draco would pacify him and they would come to a compromise. If this was the biggest flaw he had to put up with to be with Draco, he thought he had it pretty good.

“Firstly, my promotion and our engagement aren’t just any ‘excuse’ for a party,” Draco began lightly, “and you said yourself that you don’t mind helping the family reputation, my reputation, what will soon be your family too.”

At that, Harry choked on his wine. He spluttered breathlessly for a moment, and Ron clapped him on the back helpfully, hiding his own snigger. “Bloody hell, that’s a frightening thought,” Harry choked out, his eyes watering. “Me, a Malfoy.”

“An unlikely and yet happy turn-out,” Severus added, taking the glass from Harry who was still wheezing a little. “You both started the change that spread across the whole world, you realise. Not just with criminal justice with the Hunters and the Ministry, but with your influence on the public. They see you both, once enemies, now engaged in the public eye constantly. It’s having a positive effect on us all.”

“Even you, Severus,” Draco grinned, “when are you going to pop Merritt the question, you old romantic?”

Merritt returned his grin with relish. “When you lot stop getting married and procreating, we don’t want you to steal our lime-light,” he joked.

“You’ll be waiting a while then, Hermione has a handful more to go before she catches up with Mrs Weasley,” Harry smiled, patting his friend’s belly and Harlene’s red head discreetly. At Hermione’s half-hearted scowl, Harry’s smile merely broadened. “I reckon your job at *Flourish and Blotts* would have to take a back-seat if you did that. You’re the manager now aren’t you?”

“Assistant Manager as you very well know, Harry Potter,” Hermione said, shoving his arm gently. “Molly Weasley is a brave woman, if I had a little Ronald or, heaven forbid, my own Fred and George I think I would lose my mind.”

Ron looked terrified at the prospect and so it was probably best that Harlene chimed in then, having remained quiet and respected their conversation long enough. “Did you see me Daddy? Harry made me fly! Everyone was taking pictures!” She cried gleefully, twirling on the spot, fanning out her dress as she moved.
“Imagine,” said Hermione, “two Harrys, one that hates the media and one that loves it.” She flashed Harry a smile before kneeling down, presenting little Harry with a glass of water. The tot guzzled it down, and Harry watched her thoughtfully. He was uncomfortable at first with the idea of Ron and Hermione’s baby being named after him. He didn’t want any child lumbered with his name’s misfortune, but ‘Harry’ Weasley was carving a name for herself.

The day he’d paced frantically outside the Hospital Wing, came back to him then. He remembered being called in, seeing the little pink think wrapped up and sleeping soundly in a white swaddling cloth. She had been tiny, especially so, considering she had come two months early. He had been afraid to so much as look at her, but she had been born healthy despite her size and had been pushed into Harry's arms not long after she had been born.

It was when he had been sitting there, with Draco at his side and the baby in his arms that his best friends had suggested the name Harlene to him. Harlene Weasley, whom everyone would call ‘Harry’. The suggestion had stunned him at first, but the surge of emotion had overcome his doubts at the time and he had surrendered the subject. Thankfully, Harry Weasley was such a personality that there was no need to fear for his namesake.

Moments after her naming, when Draco had touched a red forelock from her forehead, they had also had their fears for her magic laid to rest. Draco had been able to sense it as soon as he had touched her, and of course, the magical tantrums that had followed in her ‘terrible twos’ had definitely helped to reassure them. There was absolutely nothing wrong with Harry Weasley, except perhaps an unnatural amount of energy…

At that moment, Harlene reached up for Draco. “Can we dance now?” she asked sweetly, hopping from one foot to the other in excitement.

“The next dance is yours,” Draco promised her, taking the little hand in his and kissing it like a prince taking a princess’ hand. “I’m going to dance with Harry first though, can you be patient for me?”

She smiled. “I’m good with patience!” she exclaimed, and dutifully rooted herself to the spot in front of Hermione and Ron, lifting her chin. “I can wait. I wait for my treat until after dinner every day!”

“Which is more than I can say for some,” Hermione said with a meaningful look at her husband, adjusting her daughter’s hair bow where it had slipped slightly in her mass of silky curls.
Draco wrapped his arm around Harry's waist, directing him towards the dance floor where a slower, more powerful tune had begun to play. One of Draco’s hands took Harry's and the other took his waist and Harry frowned thoughtfully as he allowed Draco to move him slowly, with their usual, intimate rhythm to the music. It was now as if there were no one else in the world watching, only them. And he was sure he recognized the music.

“Draco, this song, is this–?”

“The song they played that day at the restaurant I took you to for our ‘first date’? Yes,” Draco answered for him with that usual devilish grin, guiding Harry to the song they knew even after all this time. “I thought such an occasion called for it, this gathering is to celebrate our engagement, after all.”

Harry raised a brow. “You’re lucky I know you so well, sometimes you make it sound like you only asked me to marry you for the sake of publicity,” he squeezed Draco’s hand, following his feet easily, without so much as looking down. “Happily, I know you better than that.”

But it was Draco that looked thoughtful then and Harry opened his mouth hurriedly to assure him he didn’t doubt the blond’s intentions or affections, but Draco spoke first.

“Does it not seem…surreal to you? With what I am, I’m…I’m a vampire and yet with every year that passes, it seems to effect me less and less. I may as well be human for all it affects me,” Draco murmured, for his ears only. This was obviously something he had been dwelling on for a while, and so Harry stepped closer into the dance, bringing their chests to touch.

Leaning close so that he could feel the vampire’s breath on his cheeks, he met his bright silver eyes. “Well, you still feed from me regularly – happily, I think you know how much I enjoy it–?”

“That’s not what I meant,” Draco said. “Besides…drinking you, I can go out in sunlight, eventually I won’t even need the potion for that, thanks to you. I am even upholding a job of great worth, I’m a godparent and by this time next year I will be a husband. Isn’t that just…surreal, almost…almost…”

“Too good to be true?” Harry finished softly, studying the face he loved carefully. “That’s the very thought that kept me from admitting my feelings to you in the beginning, you know. I know there is still bad in the world, I’m not so blind to say there isn’t, but the world has changed in the last five years, a lot. Magical beings are respected, treated like normal citizens. Remus says his rehabilitation centre is growing every year out of necessity because so many people feel they can come forward now and ask for help.”
Draco nodded, his movements never slowing, never faltering as he lead them through the dance. The world was simpler like this, with Harry close to him, it made him feel like he was floating on a lush cloud, unaffected by anything in the world below. Nothing but Harry. “Yes, but more than that, my life is almost normal, only better than normal. It’s the life I didn’t dare to dream of from the moment Voldemort slapped that brand on my arm, and it’s all possible because of you. Everything I have is because of you.”

Harry blinked at him, his cheeks colouring treacherously. That was something he doubted he would ever grow out of, no matter how many years passed. But as the words registered, he bowed his head to rest it on Draco’s shoulder, his face turned into Draco’s neck to hide it from the eyes watching them carefully. There were many other bodies on the dance floor but he knew the press and guests were watching them. He didn’t care.

Inhaling Draco’s scent he smiled into his collar. “Surely you’re not going all sentimental and romantic on me in public? You know it gets me hard,” Harry teased, knowing very well that Draco knew he appreciated it when Draco confided his feelings to him. The vampire’s rich laugh rolled over his ear.

“Harry Potter, the randy one,” he chuckled, “yes, that’s a much better anecdote. If only the world knew what an insatiable demon he was. Far more voracious than his blood-sucking fiancé.”

“Never that bad,” Harry answered with mirth, raising his head from the comfort of his shoulder to look at him again. I think I’ve definitely earned the most amazing blowjob for behaving myself tonight and not hexing any Ministry officials or Daily Prophet representatives, he thought, the smirk that touched Draco’s lips telling him the vampire had heard the mental words loud and clear.

They swayed to a rhythm their bodies remembered well, their bodies locked together lovingly and Draco’s hand that was on his waist snuck up to caress the back of his neck, stroking his hair as he pressed his forehead against Harry’s. I do love you, Potter, he whispered inside his head. Right down to the way you're blushing because you know we're being watched. Harry winced at that and drew back a fraction as they danced to catch a glimpse of the guests gathered round the dance floor, and the other dancing couples that glanced at them with every turn of the music.

“I thought my Harry didn't like dancing?” Draco asked aloud then, his devilish grin flashing across his lips. Harry almost expected to see fangs there, all of him visible as they were during their most intimate moments together. He couldn't explain why, but he relished those moments best, when he could see, feel the vampire in Draco. It felt like he was being trusted with a great
precious sight, his lover's deepest secret. Or at least, the *image* of it was a secret, a sight for him only, the knowledge of it nowadays was very much out in the open.

“Why do you indulge little Harry and me so often if you hate it so?” Draco questioned him, punctuating his words by twirling Harry dramatically from his body and tugging him back in. Harry laughed as their chests bumped together.

“I think you'll find this is the first time I've indulged Harry in dancing in public,” Harry said, “I usually leave the showing off up to you. And it's not that I don't like dancing with you, I just don't like people staring at me while I try not to fall on my face.”

“Mmm, and what changed?” Draco asked, with an air of a man who knew the answer already.

“I realised you'd never let me fall, and that I don't mind the staring quite so much as long as you're the one doing it,” Harry replied sheepishly. There was still a hint of awkward innocence in him that he didn't think he would ever lose, and that Draco had confessed to finding most endearing in him whenever the subject had been broached. Even now his cheeks flushed with heat and colour whenever their eyes met while their bodies were locked together in the intimacy of lovemaking. And still, he never managed to look away. Those silver eyes were as captivating as they had always been, and always would be.

The arms around him, guiding Harry in the subtle movements of the dance tightened briefly, but before Draco could give a verbal reply, the music ceased in a crescendo of dramatic symphony. A voice called out to Harry as they began to exit the dance floor, heading back towards their friends.

“Potter!” A female voice cried. Draco turned first with his superior speed, and when Harry finally met the eyes of the woman who had called him, he squeezed Draco’s arm and gave her a polite smile.

Aurelia Alaric (Caius Alaric’s mother) had been his instructor when he had first joined the Hunters. Then still overwhelmed by her son’s death, she had taken a shine to Harry and almost reminded him of a more morose, quiet Mrs Weasley with her motherly pride and strength.

It had been a shaky start when he had first started under her wing along with a few others. Draco had been sceptical for a long time as had the rest of the wizarding world, but the first time Harry and his colleagues had rescued both humans and vampire younglings alike from a particularly brutal coven (during Harry's second year in his training) things had definitely begun to ease up. As had Draco.
Now they were as reputed as the Aurors, who they worked together with on many cases. They were respected now and still growing, undoubtedly making the world they knew a safer place for magical beings and mortals alike. Draco hinted endlessly that they had only risen this high from the rubble because of their association with Harry, but Harry had learnt to ignore him.

Things were not perfect, he had hard cases, he made mistakes, there were even some that got away, but he was safe in the knowledge that he was doing good in the world. And of course, thanks to Draco’s gentle insistence, he still maintained a good deal of ‘self preservation’ and time for his personal life i.e. Draco. Although one of their joint favourite things was when Harry came home after a hard case, wound up and tense and Draco would pound him into a blissful, peaceful oblivion. He grinned at the thought.

Aurelia stopped before them, her usual conservative smile on her lips. She looked exactly like her son with blonde hair swept back off her shoulders and riveting icy blue eyes. She gave a small bow of sorts to both Harry and Draco, before meeting their gazes. “I want to thank you for inviting us. It’s good to scrub up and leave the office for a reason other than hunting, isn’t it?”

Harry nodded. “Living with a successful politician does lend itself to the more glamorous parties,” he smiled.

“Even if we all know Harry Potter enjoys less sensational hobbies more,” she replied gently.

“Oh, yes, he prefers a quiet gathering or rough-housing with a few demons to this no doubt,” Draco said cordially.

“Oh, I know, I know Harry’s love of rough-housing,” Aurelia said, a light of teasing in her eyes before she reached forwards to take both of Harry’s hands in hers. “I know you’ve lots of circulating to do here, so I won’t keep you long but tonight is a special night to you and Mr Malfoy and there are things that need to be said. Corvus and I wanted to say this to you together, of course but…”

Harry blinked, embarrassed at her conviction, her belief in him. Corvus was her husband and Caius Alaric’s father. He was a more outspoken man, gruffer, more hardy, but hardworking. He reminded Harry of a more polished version of Hagrid. “Where is Corvus?” he asked curiously.

Aurelia rolled her eyes. “Oh, you know him, his work comes first. I believe last I saw him he vanished out into the courtyard with the Minister. At any rate, we wanted to tell you, Harry, to express how…how grateful we are for all you did for Caius and for all you have done for the
“Really,” Harry said, softly extracting his hands from hers. He felt awkward when people thanked him for simply doing his job. “It’s my job, that good people are allowed to live happily is the only reward I want – and I’m paid good money for it. I do the same job as the others, I’m nothing special,” he protested.

The woman shook her head with a thoughtful smile. “No, you shine far brighter than any other, Harry, you must believe this. The way you have helped our organisation grow over the last few years…it means that my boy did not die in vain, that what he suffered was for a bigger purpose and that…that means I can let him go, at long last.”

Harry felt his eyes sting, but smiled through them, stepped forward to take her hands again. “He suffered, but his face showed only peace when he left this world. He is where he wants to be, I promise you,” he assured her, his voice a little coarse with emotion. The Alarics were a polite but emotionally solitary couple, they had only asked once after how their son had died and Harry had never had the chance to assure her that his passing, though painful, was the only way he could have found peace. “He’s with Vesper, I know that somehow. I can just feel it. He’s alright now.”

He saw the same resilience, the same struggle in her own vibrant blue eyes to fight back tears. She nodded vigorously, mimicking his smile. “Bless you, dear boy. You do so much for others, always the hero,” she leant in then, kissing him on his cheek. “Just you make sure you let yourself be saved once and a while as well.”

“He’s getting better at it, Mrs Alaric,” Draco said, his cool voice touched by sympathy as his hand ghosted over the small of Harry's back.

Harry squeezed her hands once more, before stepping back into Draco’s arm. “I’ll catch up with you again as soon as my father-in-law is quite done embarrassing me,” Harry said to her, receiving a small chuckle in response, before Draco whisked him away up towards the main, sweeping staircase in the grand foyer, where everyone was beginning together.

The warm light bathed the great room as guests filed in and he and Draco ascended the dark wood stairs, the rich green carpet cushioning their footfalls. They stopped half way up, where Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were standing waiting for them, their arms linked regally, a snippet of their affection there for the world to see. Their loyalty to each other and their family.

Narcissa kissed Draco’s cheek and he positioned himself beside her, Harry close at his side. Harry couldn’t say time had warmed him to the way they displayed themselves for the public this way,
but it was to the benefit of Draco’s swiftly growing career and he was always given a choice as to whether he attended or not. If he thought of it as helping Draco he didn’t quite mind as much.

Looping his arm in Draco’s, he felt the blond’s face turn slightly to him as the guests gathered below, all staring up at them. “You’re getting quite maudlin in your old-age,” the vampire whispered teasingly.

“Twenty-two is hardly old,” Harry laughed. “And thanks to the bond we share, I’ll probably never look or feel a day older than twenty.” His ties with Draco, their frequent sharing of blood would mean that his aging would slow until eventually, he would stop altogether. The prospect was a daunting one, but he felt confident they would get through it together and those he loved, all witches, wizards or magical beings, they would all live magically lengthened lives in any case. He would not have to worry about losing them for a very, very long time.

A small jerk on the arm that was intertwined with Draco’s tugged him back to reality. “No daydreaming before the masses, Harry, they’ll eat you alive,” Draco purred in his ear. Harry leant into him subtly. You can do that later, he answered him in their minds, just as Lucius Malfoy began to speak, the effects of a Sonorus charm helping his voice to carry out loud and clear.

“I would like to thank all of you for coming. My wife and I have of course had the pleasure of inviting you all here in honour of our son and heir’s outstanding promotion to Deputy Head of the Magical Creatures and Beings Organisation Department in the Ministry of Magic. A department he has raised from the ground up since he left Hogwarts just five years ago. This of course, as you know, has helped us all immensely in the goal of living harmoniously, together in this world.”

Harry barely refrained from scoffing aloud. Lucius Malfoy, a once Death Eater talking of harmony? Still the man meant well, more or less nowadays. And this was for Draco, he reminded himself, keeping quiet.

“I am sure that you will all agree that in conjunction with the work of others, such as his partner, Harry Potter, he has helped to make our world a safer, more just world to live in. So please, join us now and raise your goblets to the new Deputy Head, all of the good he has done and all he has yet to do.”

As the crowds below began to raise their glasses, however, Draco squeezed Harry’s arm and cast a wandless Sonorus on his own voice so that is carried across the foyer like his father’s had. “But not only that, to the work of every single person who had improved our world, inside and outside of the Ministry for Magic,” Draco interrupted, raising his own goblet that Harry had not even seen him grab on their way up the stairs. “To us all!”
An echo of his addition carried through the hundreds of people below, and Harry strained his eyes to try and catch sight of Ron, Hermione, Snape or Merritt. Remus, Tonks and Teddy hadn’t been able to come since they were holding (a rather successful no doubt) fundraiser for the ‘clinic’ Remus still worked for after all these years. Draco had persuaded Lucius to make a rather generous donation himself as a gesture of ‘good-will’.

“And one of the main successes of the department this year,” Lucius said, his voice carrying over the dying cheers, “was the removal of many barriers of wizards and witches marrying magical beings. And it is with great pleasure that one the first wizard and magical being marriages to be held in England will be that of my own son and his long-time partner, Harry Potter.”

Zealous cheers and whistles, even screams of delight filled the momentous room and Harry even had to wince at the sheer volume of everyone’s support. He smiled through it, as did Draco, though his cheeks coloured tellingly as the applause soared to new heights. He swore the grand chandeliers hanging above would tremble and fall with the intensity of it all.

This was it; the world officially knew they were engaged. His stomach felt quite tight at the notion for some reason, as if he had missed a step going downstairs. It was real now. Oh Merlin, he thought to Draco as well as himself. I’m going to be a married man!

He heard Draco’s chuckle inside his mind. Married to a vampire no less, they are the most demanding, voracious of partners, you know. They always claim their conjugal rights and are terribly possessive.

Not to worry, I’ve had practice with that, Harry replied, the tightness in his belly easing slightly at the tone in Draco’s thoughts. Draco was just as nervous-excited as he was. Not for the first time, he appreciated how intricately intertwined their minds, bodies and souls were.

“Thank you so much.” Draco’s voice sounded over the congratulatory cheering, and he stepped forwards slightly towards their waiting audience. “It means a lot to us that we have so much support and so many well-wishers among you all. But on the note of announcements, there is something that I want to mention that I have only touched on in interviews with the Quibbler and Daily Prophet before…”

Harry frowned as he watched his lover’s – no his fiancé’s back, confused. There were only two announcements agreed between them tonight, so what was this? Judging by the look on the faces of Lucius and Narcissa, this was a surprise to them too. Draco was speaking completely of his own volition, whatever he was about to say.
“I know that it must have had more to do with Harry than me, but regardless, a few years ago, when I was still climbing my way up through the Ministry towards where I am now, I revealed a very precious secret to you all. One that could very well break the future I had painstakingly carved for myself had you not all accepted it so graciously.”

Draco paused, allowing the words to sink in, allowing them all to realise what he was talking about before he continued, his once proud voice now humble yet still as confident as ever.

“It is a tribute to how far we have all grown as a society, that you could accept me so easily in spite of what I was. I was judged solely on what I had done with my life and my career, not what I was. I thank you all for your support during that time, and even now. I promise you that I will not give you cause to regret it and I hope we will all continue to grow for the better, together. I am content to live in a world where I need not fear being what I truly am, thank you, everyone.”

For a moment, the expanse of hall was silent. Even Harry was stunned. Never had he heard Draco speak so openly, so completely from his heart, not to anyone besides him anyway. Then, slowly this time, like a natural ripple across a calm stream, applause began to build again.

It was more real because of the subtlety of its growth and when at last it reached the surmountable heights of the applause before, Harry swallowed and stood and Draco’s side, locking their hands together. They had faced this much and come out stronger, better than before. He doubted there was anything that they couldn’t endure now.

The clapping merged with the verbal cheers into one continuous sound that made the warmth of the room fill Harry’s core. It rang off the marble accented walls, making the very floor hum with the harmony of their ovation. People could come together in darkness and incite a flame of hope, of light in the shadows, it seemed.

* * *

Harry gave a deep, exhausted yet blissful sigh as he sank down on the edge of the ostentatious four-poster that stood in the master bedroom of his and Draco’s home. He kicked off his shoes and began to shed his dress robes, smiling to himself as he relieved the night in his head.

The party at Malfoy Manor hadn’t been too bad, and he and Draco had even had a quiet dinner at Siddlebury cottage with Remus, Tonks, Andromeda and Teddy afterwards. It was hard to imagine a time where he had been awkward with Teddy; the boy was practically stuck to him whenever he revisited his family at Siddlebury (which was often). Those trying adolescent years seemed very far away from where he sat now, almost down to his underwear in the large bedroom.
He had let Draco get away with his grandiose interior designs in some rooms, their bedroom and their en-suite mainly, since no one else could see the fine mixture of gold, silver and green, the obscenely large sunken tub nor the matching silk bed-curtains and window-dressings. Their bedroom was grand indeed but warm and luxurious and Harry had to admit he quite enjoyed the hint of luxury here and even in the bathroom.

The rest of their home was simply nicely finished, Harry hadn’t wanted a home his friends were afraid to even sit in and after teasing him profusely for his conservative interior tastes, Draco had relented and chosen something traditional but stunning. It was an old Victorian manor, set out in the countryside just a short way from Siddlebury with exposed beams and a light, spacious feel. Not too large, not too small, a fine mix of them both to suit both Harry and his flamboyant lover.

Fiancé, Harry’s mind corrected as he stood up, tossing his clothes into the hamper. Blimey, that’ll take some getting used to. As he tugged at the waistband of his briefs, about to discard them to, the door joining the bedroom to the en-suite swung open and Draco stepped out, a towel around his waist. Stopped at the door by the sight of him poised to take his underwear off, Draco smirked. “A million-quid view, this one,” he mused.

“Up yours,” Harry swore teasingly, straightening up and keeping his black briefs on defiantly. Draco’s grin grew and he continued into the room, running another towel through his wet locks. Harry had hopped out of their overlarge ‘power-shower’ earlier, purposefully avoiding the water-slicked tussle they would usual get into when they shared a shower. He had plans for Draco in the bedroom tonight, not the bathroom.

“I wonder if the party is still in swing at the manor,” Draco wondered aloud, now towel-drying his body. They had left Malfoy Manor ‘fashionably early’ to head for Siddlebury cottage and knowing Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, they would milk every possible connection as much as possible. Harry could not help but admire their fearless ferocity in seizing every possible opportunity for their son. He could not fault them for that, whatever their methods. Sometimes he thought they did more than perhaps was necessary to make up for the dark time when Draco was first turned, though he would never say that to them aloud.

“Did you always think the fact that you’re a vampire would be so easily accepted?” Harry asked thoughtfully as he sat back on the bed, watching Draco dry himself. “Back when we’d only just left Hogwarts, I mean.” He would never be incredibly articulate, always blundering in with his incessantly honest questions and views, the exact opposite of Draco’s smooth, tactful eloquence, but that balanced them out nicely.

Draco looked at him then, standing before him completely naked, with the soft glow of magical light above illuminating his pale, hard body. “I knew that there was a good chance, vampires were
already quite accepted once they reached a certain level of authority and respect, once they’d already made a name for themselves, but I wasn’t certain until I woke up one morning and saw the world changed.”

Turning then, as if that was the end of his reply, Draco snatched his black, silk bath robe off the hanger on the back of the bathroom door and shrugged it on, only turning back to Harry once it was tied shut. It was almost as if he were trying to frustrate and evade Harry's gaze and touch, as Harry had done when he’d fled their joint shower.

“What do you mean?” Harry wondered, confused at that enigmatic answer. His lover levelled him with an adoring glance.

“When the work of you and others like you started to make things easier for magical beings,” he explained. “Even Remus Lupin had a stable job before we left Hogwarts. And people like us have more rights, more protection. It’s radically different to how it was before the war.”

The vampire stood before him then and Harry leant into him, resting his forehead on Draco’s sternum. He closed his eyes, breathing in his freshly washed scent. “I like the way you don’t make out like I changed the world single-handedly,” he muttered with no little relief. He felt Draco’s fingers card through his own barely damp locks lovingly.

“I’ve been with you a while now, I think I can understand the baser things that piss you off,” Draco mused.

Harry lifted his head and looked up into those silver eyes. They glimmered with the soft light. “So when we made the decision to announce the truth of what you were, you had faith that it would be alright?”

Draco set his hands on both sides of his throat the same way he used to, lowering his mouth to Harry's and smoothing his lips against his in a languid, sensuous movement. Their tongues touched briefly, a flickering glimpse of the pleasure they had the ability to share before they broke apart. “I had faith that I would be with you and that we’d get through it somehow,” Draco answered. “I never doubted that we’d be alright in the end.”

“Mmmm, don’t, you know daft endearments make me hard,” he chuckled, circling Draco’s waist with his arms and pulling the vampire to him with a sharp yank. Draco spilled over him, flattening him to the bed and pinning his wrists above his head for good measure. The vampire gave a small, playful growl and Harry wrapped his legs around that pale waist, grinding their clothed bodies together.
“Ah, alas, you’ve deduced my cunning plan,” Draco murmured, ducking his head to graze his lips over the soft shell of Harry's ear. “I suppose I do owe you ‘the most amazing blowjob’.” He caught the fleshy lobe of that ear between his lips and sucked, nipping at the very edge at the same time while his fingers slid to interlock with Harry's, keeping his hands pinned. At that moment, a familiar golden glow lit between their joined hands, shining brighter with every desperate heave Harry's chest gave, with every breathless writhe of his body.

Magic hummed in the very air around them. Harmless sparks that radiated warmth as they fractured from the glowing light conjured between their skin and danced off into the room, ricocheting off the walls. It had taken all this time, years of perseverance, practice and unified effort to get to this point and Harry swore they would’ve never found it possible if they didn’t love each other so much, but the insurmountable joint power of theirs was finally theirs to control. They had harnessed it.

This was one secret that was only theirs, of course, shared only with Snape, Merritt, Ron, Hermione and of course the Lupins, one that they tapped into out of necessity only when Harry was on a particularly risky job and which they were now accomplished at doing secretly.

Now, it tingled, glistened vibrantly at the end of Draco’s fingertips as he supported himself up on his elbow and traced the shape of Harry's jaw tenderly. Almost electrical vibrations teased his skin wherever Draco touched. Those long fingers danced along his neck, lingering over his throbbing pulse, skittered over his collarbone and down his sternum illuminating his flesh with a subtle gold. Little glittering bursts sparked off, zapping Harry's chest with sharp, sudden bolts of pleasure.

Harry groaned, one of Draco’s hands still holding both of his together above his head while his body arched and sang rhythmically under Draco’s ministrations. Draco gave a warm laugh, the glowing, electrical touch of his fingertips coursing off to taunt a pert nipple until Harry’s head flew back into the sheets with an open-mouthed cry of sheer ecstasy.

“They say that love loses its fire after the first few years, what do you think of that Mr Potter-Malfoy?” Draco taunted him, his voice husky with desire and his eyes reflecting the magic of his fingers as he tormented the other nipple with little zings of power before laying his palm flat over Harry's chest.

“I think I’m going to bite you in a minute, vampire or not!” Harry growled, his need roaring in his ears. “Need you – Draco, fuck me!”

“Just as demanding and eager as the first time,” Draco breathed, trailing his fingers down over the taut muscles of Harry's belly, watching the electrical zings of magic tease every inch of them.
“Open your legs for me, Harry,” he whispered, sliding further down between them when his lover obeyed. The hand holding those wrists above Harry's head released them with a flick, sending shining golden ropes to bind his hands in the place that he’d held them.

With both hands now, he trailed his glowing fingertips over the inside of Harry's thighs before brushing them back up to the waistband of his briefs. “Now, I believe I owe you ‘the most amazing blowjob’?” Draco asked, tugging down the black garment shielding the last part of Harry from view. “I'll give you that and more, fiancé.”

“Even you can make a romantic endearment sound filthy,” Harry said in a half moan, half chuckle, his toes clawing at the bedclothes as Draco’s breath danced across his swollen cock. He watched as his underwear was tossed aside carelessly and arched his hips upwards, welcoming Draco into the cradle of his thighs.

Draco’s electrifying touches halted as he caressed the leaking length of Harry's cock with his lips, allowing his fangs to expose themselves so that he could drag them gently across the sensitive vein at the underside. Harry writhed, grazing Draco’s thighs with his toes, using them to tease the hard muscles of Draco’s buttocks and legs with the same, golden glow the vampire had used on him. The undefeatable glittering gold they created together.

The vampire gasped over his prick in response, a sharp gasp of warning before he tongued the delicate string of flesh just beneath the head that made Harry's balls tighten. He knew that tight chute was clenching without even feeling it and he reached down, circling the ring of flesh with the pad of his thumb lightly, just as he took Harry into his mouth.

His fangs grazed the sensitive flesh with feather-like gentleness, his tongue lashes wickedly at the tip each time the movements of his head came to a peak and he sucked hard when he moved down. Harry rode the regular rhythm of his Lovemaking and urged his arse back into the thumb still teasing his ring with little jerks of shocking pleasure.

“Mmm, most – amazing – blowjob – ever!” Harry panted, squirming eagerly on the tip of that finger, under the cool suction of that mouth that was swiftly warming from his body heat. His body was on fire. Sweat beaded across his chest, his thighs tensed where they were locked around Draco's body. “R-Ready for the ‘more’ part now,” he urged his vampire frantically, longing to feel the completion only Draco’s embrace gave him.

“Reckless, foolhardy and impatient,” Draco whispered, releasing his mouthful reluctantly, seizing Harry's thighs and pushing them up until they were pinned to Harry's shoulders, exposing the twitching, pink star of his opening to Draco’s gaze. A swift flick of his wrists and Harry was lifted into the air, poised open and vulnerable to his gaze. The way they both loved it best.
Draco held Harry's gaze, rearing up on his knees as Harry was suspended in thin air before him, his wrists still knotted above his head. Harry squirmed pleasurably, watching him hungrily, his green eyes bright with desire. The vampire shrugged off his silken bath robe, evening the state of their undress and exposing his body in all its glory.

“Arrogant, possessive, tormenting,” Harry all-but groaned, his cock bobbing wantonly, desperate for Draco’s touch. “I do love you, Draco Malfoy.” That devilish smile arched those lips, exposing those fangs he loved and his vampire edged towards him, pushing his chest gently so that his suspended body tilted just enough to bring his clenching hole right next to Draco’s lips.

The familiar cleansing tingle rippled through him and he wriggled all the more, knowing he was ready now. “I could eat you up,” Draco murmured huskily, piercing the puckered entrance with his tongue. The muscles opened up to him eagerly, quivering with spasms as he lapped teasingly at his insides, slicking Harry's body for his entry.

Circling the soft flesh a final time, he drew back just enough to slick up his fingers with his own spittle and slid two digits into that burning hot channel. He spread that pink place open, glancing up to meet Harry's gaze just as he pressed into the nub of pleasure that made his senses sing. Harry swore, his body tensing furiously and snapping the golden strands that held him ‘captive’.

Harry lunged at Draco’s body, pinning him to the bed and attacking his lips with savage, hungry kisses. He rocked his hips into Draco’s grinding their cocks together with jack-rabbit-like frenzy. His fingers dove into Draco’s hair, golden magic at their tips massaging into Draco’s skull in just the right place to make the vampire’s mouth open with a groan under his.

“Fuck me,” Harry growled softly, diving into that now warm mouth, caressing the length of that tongue with his own, purposefully grazing it on Draco’s fangs with tickling pressure. One of Draco’s hands hooked around the back of his neck, holding him to their kiss and sending zinging sparks of gold through his skin there, while his other hand gripped his hips, helping him to cant his hips harder and faster against him.

“Oh, shit,” Harry swore, his cock drooling pre-emission over Draco’s slicking their every move deliciously. He could have come right then, rutting senselessly against Draco’s body, but just as his pleasure touched its peak, Draco smashed their lips together more firmly.

“Lie back,” Draco whispered between kisses that came more tenderly now. He went with Harry as he leant back against the pillows, resting on his elbows to maintain the connection of their lips just a little longer. Draco drew back only a fraction to distribute his body weight on his hands either side of Harry's frame, still grinding his cock into Harry's impatiently.
“Come on, sweetheart,” Draco panted teasingly, “reach down and put me in you, mm?”

“Wanker,” Harry answered with a breathy laugh, seizing Draco’s thick shaft and stroking it as he angled it down, rubbing the swollen, slick tip over his twitching, puckered entrance. A low, husky groan left his lips at the delicious feeling of Draco’s organ sliding into him. The sound was muffled by Draco’s mouth returning to his with a languid, loving kiss and he accepted it limply as he welcomed Draco into his body.

That golden glow emanated from his skin wherever Draco touched him now, like a kiss of gold dust. His hand slid up to allow Draco to guide himself the rest of the way in and his lashes dusted his cheeks, his head turning to the side where he cried his pleasure out into the pillows. He only found coherent words when Draco was fully seated inside him and rocking gently back and forth, back and forth with almost liquid smoothness.

“Always feels so perfect,” he panted, moving to grip his own cock only to have Draco’s hand beat him to it.

The vampire clucked his tongue against his pearly white fangs in mock admonishment. “This is all mine tonight, you earned it,” he murmured, his voice thick with arousal, punctuating his words with a sweep of his thumb over the oozing slit. He rocked his hips faster, a slender trail of golden magic emanating from his thumb and kissing the tip of Harry’s cock with a spark of ecstasy, before diving into his slit, making his prick vibrate from the inside out with electrifying pleasure.

Harry screamed then, his toes and fingers clawed at any part of Draco he could reach. His entire cock felt as if it might burst with intensity. It was almost too much. Electrical magic licked the insides of his organ with shuddering intensity while Draco’s hand fisted it, hastening both the movement of his hand and his hips. The head of his own cock spat pearly pre-come into Draco’s hand as Draco’s hammered his pleasure spot and he opened his eyes, searching for Draco’s.

“Mmm, love you, Draco – so much. Fuck me, want to come – want you to come in me…!”

“And you’ll guzzle me down greedily won’t you?” Draco taunted him, snatching a swift kiss and canting his hips faster now, slamming into Harry in desperate search for their joint completion. “I can feel you twitching around me, sucking me in deeper. You look beautiful like this, you know? Flushed and shaking with ecstasy…!”

His next few words were elaborate swear words that Harry swore he made up on the spot, seizing
a final kiss, before thrusting so hard into his body that it made Harry's torso arch like a taut bowstring. Draco craned his neck, seizing a tight nipple in his mouth, and nipping gently with vampire fangs, just enough to send a final jolt of maddening bliss through Harry's body that sent him over the edge.

Harry was the one that swore then, seizing Draco roughly by the hair, gripping the white-blond locks like reins as he pounded his arse back into Draco’s intensifying thrusts, riding out his climax and milking Draco for everything he had simultaneously. His own cock was jerking as it spat creamy bliss out into Draco’s hand and over his belly. But even after his bollocks were dry he still squirmed, caught in the vampire’s sticky web of inescapable pleasure.

“C-Come – come in me, Draco. Need it,” Harry groaned out, tugging Draco’s mouth up to his neck by his hair and welcoming him into the hollow of his throat. He arched more frantically into the pulsing hard shaft slamming into him. “Bite me. Fuck me.”

More articulate than you give yourself credit for, love, Draco whispered in his mind. He sucked gently on Harry's warm throat, anesthetising his flesh and drawing the blood to the surface with the loving caress of his lips and tongue. Just at the moment his fangs pierced that honey-hued, flushed skin, his body arched, filling Harry's for a final time. He spilled his climax into his lover’s body just as that rich, life-giving blood splashed over his tongue.

They remained joined together in the two most intimate ways possible, Draco softly guzzling at Harry's neck in a mimic of their lovemaking while Harry's breathing and heart slowed gradually to their regular pace. He wrapped his arms around Draco lazily, the golden glow fading along with the mind-numbing pleasure into the soothing afterglow that overcame them.

Harry exhaled softly as Draco released his throat, kissing the sensitive flesh gently until the wound closed before rising up on his elbows again to look down into Harry's eyes. They stared at each other in silence for a moment, relishing in the closeness and then Draco swept that dark, damp fringe back from his lover’s scar and caressed the faded mark before kissing his lips gently.

If ever there were physical gestures that could reassure him they would endure whatever the world threw at them, they were gestures such as this. He closed his eyes, returning the kiss sleepily, his fingers distractedly caressing Draco’s arms as he said softly, “I love you, always.”

“I love you,” Draco answered, rolling onto his side so that he was facing Harry, bringing one of his hands up so that those fingers grazed his lips. “Sometimes I can’t believe I found you amongst such darkness,” he whispered, mostly to himself.
Rolling onto his side as well and curling into Draco’s body, Harry rested his head against the vampire’s chest, listening for a moment to his sluggish heartbeat. “Most of the time that’s the way it happens,” he replied after a while, thinking of all the good that had often happened during even the darkest of times. Some of which might have never even happened without the catalyst of those dark times occurring.

He remembered the time at the start of all this, where he had been unable to adjust to the fact that his and Draco’s romance might have never sparked without the Vampire’s First bond to bind them. It seemed so stupid now, looking back on his scared, adolescent attempts to keep any potential happiness away in fear of being burned.

Nearly every union he knew of only came together on the cusp of some terrible occurrence. Realising that was like gaining the ability to find even the tiniest rays of hope in the dimmest shadow. Night-blooming lights just like the jasmines in the Malfoy gardens.

“I wonder if we’d have come together even if you weren’t turned into a vampire,” Harry wondered aloud, his mind drifting.

“Of course we would have,” Draco assured him, “you wouldn’t have been able to resist my charms for long. We’d probably just have more ‘vanilla’ sex, that’s all.”

“Hmm, sounds dull,” Harry mused, leaning closer still into Draco’s body which he felt warming with his body heat. “I love all of you, fangs and all; you know that, don’t you?”

Draco chuckled softly, wrapping Harry in a tight embrace. “Oh, believe me I know. Even the all-powerful Harry Potter couldn’t fake the reactions you have to my fangs or my bite,” he teased, his words suffusing Harry's cheeks with a reddish glow.

“I thought I was Harry Potter-Malfoy,” Harry replied. He started at his own words, as if only just realising what that meant. His eyes went wide. “Oh, Merlin, don’t let your mum go overboard with this ‘wedding’ she’s bound to insist we have. I don’t suppose we can just elope can we?”

“With public names like ours? Not a chance,” Draco said cheerfully, turning to lay flat on his back and tugging Harry gently with him into their usual post-coital position, holding Harry against his body. “All the things we have endured together and you’re worried about my mother throwing us a fancy ceremony?” he laughed.
Harry grumbled under his breath, trying not to think about the flamboyant, overwhelming event that Lucius and Narcissa were sure to insist upon. Draco was their only son after all. “I’d rather face a Hungarian Horntail,” he mumbled to himself, wondering if he could at least persuade the Malfoys to invite only *actual* friends and family in compromise before letting out a deep sigh.

“We’ll figure it out I s’pose,” he said at last, “we always do.”

Draco gave him an indulgent smile and kissed his forehead softly. “We always will, whether it’s Hungarian Horntails or my mother’s parties,” the vampire said, his voice tinted with doting mirth.

Drifting slowly into slumber wrapped in Draco’s arms, Harry closed his eyes and concurred fully with a small nod, “Together,” he agreed.

~The End

Chapter End Notes

Harlene – I developed it from the male name ‘Harlon’ which can be shortened to Harry. You can say it ‘Har [car] lene [lenn]’ or ‘Har [car] lene [leen]’ whichever you prefer, just wanted to be slightly different for Hermione and Ron’s baby’s name :)

Please keep an eye out for my other Harry Potter stories, I have two others already completed and up besides this one (co-written with my friends) and I have two more under my belt that I am working on. I’ll upload one of them in a few weeks, the Harry/Fenrir one and then the Draco/Harry one will follow later.

Thank you so much again everyone! Ta ta for now and best wishes!

Shigure-san (HyperLittleNori)

Xxx chuu xxX

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